
East Devon AONB Partnership Plan

Adoption Report

January 2019

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Introduction - This Adoption Report

Sections 89 and 90 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CRoW Act) created a statutory responsibility for local authorities (and conservation boards) to produce AONB management plans and thereafter to review adopted and published plans at intervals of not more than five years.

This report outlines the review process of the 2014-19 East Devon AONB Management Strategy and the Strategic Environmental Assessment carried out by the East Devon AONB Partnership on behalf of East Devon District Council and Devon County Council under the requirements of the CRoW Act.

By detailing the process of review and recommended changes this report acts as a statement of approval for the adoption of the East Devon AONB Partnership Plan 2019-24 by the responsible local authorities of East Devon District and Devon County Council.

The East Devon AONB Partnership Plan 2019-24 will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Environment, following formal approval by the above authorities.

On behalf of my Partnership, I commend the East Devon AONB Partnership Plan (2019-24) to East Devon District Council and Devon County Council for adoption.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Godbeer', with a horizontal line underneath.

Graham Godbeer
Chairman, East Devon AONB Partnership

East Devon AONB and its purposes

Context

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or 'AONBs' are our nations' finest landscapes. They are nationally and internationally important and receive protection to safeguard their special character and qualities. The primary purpose of the designation is to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty' of the AONB. In pursuing this primary purpose, account is taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard is paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. These considerations are known as the 'subsidiary purposes'. Designated in 1963, the East Devon AONB covers some 268sqkm and stretches from Lyme Regis in the East to Exmouth in the West. It is a diverse landscape ranging from chalk cliffs, wide river valleys wooded ridges, internationally important heathlands and a World Heritage coastline.

The East Devon AONB Partnership

Delivery of the AONB Partnership Plan is co-ordinated by the East Devon AONB Partnership, which brings together local authorities, statutory agencies and landowner representatives. Acting on behalf of East Devon District Council and Devon County Council, the Partnership has a team of dedicated staff which delivers a range of projects and advises on activities and initiatives across the AONB.

The East Devon AONB Management Strategy (renamed Partnership Plan for 2019-24)

The first AONB Partnership Plan was published by the East Devon AONB Partnership in 2004 on behalf of East Devon District Council and Devon County Council. The CROW Act 2000 requires local authorities to act jointly to prepare management plans for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in their administrative areas and to review them at intervals of not more than five years. The Partnership Plan sets out the policies for the AONB and the priorities for action.

The Partnership Plan is for the AONB, guiding those whose activities impact on the area. It is not just for the AONB Partnership and team, but for everyone – from the statutory bodies that have a duty to care for the AONB to voluntary bodies, landowners and communities which can make a huge difference on the future of the area through their activities.

The current East Devon AONB Management Strategy runs from 2014-19. It was the third strategy produced for the AONB and has been a valuable tool in developing a common vision and co-ordinated activity to conserve and enhance parts of East Devon's most special landscapes. Significant progress has been made on delivering the strategy and awareness of the AONB is far greater among communities and decision makers as a result of these activities.

It is important to build on the solid foundation that has been created through this Strategy and keep looking ahead, ensuring that the policies and actions for the AONB are up to date and responsive to change. For this reason, the East Devon AONB Partnership has undertaken a formal review of the Plan and public consultation, which will also fulfil the statutory requirements of the CROW Act 2000. The outcome of this review will set the management framework through the Partnership Plan for the next five years.

What has been achieved to date?

The following gives a flavour of the AONB Partnership's key achievements over the last fifteen years:

- Key driver for EDDC's first Landscape Character Assessment and Management Guidelines for District and the AONBs – a detailed assessment of today's landscape that helps planners, agri-environment policy makers, landowners and other stakeholders understand what makes the landscape special and distinctive in each part of the AONB and how it can be managed and influenced in the future (currently being reviewed and updated)
- A detailed full primary archaeological survey of the AONB which provided a huge depth of information on the historic environment of the AONB and will aid the development control process. This has provided influential information for the implementation of a number of heritage projects across the AONB
- Three HLF funding programmes for three-year heritage projects– *Parishscapes* (2007-10) and *In the Footsteps of Peter Orlando Hutchinson* (2010-13) and *Legacy to Landscape* (2016-2019) to improve access to heritage information by digitising tithe maps and engaging local communities to care for and celebrate the area's superb historic landscape. Fully trained volunteers engaged in the projects which involved schools and involved recorded oral histories, guided walks and talks.
- English Heritage 'Heritage Angels' Award for our work with volunteers and caring for the Historic Environment.
- English Heritage core funded Historic Environment Action Plan contract
- Raised levels of awareness of the AONB significantly - through repeated AONB questionnaire surveys we have demonstrated a significant increase in the awareness of the East Devon AONB which can in part be attributed to the coordinated programmes of walks, talks, installation of AONB boundary signs and markers, our Annual Forums and the wide range of community based activities undertaken since 2003.
- A full audit and improvement programme for the East Devon Way and the development of the promotion and standard for the route which provides the backbone to the Sidmouth and East Devon walking festival.
- Secured approximately £60k funding from SITA Trust (Landfill Tax) to support a three year project to conserve and enhance the greater horseshoe bat which led on to the current Devon wide Greater Horseshoe Bat project hosted by Devon Wildlife Trust
- Implemented a wide range of landscape and biodiversity projects in partnership with local communities and landowners
- Delivered a Sustainable Development Fund which has drawn in millions of pounds of funding to the AONB and helped support a broad range of community and business projects and activities furthering both primary and subsidiary AONB designation purposes.
- Secured over £3m from the Rural Development Programme for England for a joint Local Action (EU LEADER) programme with Blackdown Hills AONB, helping support the rural economy and local communities.
- Development of policy and guidelines for the East Devon District Local Plan.

Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans

Supporting advice and information on this current review cycle of AONB Management Plans was provided from the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) and Natural England (NE). In addition, an internal consultation with our local authority representatives provided guidance on the scope and scale of the review. This section outlines how we addressed this advice.

NAAONB

The National Association provided two supporting reports for the review of the management plans. The first was an evidence document, detailing the current context and developments of relevance to AONBs. The second focused on policy and the legal framework for AONBs. Both documents were provided as supporting references throughout the consultation process and will act as supporting documentation to the new plan when adopted.

Natural England

Meetings were held with fellow AONBs and Natural England to scope the review process. These meetings helped to confirm guidance, key issues, forces for change and areas of focus which were used to help shape the review process.

Local Authority Advice

The local authority guidance on the format and preparation was articulated through Devon County Council and East Devon District Council to help guide the review process. The guidance suggested that the review process should be a “light touch” approach and build on the common format and structure that has been agreed for previous reviews; the emphasis should be on a new edition rather than a full-scale review. Specifically the review should cover the following:

- It will be helpful if once again, the AONBs, in making any changes, could agree a near common and consistent format and structure to their Plans.
- It is anticipated that the evidence base and background information of each Plan will require updating, and one or two new areas explored where necessary, drawing on the information sources contained within the support paper prepared on behalf of the NAAONB.
- It is expected that the Reviews will refer to the headline Performance Metrics being developed nationally for each AONB through DEFRA, Natural England and the NAAONBs and also secondary Metrics for the local partnership activity. These measures need to be “SMART” and added value from partner contributions should be emphasised.
- A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) may need to accompany the reviewed Management Plans dependent upon the extent of the change to the Plans and their associated evidence base. The current advice from the County Council’s Environment and Sustainability Policy Officer is that some form of SEA will be required, although the nature and extent of this will need to be determined through screening. Further advice can be provided in due course.
- A succinct Impact Assessment should also be undertaken for the Reviews in line with the relevant legislation requiring public authorities to have due regard to the aims of the equality, environmental and economic impacts when setting policy. A joint approach to this Assessment may be prudent.
- It is expected that an appropriate level of consultation will form part of the plan making process, particularly for those areas related to any significant change within the plan. However, it is not considered that a Statement of Community Involvement will be required.

The review process and how we addressed the guidance

The review of the Management Strategy addressed both the National and local requirements either by directly altering content or by referring to commitments and priorities for action.

The Management Strategy review process began in 2017 (see Appendix I) with internal discussions within the AONB Team, Executive Group and Partnership. This included an overview of what had worked well in the existing Strategy and what could be improved. The overwhelming view, given the impending exit from the EU and uncertainty about what this might mean across a wide range of issues affecting the AONB, the review should be light touch. Furthermore, the AONB Partnership felt the existing Management Strategy had met and delivered on its key purposes well and did not 'under-perform' in any of its key purposes. An outline of the main changes to the Plan carried under the review is detailed in Table I opposite.

Whilst the Partnership was largely content with the existing policies, it considered would be necessary to amend or update the context and policy influences to reflect change since 2014, suggesting a 'refresh' rather than a wholesale review of the existing plan and taking account of the advice from national bodies and local authorities.

The revised Consultation Draft Plan went out for public consultation on in July 2018 for an 8-week consultation period which was complemented by a weeklong drop in consultation exhibition at Kennaway House in early September. The draft consultation documents included assessment documents: a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA). Under European Directive 2001/42/EC the AONB Partnership is required to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in order to ensure the Strategy provides a high level of protection for the environment and contributes to the integration of environmental considerations and promotion of sustainable development.

The SEA/HRA, which identified no requirement to changes to policies that would improve environmental performance, were sent to the statutory consultees, Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England. The SEA also included a Sustainability Assessment (SA) which met the requirement for an Impact Assessment as suggested in the Local Authority Guidance.

All consultation documents were made available on the AONB web site and hard copies were sent to all parishes, town councils and libraries in the AONB and to AONB Partnership members. Press releases and articles were also issued. There were few responses to the consultation process. Of these, a number were very detailed and helpful.

There were no significant issues arising from the consultation process that required a fundamental reconsideration of the proposed new structure, content or the SEA/HRA approach.

A copy of the feedback provided and the changes made to the draft Plan as a result of the consultation process is publicly available.

Table 1 – changes to the Strategy as a result of the review/consultation

Section	Key Changes	Detail
Title	Renamed to Partnership Plan	To underline it is a joint plan for the area, delivered through a partnership that is acting on behalf of local and national government
Structure	Renamed Key Themes to Place/People and Prosperity/ Communication and Management	To reflect similar approaches in local government service/departments
Vision	Added Theme Strategic Aim to Key Objectives for each sub-theme as a summary ‘heads up’ page	Quick and easy reference page that helps to provide structure and context to the Vision
Plan purposes, legislative context, purposes and national/regional setting	No significant changes	
Introduction to the AONB	No significant changes	
Landscape Character	No significant changes	
Special Qualities	Placed SQ tables in Appendix I	Retain clarity of presentation
Sub –Themes	Reformatted include forces for change, key policy influences, key partners, our work to date	Consistent format throughout and removal of time-sensitive references
Theme indicators	Modified	Updated to reflect NAAONB, Natural England monitoring and potential Defra KPIs
Key Objective and Policies	No significant changes - policy purposes unaffected	No further follow up to SEA/SA
Priority Actions	Proposed future action	To be detailed in the Annual Delivery Plan
Delivery and Monitoring	Annual Delivery Plan to be developed once plan adopted	To link with AONB Business Plan/grant from Defra
	New Targets developed to tie in with the developing Key Performance Indicators and Sub-Theme indicators	To be produced annually and feed into Annual Review and reporting to Defra
Appendices	Moved Special Qualities table from earlier section. Added revised National Planning Policy Framework section of particular relevance to AONBs	To reinforce the significance of the AONB designation in planning

Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA).

A Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening was also carried out to ensure the policies would not impact on our most important international habitats and species. No changes to policy wording were recommended. Copies of the both the SEA Environmental Report and HRA were available to consultees during the consultation period and sent to the required statutory agencies and local authorities. No comments were received on either the SEA or HRA that required amendments to the proposed policies.

The findings of the SEA identified that there would be significant positive effects from the implementation of the AONB Partnership Plan and there are not likely to be any significant adverse impacts.

Given the environmentally protectionist nature of the East Devon AONB Partnership Plan approach this is not unexpected. Residual potential for negative effects will be screened out during the development and implementation of specific actions (i.e. through the Delivery Plan process). This, plus the controls afforded by legislative measures to protect landscape, heritage and biodiversity reduce the likelihood of the Partnership Plan giving to any significant adverse environmental effects.

A Sustainability Assessment was carried out alongside the SEA to accommodate the requirement for an impact assessment.

The conclusion from the assessments is that the policies in the Partnership Plan will not give rise to any significant adverse environmental effects and are supportive of the principles of sustainable development.

The Environmental Report considered alternatives in respect of the revised Strategy. These options were:

1. 'Do Nothing' - i.e. have no Strategy
2. 'Business As Usual' – keep the existing Strategy
3. 'Best for the Environment' - adopt the revised Strategy

Preparation of an AONB Management Plan is required by law; therefore it was not a viable option to 'Do Nothing'. The revisions to the Plan acknowledge that the AONB is not a static environment and the Plan creates a co-ordinated framework to address these forces for change; it is therefore appropriate to adopt the revised Plan as 'Best for the Environment'.

Monitoring

Monitoring measures are outlined in the new Partnership Plan. The AONB Partnership will work with others to implement a monitoring programme on an annual basis and report its findings. These will be publicly available and presented at the AONB Annual Meeting.

Appendix 1 – Review/consultation process summary

Period	Internal /External	Details	Consultation we will undertake	Action/update
Jul-Dec 17	Internal	Initiate review process – confirmation of AONB Partnership role and requirements from EDDC/DC to implement review	Local authority partners consulted to confirm requirements of the review	EDDC/DCC confirmed AONB Partnership to implement ‘light touch’ review
		Evidence gathering and scoping for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	AONB Partnership consulted on review expectations/scope	Review to focus on the changing context and updating targets whilst maintaining existing objectives and policies.
			National evidence and context gathering through NAAONB and Natural England	SEA scoping sent to NE/EA/HE
Jan 18 – April 18	Internal /External	Review and update evidence/background and policy context for the Plan sub- themes and identify priority actions, indicators	Internal consultation with AONB Partnership	Consultation carried out - redrafting underway
		Carry out scoping for the SEA Report	SEA scoping with statutory Agencies and LA partners	Completed.
April 18 - July 18	Internal /External	Produce review report /revised draft Plan	Present draft Plan to AONB Partnership for approval for wider public consultation (April 25 th)	Completed and approved
			Local Authority approval for consultation scheduled for (12 July) DCC ED Locality Committee and (11 July) EDDC	Completed and approved

		Assessment of SEA scoping, Sustainability Appraisal (SA), Draft Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA)	SEA/HRA and SA drafted	Drafted
		Public awareness survey commissioned	Awareness Survey with public in key towns around the AONB	Survey completed
July – Sept 2018	External	Minimum 6-week formal consultation process on Draft Plan & associated assessments (SEA, HRA)	Draft documents available for public/agency consultation through press release, www, email to key consultees/contacts and drop-in session held over 1 week at Kennaway House. Draft Plan in all local libraries.	Completed 23 July – 18 September
Oct – Nov 18	Internal	Analysis of consultation and revised Plan for AONB Partnership recommendation to EDDC/DCC	Feedback report presented at the November 2018 Partnership meeting with revised final draft for approval /final input from LA officers Changes to the SEA/SA carried out if on any policy changes	Revisions underway – Partnership meeting on 14 November No changes
Nov 18- Jan 2019	External	Consult Natural England over final draft report/plan	Formal confirmation of any Natural England comments prior to adoption process	NE approved the SEA/HRA and reviewed plan with minor suggested changes which have been accommodated
Jan-Feb 2019	Internal	Report to EDDC/DCC on revised plan/report.	Local authority confirmation and adoption	
Mar 2019	External	Present to Defra	Publicise	

Appendix 2 - The East Devon AONB Partnership

AONB Ambassadors Representative
Axe Vale and District Conservation Society
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
Clinton Devon Estates
Country Land & Business Association
Defra
Devon Association of Local Councils
Devon County Council
Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site Trust
East Devon District Council
Environment Agency
Federation of Small Businesses
Forestry Commission
Historic England
National Farmers Union
Natural England
Otter Valley Association
Sid Vale Association
The Donkey Sanctuary
The National Trust

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