

Divisions Affected – Charlton, Ardington & Hendreds; Cholsey & The Hagbournes; Harwell, Western Valley & Blewbury; Shrivenham; Wallingford; Wantage West

**DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR PLACE,
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION**

13 November 2025

**NORTH WESSEX DOWNS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT
PLAN 2025-2030: ADOPTION**

Report by Director of Environment & Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

- a) Adopt the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030 at Annex 1.**

Executive Summary

1. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Council of Partners has finalised and approved the statutory Management Plan for the period 2025-2030. The Council of Partners has requested that local authority partners adopt the plan, which will be formally launched at the North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) Annual Forum (12th November 2025).
2. The Management Plan sets out objectives and policies that direct the activities of the NWDNL team, and guides the activities of partners, organisations and individuals. The Management Plan covers various themes comprising landscape, farming & land management, biodiversity & nature recovery, historic environment, natural resources & climate change, planning & development, communities, access recreation & tourism, summary of activities and protected landscape targets. The new plan gives a greater emphasis to climate change, climate adaptation and nature recovery compared to the existing Management Plan. These additions are welcomed and are complimentary to the publication and adoption of Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the council's Biodiversity Action Framework and Climate Action Framework.

Background

3. The National Landscape designation protects some of Britain's finest landscapes of distinctive character and natural beauty. Oxfordshire has three National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty): the Cotswolds, the Chilterns, and the North Wessex Downs (NWD). Together these cover around 26% of the county.
4. National Landscapes are governed by one of two mechanisms:
 - (a) Conservation Boards – a managing body for the large administratively complex Cotswolds and Chilterns National Landscapes.
 - (b) Partnerships of local authorities, community groups and associations, governed by a Council of Partners (CoP). The NWD National Landscape is such a partnership.
5. The council's interests are represented on the CoP by an elected member, supported by the council's Landscape and Green Infrastructure Technical Lead officer. The current representative on the NWD Council of Partners is the Member for Cholsey & The Hagbournes Division.
6. Section 85 of the CRow 2000 Act (as amended by the *Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023*) requires 'relevant authorities', in exercising or performing any function that affect National Landscapes in England, to "seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."
7. All public bodies including Oxfordshire County Council have a statutory duty under that Act 'to further' to the purposes of the National Landscapes when undertaking their work.
8. The preparation of a Management Plan for National Landscapes is a statutory requirement under s.89 of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRow)*. It is intended to guide the activities of all who live and work in the National Landscape to help conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty. The plan for the North Wessex Downs is prepared on behalf of this council and the other constituent local authorities by the North Wessex Downs Council of Partners.
9. The Management Plan is a review of the existing Management Plan 2019 – 2024, and it was developed in consultation with partners including the council. The council responded to the public consultation on the draft management plan

in April 2025. The final Draft (July 2025) has been amended to take on board comments submitted by the partners. It should be noted that the draft Management Plan is substantively complete and the only changes that will be made in the final publication version will be non-substantive content, e.g. design graphics, acknowledgements and glossary.

10. The Plan helps the council demonstrate compliance with our statutory duties *to further* the purposes of the National Landscapes under s.85 of the *CRoW2000 Act* (as amended). The plan aligns with the council's Strategic Plan 2025-2028 priorities for a greener, fairer and healthier Oxfordshire.

The NWD Management Plan 2025 - 2030

11. The NWD Management Plan sets out a vision and strategic priorities for the North Wessex Downs and is split into eight key themes designed to better focus the delivery of objectives. The themes are Landscape, Farming & Land Management, Biodiversity & Nature Recovery, Historic Environment, Natural Resources & Climate Change, Planning and Development, Communities and Access Recreation and Tourism. Each chapter covering the themes consists of a list of key issues, priorities for the plan period and policies to guide and inform the delivery of the plan.
12. The plan policies are designed to be delivered by a wide range of stakeholders and partners (including local authorities) in the National Landscape. The core National Landscape unit co-ordinates the monitoring and delivery of the plan policies and are directly responsible for the delivery of certain work areas.
13. National Landscape Management plans have to be produced every five years, and the new Management Plan provides an update to the previous plan. Changes include amongst other things an expanded chapter on Natural Resources and Climate Change, more detail on the strengthened s.85 duty *to further* on public bodies and a chapter on Protected Landscape Targets, which will assist the council in meeting its objectives in furthering nature recovery and climate resilience in Oxfordshire.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

14. The adoption of the Management Plan contributes to the council's Strategic Plan 2025-2028 priorities for a greener, fairer and healthier Oxfordshire.
15. Chapter 7 of the NWD Management Plan sets out a series of policies that will be delivered by members of the partnership that are aimed at delivering action on climate change within the NWDNL.

16. Chapters 5 and 10 of the NWD Management Plan set out objectives, policies and actions that are aimed to deliver on nature recovery and to improve access to the NWDNL for people of all backgrounds and abilities.
17. The plan is also complimentary to Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the council's Biodiversity Action Framework and Climate Action Framework.

Financial Implications

18. Adoption of the Management Plan does not commit Oxfordshire County Council to additional financial expenditure. However, as a member of the Council of Partners, the council has signed up to the Partnership Agreement (Revised 2024) and makes an annual contribution to the NWDNL.
19. Oxfordshire County Council's contribution to the NWD National Landscape in 2025/26 is £8,862. This annual contribution is allowed for and met from existing budgets. The contributions from the nine local authority partners enable the NWD to draw-down substantive match-funding and in-kind support towards the implementation of the management plan. Funding for the NWD National Landscape is 75% from DEFRA and 25% from local authorities.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

20. The preparation of a Management Plan for National Landscapes is a statutory requirement under s.89 of the CRow 2000 Act. The preparation of the plan was delegated to the Council of Partners in accordance with the Partnership Agreement, but each constituent council is required to formally adopt the plan.
21. The adoption of the 2025-2030 Management plan satisfies the statutory duty of the council to produce a management plan to govern the management of this area of National Landscape.

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environment)
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Staff Implications

22. There are no additional implications for staff resources through adoption of this Plan. Resources to deliver on commitments can be met from existing members of staff (Member and officer attendance at partnership meetings, officer contact).

Equality & Inclusion Implications

23. The management plan is considered to have a positive impact on equalities overall (see Annex 2). The document contains measures to improve the level of engagement from under-represented groups or those for whom barriers may exist to accessing and benefitting from the National Landscape.
24. Adopting the North Wessex Downs Management Plan could have positive implications on Equalities as policies in Chapter 10 specifically mention the need for greater accessibility to the NWDNL for users of all backgrounds and abilities for quiet enjoyment and improved health and well-being.

Sustainability Implications

25. A Climate Impact Assessment, at Annex 3, has been carried out and indicates a positive climate and ecological impact of the Plan.
26. The Management Plan sets out a strategic vision and a set of policies that will act as a framework to further the purposes of the designation of the National Landscape over the next five years. Chapter 7 includes objectives and policies that are specifically aimed at delivering action on climate change within the NWDNL, but climate change adaptation and mitigation is also a common thread running throughout the majority of the Plan.
27. The Plan is considered to align well with the council's commitment for climate action and nature recovery.

Risk Management

28. Risks associated with adopting the plan are very low considering the changes that have been made to the current Management Plan. The main risk to the council is of reputational damage, caused by not adopting or unduly delaying adoption of this plan.
29. Furthermore, the opportunities presented by adopting the new plan, which incorporates desirable additions around nature recovery and climate action, which directly contribute to other council priorities.

Consultations

30. The NWDNL Team carried out an extensive consultation with partners including the council, the public, external organisations and interest groups when drafting the plan. Within the council, comments from various teams were collated and submitted to NWDNL for consideration and inclusion in the Management Plan. Council responses have informed the final version of the NWD Management Plan.

Paul Fermer
Director of Environment and Highways

Annex: Annex 1: North Wessex Downs National Landscape
Management Plan 2025 – 2030 (pre-publication version).

Annex 2: Equalities Impact Assessment.

Annex 3: Climate Impact Assessment.

Background papers: North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2019-2024

Link:https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NWDAONB_Management_Plan_2019-24_low_res_32Mb.pdf

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