

**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**

CMDGI5

**Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty before March 2010.**

CHRIS COUSINS  
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Background papers: Nil

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