



Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member Decisions for Growth and Infrastructure

***Thursday, 3 September 2009 at 12.00 pm or on the rising of the Transport Decisions Committee if later
County Hall***

Items for Decision

The items for decision under individual Cabinet Members' delegated powers are listed overleaf, with indicative timings, and the related reports are attached. Decisions taken will become effective at the end of the working day on 1 May 2009 unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

Copies of the reports are circulated (by e-mail) to all members of the County Council.

These proceedings are open to the public

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Cloke".

Tony Cloke
Assistant Head of Legal & Democratic Services

August 2009

Contact Officer:
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graham.warrington@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Note: Date of next meeting: 1 October 2009

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, but please give as much notice as possible before the meeting.

Items for Decision

1. Petitions and Public Address

2. Declarations of Interest

3. Annual Parking Report 2008/09 (Pages 1 - 12)

Forward Plan Ref: 2008/202

Contact: Pat Higgins, Group Manager, Traffic Enforcement (01865 814022)

10:45 or on the rising of the Transport Decisions Committee if later

Report by Head of Transport (**TDC3**).

4. Forestry Statement - Oxfordshire's Trees and Woodland, Today and Tomorrow (Pages 13 - 18)

Forward Plan Ref: 2009/040

Contact: Eric Dougliss, Forestry Officer (01993 814141)

11:00 am

Report by Head of Sustainable Development (**TDC4**).

5. North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Management Plan (Pages 19 - 22)

Forward Plan Ref: 2009/101

Contact: Keith Wheal, Countryside Service Manager (01865 810202)

11:10 am

Report by Head of Sustainable Development (**TDC5**).

Division(s): All

CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS FOR GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE – 3 SEPTEMBER 2009

PARKING REPORT 2008/9

Report by Head of Transport

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to present for approval an annual parking report for the financial year 2008/9. This report will be made publicly available, both in hard copy to interested parties and on the internet.

Background

2. The Traffic Management Act 2004 came into force on 31 March 2008. Within this Act there is a requirement for Local Authorities to create a publicly available report each year on the activities of the traffic enforcement operation. This requirement comes into effect for the financial year 2008/9.

Annual Parking Report

3. The purpose of the Annual Parking Report is to make publicly available information on the work being done by the council in respect of enforcement and developments in parking provisions and restrictions. It shows levels of penalty charge notices and makes comparisons with previous years. Using information taken from the Parking Adjudicators' annual report there is a section showing how Oxfordshire County Council compares with other local authorities undertaking Civil Parking Enforcement in respect of appeals.
4. The Secretary of State's Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on the Civil Enforcement of Parking Contraventions issued in conjunction with the Traffic Management Act 2004 states (paragraph 114) Enforcement Authorities should produce an annual report about their enforcement activities within six months of the end of each financial year. The report should be published.
5. The report submitted at Annex 1 is designed to meet the requirements of the Traffic Management Act 2004 and provide members of the public transparency in the parking enforcement operation being carried out in Oxford.

Financial and Staff Implications

6. There are no staff implications in the production of this report. The financial commitment is very limited as it is anticipated that most people will access this document from the council's website. It is not anticipated that there will be a significant demand for hard copies of the document so these can be generated individually on request.

RECOMMENDATION

- 7. The Cabinet Member for Growth & Infrastructure is RECOMMENDED to approve the Annual Parking Report as set out at Annex 1 to this report for publication and general public release.**

STEVE HOWELL
Head of Transport
Environment & Economy

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Pat Higgins, Group Manager - Traffic enforcement
Tel. 01865 815865

August 2009



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

**ANNUAL REPORT
ON
CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT**

2008-2009

DRAFT

Background

This report details the work of the Civil Parking Enforcement operation in Oxford during the financial year 2008 – 2009. Oxfordshire County Council has undertaken parking enforcement on the streets of Oxford since 1997.

The existence of parking regulations is key to the overall traffic management in Oxford. Ensuring that the various regulations and restrictions are effective achieves several benefits.

- It keeps the traffic flowing on main roads and reduces delays to public transport vehicles.
- It makes for a safer environment for all road users.
- Where on-street parking is possible it shares out the available kerbspace fairly. This means that short stay parking is more available.
- It gives priority to people living in residential areas within the city.
- It ensures that areas set aside for specific purposes, such as disabled parking, loading bays and taxi ranks are kept available for those drivers who need them.
- It improves traffic congestion at key times of the day by restricting the availability of all day parking in the city and thereby encouraging those working in the city to use park & ride or other means of travelling to work.

Civil Parking Enforcement ensures that these benefits are delivered.

Changes in 2008-9

This was the first year of operation under new legislation introduced at the end of March 2008. One of the requirements of this new legislation, and the one that was most noticeable to the motoring public, was the introduction of differential penalty charge rates. Under the previous legislation every penalty charge notice was for the same amount which some motorists perceived as unfair. Under the new legislation higher charges were introduced for contraventions in locations where parking was not permitted at all with a lower rate for vehicles parked incorrectly in areas where parking was permitted, such as pay and display bays and limited residents' parking areas.

Oxfordshire County Council had kept the same penalty charge level ever since enforcement started in 1997. This was starting to create some anomalies as the penalty charge had, over time, been overtaken by the cost of all day parking in the car parks in the city centre. The opportunity was taken to revise the penalty charges applicable in Oxford. The penalty charge for the contraventions considered to be fall into the more serious category was set at £70, reduced by 50% to £35 if paid within 14 days. The penalty charge for the less serious contraventions was set at £50, reduced to £25 if paid in 14 days. The distinction between more and less serious contraventions was not a local decision. Differential penalty charge rates had

been trialled in London and the contraventions included in each category had been decided then.

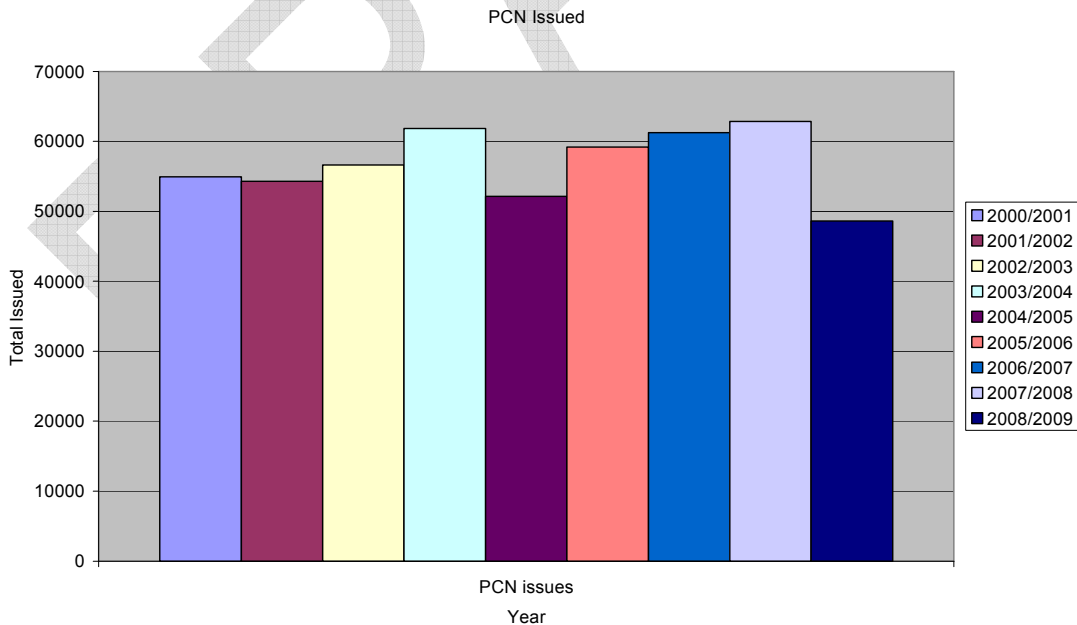
Oxfordshire County Council has used the services of a parking enforcement contractor since 1997. During this year the contract was due to expire and so a competitive tendering process was carried out. The successful company was NSL (previously NCP Services) who started work on 1st October 2008

Civil parking enforcement

Penalty Charge Notice issues.

In the financial year April 2008 to the end of March 2009 48589 penalty charge notices were issued for parking contraventions. Below is a table showing the notice issues for the last 9 years.

In a mature enforcement operation such as exists in Oxford it may be expected that there will be a gradual decline in the number of penalty charge notices issued year on year. In Oxford, however, this has not always been the case as the introduction of new controlled parking zones has increased the amount of kerbspace that is required to be patrolled. Another factor unique to university and tourist towns and cities is that there is a considerable transient population which can reduce the deterrent effect of parking enforcement.



The introduction of higher penalty charge rates in 2008/2009 was expected to result in a reduction in the number of penalty charge notices issued and this has been borne out by the figures. The reduction in penalty charge notice

issues in the second half of this financial year reflects the change of emphasis introduced with the new enforcement contract. This is reflected in other parts of the country where civil parking enforcement is carried out though most other authorities were already using a higher penalty charge rate. Noting this trend the Chief Adjudicator has remarked 'a robust scheme of enforcement should always give rise to improved compliance'.

With the increase in the numbers of Civil Enforcement Areas throughout the country has come a greater scrutiny by motorists of the legal process of parking enforcement. The details that appear on the stationery used at each stage of the process is set down in the legislation and councils have to ensure that their documentation complies exactly. Oxfordshire County Council is a member of the British Parking Association which worked to draft fully compliant documentation that local authorities could use. The way that parking restrictions are conveyed to drivers by means of signs and road markings is set out in a Statutory Instrument known as the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (current version dated 2002). More appeals are being made on the basis of errors on the signs and lines and councils have a responsibility to ensure that these are correct. The adjudicators have to make decisions on appeals made by motorists on whatever basis.

The five most common reasons for vehicles being issued a penalty charge notice for a parking contravention in 2008/9 were (with figures for 2007/8 for comparison shown on the chart);

Parked in a residents' parking bay without a valid permit displayed.	14683
Parked on waiting restrictions shown by single or double yellow lines.	10358
Staying in a pay & display parking bay after the ticket has expired	5076
Staying in a time limited free parking bay for longer than allowed	4726
Parked in a pay & display bay without a valid ticket clearly displayed.	4139



The above five contraventions accounted for over 80% of the PCNs issued and indicate the emphasis on the key reasons for parking enforcement, that of keeping traffic moving, sharing out the kerbspace and providing available parking spaces for permit holders.

The increase in the number of penalty charge notices issued to vehicles using residents' parking places without displaying a valid permit demonstrates a greater emphasis being placed on this area of enforcement. With a charge being introduced for permits the council is committed to ensuring that the bays are kept clear for residents and providing them with value for money.

Drivers parking their vehicles in a restricted street can cause delay and obstruction to other traffic. They can also cause danger to other road users, requiring cyclists to move further out into the road to pass and reducing visibility from junctions.

The enforcement of limited waiting bays, be they free or metered, ensures that there is a good turnover of parking spaces.. This benefits local businesses whose customers can be more likely to find a parking space when they visit.

In view of the fact that disabled parking bays are an important part of ensuring equal access to all it is relevant to note that 1980 penalty charge notices were issued to vehicles parked in these bays without a badge on display or correctly displayed. These bays will continue to be rigorously enforced.

Although Oxfordshire County Council retains the power to clamp and tow illegally parked vehicles these powers are not generally used. No vehicles were clamped in the financial year 2008/9. Clamping is very much out of favour as an enforcement tool as it tends to perpetuate rather than remove the obstruction.

Oxfordshire County Council works closely with Thames Valley Police on the removal of vehicles. The police deal with obstructive parking. The council only removes vehicles in cases of persistent evaders or to clear areas where parking is suspended for special events.

What happened to the Penalty Charge Notices issued?

	PCN Issues	Paid at Discount	Paid in full	Cancelled after challenge or representation	Cancelled for other reasons or written off	Outstanding
TOTALS	48589	31516	4442	5791	629	6211

Of the penalty charge notices issued 32470 were for the higher level penalty charge and 16119 were issued for the less severe contraventions.

Appeals process

The new legislation introduced in 2008 continued by and large with the adjudication process that had been set out in the Road Traffic Act 1991. Outside London this appeals service had been operated by the National Parking Adjudication Service (NPAS). Vehicle owners who believed that a penalty charge notice that they had been served with was incorrectly or unfairly issued had the opportunity to have their case decided by an independent adjudicator. Within the new legislation there were some changes, mainly intended to provide more information to the motorist. The stationery used for parking enforcement, such as the penalty charge notice and notice to owner, was redesigned to include much more information about the appeals process and to explain how it worked. Concern had been expressed in the consultation process leading up to the changes to the legislation that many drivers did not know that they could appeal against a penalty charge notice.

Along with the introduction of the new legislation the adjudication service changed its name to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal. This was done to reflect the wider enforcement role foreseen in the Act (and already being undertaken in London) involving moving traffic contraventions such as banned turns and obstructing yellow box junctions.

Adjudications and Appeals

Each year the Chief Adjudicator will produce a report on the previous year's adjudications for every local authority that is undertaking civil parking enforcement. Statistics taken from this Report of the Adjudicators for 2007/8, the last one available, show that

1. The percentage of penalty charge notices against which an appeal was lodged with the National Parking Adjudication Service was, at 0.07%, considerably lower than the national mean of 0.29%. This placed Oxford 12th out of the 191 local authorities listed in the report.
2. The percentage of appeals upheld by the adjudicators was, at 22%, lower than the national mean of 29%. This placed Oxford 43rd out of 191 local authorities.
3. 24% of the appeals lodged at the appeals service were eventually not contested by the council at the hearing, normally as a result of the appellant providing new evidence. This is lower than the national mean of 31%.
4. Overall the number of cases taken to appeal that were subsequently upheld or the appeal withdrawn was 50%. This compares with the national figure of 39%

The fact that on all these indicators Oxfordshire is performing better than the national mean would tend to demonstrate the following:

- The enforcement is carried out correctly and fairly.
- Due consideration is given to challenges and representations against the issue of penalty charge notices and discretion exercised at the appropriate stage.

Nationally the percentage of penalty charge notices decided at adjudication has remained at or below 0.4%. As part of the change in legislation councils have to ensure that, at all stages in the process, motorists are kept fully informed about their right to appeal. This is intended to improve transparency and accessibility of the appeals process and may result in some increase in the percentage of appeals lodged in the future.

Residents' parking permits

The number of residents' permits in circulation in April 2009 was 9571

The number of business permits in circulation in April 2008 was 275

This was the first full year during which charges were made for residents' parking permits as approved by Cabinet in September 2006.

The income from these charges was as follows:

Residents' permits	£339152
Business permits	£28425
Visitors' scratchcards	£12760

Prior to the introduction of charges for permits the number of current residents' permits in circulation was 10537. There has, therefore, been a reduction over the last year in the number of vehicles that may be parked in the various CPZs of 966.

As part of the introduction of charges for parking permits the council agreed to implement the following improvements to the residents' parking schemes.

They were:

- Sending out reminders to residents to renew their permits.

Reminders are now sent out to all residents in good time for them to renew their permits.

- The introduction of a visitor permit for a 24 hour period rather than a calendar day.

The visitors' scratchcard now covers a 24 hour period.

- A temporary permit for hire vehicles.
- Sunday enforcement in the Kassam Stadium area to resolve issues with event parking.

Enforcement is now being carried out in the Kassam stadium area on Sundays when boot fairs are taking place.

- A review of the West Oxford and South Oxford Controlled Parking zones.

Reviews of the existing Controlled Parking Zones are now being undertaken. Both West Oxford and South Oxford zones have been reviewed. Residents have been consulted and changes made. West Oxford is complete and the changes in South Oxford are expected to be completed by July 2009. The review team are now working on the East Oxford zone with the intention of completing any changes in the financial year 2009/10.

Financial information

Each year the council is required to provide a parking account showing expenditure and income. The parking account for the financial year 2008/9 is shown here. There are strict controls on how the surplus from a parking account can be spent.

The 2008/9 parking account is as follows:

	Oxford City On Street Pay & Display	Oxford City Parking Enforcement	Oxford City Residents' Parking Zones	TOTALS
INCOME				
Pay & Display income	£1,459,685			£1,459,685
Penalty Charge Notices	£202,134	£638,762	£529,984	£1,370,880
Residents' permits			£423,940	£423,940
Total income	£1,661,819	£638,762	£953,924	£3,254,505
EXPENDITURE				
Equipment purchase	£72,993	£118,365	£72,993	£264,351
Contract Costs	£855,235	£654,865	£400,199	£1,910,299
Council Staff costs	£25,475	£79,514	£64,847	£169,836
Parking shop costs	£4,958	£9,916	£84,283	£99,157
Other	£4,940	£153,813	£92,979	£251,732
Total Expenditure	£963,601	£1,016,473	£715,301	£2,695,375
Balance	£698,218	- £377,711	£238,623	£559,130

Please note that these figures have been produced prior to the finalising of the Council's accounts and are therefore subject to external audit.

CPE as part of the overall Transport Strategy

The Controlled Parking Zones in Oxford have been successful both in prioritising on-street parking for residents and in limiting the availability of 'end of journey' parking in the centre of Oxford. The removal of charges in the park & ride car parks has provided a viable alternative for drivers coming into Oxford.

During 2008/9 the design and consultation process on two more CPZs has been ongoing. These lie to the south east of the existing East Oxford zone and are likely to be in place during the first half of 2010. Because the new zones will adjoin an existing zone the Traffic Regulation Order review team are currently involved in reviewing the parking provision in East Oxford.

Useful contacts

Oxfordshire County Council	www.oxfordshire.gov.uk
Parking shop	0845 634 4466 email parking-shop@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Oxford City Council	www.oxford.gov.uk
Traffic Penalty Tribunal	www.trafficpenaltytribunal.gov.uk
Patrol (for information on PCN process)	www.patrol-uk.info
Parking control room (for any on-street parking enquiries)	0845 337 1138
Thames Valley Police (To report obstructive or dangerous parking)	0845 8505 505

Division(s): All

CABINET MEMBER FOR GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE 3 SEPTEMBER 2009

FORESTRY STATEMENT - OXFORDSHIRE'S TREES AND WOODLAND, TODAY & TOMORROW

Report by Head of Sustainable Development

Introduction

1. Woodland covers about 7% of Oxfordshire's land surface and there are over four million non-woodland trees in Oxfordshire's towns and countryside. The County Council owns and manages a small proportion of these. Most are in private ownership.
2. Trees and woodland provide many social, environmental and economic benefits for the County and have the potential to do more. Much of this potential is identified in the South East Region Forestry Framework.
3. For many years, the Council, in partnership with District Councils, the Forestry Commission and others, has supported a number of initiatives which promote tree and woodland management, to help sustain and enhance these woodland benefits in the County.
4. At the request of the former Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, officers, in consultation with existing partners and other stakeholders, have undertaken a review of the potential for the County Council to promote and to support forestry.

Proposed County Council Forestry Statement

5. The text of the proposed Statement is attached at Annex 1.
6. The Statement
 - (a) Recognises the environmental value of Oxfordshire's trees and woodlands and seeks to protect and enhance them.
 - (b) Seeks to develop the economic potential of the resource.
 - (c) Recognises the role that greater use of wood as a fuel can play in reducing overall carbon emissions.
7. Following approval the Statement will be published as an illustrated pamphlet in limited numbers for distribution. It will also be made available on the website with links to additional background detail and supporting information.

Financial and Staff Implications

8. The Statement is clear that the Council's resources to support and promote forestry are limited and that there is no realistic prospect of their being increased for the foreseeable future.
9. There are, therefore, no financial or staff implications.

RECOMMENDATION

10. **The Cabinet Member for Growth & Infrastructure is RECOMMENDED to approve the Forestry Statement for publication.**

CHRIS COUSINS
Head of Sustainable Development
Environment & Economy

Background papers: Notes of Oxfordshire Woodland Conference, 23 March
2006
Jane Hull, Forestry Commission, SE England
(unpublished) 9pp

Draft Forestry Statement (2008), 26pp

Draft Forestry Statement (text only) & collated comments
(2008), 24pp

Electronic copies of all these documents available on
request from Eric Dougliss (forestry@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Contact Officer: Eric Dougliss Tel: 01993 814141

September 2009

OXFORDSHIRE'S TREES AND WOODLAND, TODAY & TOMORROW

Introduction

Oxfordshire's trees and woodlands are important landscape features and wildlife habitats. They provide a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits and have the potential to contribute much more.

This Statement sets out the national and regional policy context and outlines the value of Oxfordshire's tree and woodland resources. It looks at how these resources might be developed over the next five to ten years and how the Council might contribute to this.

National and Regional Context

'The England Forestry Strategy' was published by the Forestry Commission in 1998. This was reviewed in 2006 and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published 'A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests' in June 2007.

Forestry strategy for the South East Region is guided by the regional forestry and woodland framework "Seeing the Wood for the Trees", published in 2004 www.forestry.gov.uk/seeingthewoodforthetrees.

The framework has four main themes:

- Making better places for people to live
- Enhanced environment and biodiversity
- A stronger contribution to the economy
- A secure future for our woodland resources

The regional framework has been the catalyst for producing local wood fuel strategies.

All three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) within the county have their own forestry strategies and have agreed local accords with the Forestry Commission to deliver them.

The aims and objectives of the regional framework, AONB strategies and the local accords provide a supporting context for this Statement.

Oxfordshire's Trees and Woodlands

Over 17,000 hectares of the county is wooded and there are around 4.4 million non-woodland trees. Around 95% of this resource is privately owned.

Oxfordshire's 7% woodland cover is half the regional average and below the national average for England (8.3%). The extent and type of cover varies greatly throughout the county. In the Oxfordshire Chilterns, woodland cover averages around 25%. In parts of the North Wessex Downs, it is as low as 1%. Outside these areas, woodland cover is typically around 4%.

There are few large woodlands. Around 93% of Oxfordshire's 3,600 or so woodlands are very small, under 2 hectares in area. This pattern will continue, with some 1,800 new, small woodlands planted since 1982.

Nearly half (7,900 hectares) of Oxfordshire's woodland area is scheduled as Ancient Woodland (i.e. it has been continuously wooded since 1600 or before). These woodlands have considerable landscape, nature conservation and historic importance. There are also many woodlands under 2 hectares in area that are too small to be scheduled but of ancient origin.

Only about 5% of the county's non-woodland trees are in public ownership. About 18% are growing on or alongside public highways, where the County Council is responsible for ensuring their safety and management.

Veteran trees (generally those with a >3metre girth at 1.5m above ground) are of particular importance, because of their great age and the unique biological communities they support. They are a factor, for example, in Blenheim's World Heritage Site status. Ancient orchards also have high biological and cultural value.

The ecological value and importance of Oxfordshire's trees and woodland are recognised by the Council and by its partners in the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum. Further information is available on the Council website and on <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk>.

Oxfordshire's woodlands produce around 250,000 tonnes of wood each year, most of which is not harvested. There is a backlog of unharvested material, probably amounting to millions of tonnes. Amenity tree management produces another 50,000 tonnes of wood annually, of which much still goes to waste. This considerable resource, if brought to market, is a significant economic opportunity and could generate funds to promote woodland improvement.

A shared view

Over recent years and through various consultation processes a number of broad views on forestry in Oxfordshire have emerged. The following paragraphs summarise these:

- Economic returns to woodland owners must improve, to underpin efforts to make woodland management sustainable. This might be achieved by:
 - Promoting the use of local wood;
 - Promoting better use of wood; and
 - Promoting the use of low value wood for fuel and other purposes.
- With increasing fossil fuel prices and various initiatives promoting new fuel crops, there are opportunities to encourage the development of new fuel wood

coppices in ways to minimise environmental damage and to provide new public and environmental benefits. This has the potential both to support the economy in rural areas and to reduce carbon emissions.

- The value and importance of woodlands in education and as a resource to promote, maintain and improve public health, is already recognised. There is considerable potential for these benefits to increase.
- The Forest of Oxford proposal to create new woodland resources and manage existing woodland in the Oxford greenbelt, in ways to provide greater public and environmental benefit, has broad support.
- Public access to woodland in Oxfordshire is generally poor. Only around 10% of Oxfordshire's woodland provides any public access (compared to 30% average for the South East Region). Small, scattered woodlands are not generally well suited for providing public access and currently make little contribution. Nevertheless, there are parts of Oxfordshire, the Chilterns for example, where woodland cover is well above the county average and access is very good. Oxfordshire rates poorly (lower quartile) against the Natural England Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard. The Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum is keen to see improvements in this position, including additional woodland access.

Position Statement

The County Council recognises the social, environmental and economic benefits provided by the county's trees and woodlands.

Conserving and enhancing the county's trees and woodlands is fully in accord with the County Council's priority to protect the environment. It supports woodland creation, improvement and development, in particular:

- Retaining, sustaining and developing Oxfordshire's unique heritage of ancient trees, small woodlands and orchards, maintaining or improving their valuable contribution to landscapes and biodiversity.
- Creating new woodlands to:
 - provide sustainable resources
 - enhance the environment
 - improve public access and recreation.

Developing the economic potential of forestry, particularly to provide wood fuel, supports the County Council's priorities to promote economic development and to mitigate the impact of climate change caused by carbon emissions.

The Council supports the development and promotion of local use of, and markets for, wood and woodland products.

While the Council's resources to promote forestry are limited and are likely to remain so for the foreseeable future, it can set an example, and influence management standards, in the way in which it manages its own trees and woodland. It may also

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be able to support local forestry, and related industry, in the way it designs, builds and heats its buildings.

The County Council recognises that these objectives can only be achieved by harnessing public interest and involvement in woodland and environmental management, and by working in partnership with other agencies, local communities, landowners and environmental charities, to improve the contribution of trees and woodlands to the environment, education and the local economy.

Division(s): All

CABINET MEMBER FOR GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE 3 SEPTEMBER 2009

NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY – MANAGEMENT PLAN 2009 - 2014

Report by Head of Sustainable Development

Introduction

1. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated by Government, under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, for the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape.
2. Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a statutory duty on constituent local authorities of AONBs to publish Management Plans and to review them at five yearly intervals. Where AONBs cross county boundaries Government guidance urges local authorities to use joint working mechanisms in plan preparation and delivery. The North Wessex Downs AONB has a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), the Council of Partners and a dedicated staff team ideally suited to coordinate plan preparation.
3. The Management Plan was originally prepared in 2004 for the five year period 2004-2009. This plan has now undergone a 'light touch' review to update it for 2009-2014. It has been approved by the Council of Partners and is forwarded to the constituent authorities for formal adoption by September. The Plan is in pre-design format and will be published with suitable layout, illustrations, maps etc following adoption by all constituent authorities. An electronic copy is available on request.

The Management Plan 2004 – 2009

4. The Management Plan provides a framework for co-ordinating and directing management activity towards the conservation and enhancement of this nationally important landscape and the promotion of acceptable social and economic development.
5. The 2004-2009 Plan was deliberately ambitious in order to attract funding from a wide variety of external organisations and setting out a wide range of objectives and actions for the partnership to deliver against, through their own programmes, priorities and resource availability.
6. The AONB partnership has achieved a range of projects over the past five years against the plan, including investigating improved ways of delivering integrated advice to land managers, developing chalk grassland and woodland strategies to help direct funding and enhance biodiversity, a

woodland archaeology project and numerous practical projects of environmental, economic and community benefit. The AONB team has also recently won £2.5 million in LEADER funding for the AONB area.

The Management Plan 2009 – 2014

7. The North Wessex Downs AONB partnership has chosen to re-structure the Management Plan in addition to the 'light touch review', which does make the plan easier to use. The focus is on sustainability, environmental quality, a successful land based economy, the cultural landscape, appropriate development, vibrant communities and promotion of the North Wessex Downs as a tourism destination.
8. The document has been prepared with input from officers both through membership of various working groups and through comments provided on earlier draft texts. The final Plan presents policies and values similar to those of the County Council. It is fit for purpose and formal adoption can therefore be recommended.

Financial and Staff Implications

9. Natural England provides up to 75% funding for AONB partnerships, with local authority partners sharing responsibility for the remaining 25%. Natural England has recently announced that AONB funding for the next three years at least has been secured.
10. The County Council's contribution to the North Wessex Downs AONB in 2009/10 is £9,006. This allows the AONB partnership to draw down a further £27,000 of Natural England grant towards its core and project costs.
11. This funding arrangement is due for review by March 2010. Natural England has requested that all existing AONB partnership agreements be replaced by new Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) which will be subject to review every three years. This will allow the AONB partnership to implement priority actions within the new Management Plan and secure resources and match funding. Constituent Local Authorities will not have to commit funding for more than one year at a time.
12. This report also seeks approval to the County Council being party to the drawing up of the new MoU.

RECOMMENDATION

13. **The Cabinet Member for Growth & Infrastructure is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **adopt the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan in pursuance of the duty under section 89(2b) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; and**
 - (b) **agree that the County Council should be party to the drawing up of a Memorandum of Understanding with partners in the North**

Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty before March 2010.

CHRIS COUSINS
Head of Sustainable Development
Environment & Economy

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Keith Wheal, Countryside Service Manager
Tel. 01865 810202

September 2009

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