

Division(s): Benson & Cholsey,  
Chalgrove & Watlington, Goring,  
Henley-on-Thames, Sonning Common,  
Thame & Chinnor

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT – 9 OCTOBER 2014**

### **CHILTERNES AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN - ENDORSEMENT**

**Report by Deputy Director for Director Environment & Economy  
(Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)**

#### **Introduction**

1. The Chilterns Conservation Board has finalised the statutory Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-2019. Oxfordshire County Council is requested to endorse the plan which is available to view on the County Council's website ..... and public inspection at County Hall, Oxford. The plan helps Oxfordshire County Council to demonstrate compliance with our statutory duties. It also helps meet Corporate Plan Priorities, particularly 'Enhance the Environment'. The plan sets out objectives and policies that direct the activities of the Chilterns Conservation Board and guide the activities of other bodies. The plan covers various topics including landscape, land management, historic and water environments, biodiversity, development, social and economic well-being, understanding and enjoyment

#### **Oxfordshire's AONBs – governance, finance and legislation**

2. Oxfordshire has three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: the Cotswolds, the Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs (NWD), together covering around one third of the county. The AONB designation protects some of Britain's finest landscapes of distinctive character and natural beauty.
3. Members represent Oxfordshire County Council's interests (appointed via the list of Outside Bodies). AONBs are governed by one of two mechanisms:
  - (a) Conservation Boards – a managing body for large administratively complex AONBs, including the Chilterns and Cotswolds.
  - (b) Partnerships of local authorities, local people and other bodies, governed by a Council of Partners. The Chilterns AONB is a partnership.
4. Funding is 80% from DEFRA and 20% local authorities. Oxfordshire County Council contributed £14,809 to the Chilterns AONB for 2014/15. There is no legal requirement for financial contributions, but it enables the draw-down of substantive match-funding and in-kind support towards implementation of the management plan.
5. Legislation is contained in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. All public bodies including Oxfordshire County Council have a statutory duty of

regard for the purposes of AONBs when undertaking their work. Local authorities (or Conservation Boards) must produce a management plan in partnership, review it every 5 years, and send it to the secretary of state for approval. The plan helps to inform local authorities of the means by which they can comply with the statutory 'duty of regard'.

### **Purpose and planning status**

6. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan has three main purposes:
  - (a) Sets out the Chilterns Conservation Board's policies and actions for the management of the Chilterns AONB.
  - (b) Informs bodies such as Oxfordshire County Council how they can comply with the statutory duties of regard.
  - (c) Guides the engagement of partners in the management of the AONB.
7. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) gives '*great weight*' to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs and states that '*planning permission should be refused for major developments in [AONBs] except in exceptional circumstances...*'. This means that the management plan can have significant weight in planning and other decision-making that affects the AONB whether it is endorsed by the local authority or not.
8. The management plan was formally adopted by the Chilterns Conservation Board in March 2014.

### **Why is endorsement required?**

9. Local authorities are asked to formally 'endorse' the plan as a document with weight commensurate with the NPPF and to ensure it is considered within plans, policies and decision-making.
10. The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan has already been endorsed. The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan is awaiting endorsement by the County Council.

### **Consultation Process**

11. The Chilterns Board undertook extensive consultations on the draft Management Plan during 2013, enabling the authority to make comments. Relevant members (our Board representative and Cabinet Member) are aware and are content with the approach.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

12. Endorsement of the management plan does not commit Oxfordshire County Council to financial expenditure. There are no implications for staff time 'over and above' our current activities (Member attendance on the Board, and informal officer contact).

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 13. The Cabinet Member for Environment is RECOMMENDED to endorse the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014-2019.**

BEV HINDLE

Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning)

Background papers: AONB Management Plan  
Contact Officer: Victoria Fletcher Tel: 07500 121855

September 2014