

**Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan Review:
Consultation Draft**

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Committee:

- (a) notes the process and timetable for undertaking the review of the existing Tamar Valley AONB Management Plan;**
- (b) endorses, in principle, the approach to the preparation of and consultation on the Draft AONB Management Plan for 2019-2024;**
- (c) delegates to officers agreement of the detailed content and any outstanding issues for the Consultation Draft;**
- (d) notes that the final version of the new Management Plan will be adopted through the Cabinet Member decision process in Spring 2019.**

1. Summary

This report outlines the process for the review of the Management Plan for the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and seeks the Committee's approval for the preparation of and public consultation on a new Draft Plan. Any views of the Committee will be addressed before finalising the Plan.

2. Background

Devon has five AONBs within its boundaries. Three, East Devon, North Devon and South Devon, are wholly within the county, while two, Blackdown Hills and Tamar Valley, straddle the county boundary with Somerset and Cornwall respectively.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act, it is a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce Management Plans for their AONBs. Previous Plans were agreed and adopted for all five AONBs in 2009 and 2014 and it has now become necessary to undertake a further five-year review of these Plans, which need to be sent to the Secretary of State by March 2019. The task of the review is to identify amendments that are necessary to ensure the Plans remain a working document that reliably, and realistically, inform the future management of the AONB in the light of the available resources.

3. Approach to the Review of the Management Plan

The County Council and other relevant local authorities have delegated the task of undertaking the Management Plan Review to the respective AONB Partnerships. In doing this, the County Council has set out in writing its expectations and requirements for the reviewed Plans, reflecting national guidance. Defra considered that previous guidance documents on AONB Management Plans are still fit for purpose but, together with Natural England and the National Association for AONBs, had produced a paper outlining the collective steer to AONB Partnerships in taking

forward the next round of Management Plans. The County Council supports the principles outlined in this paper in issuing its own guidance.

The County Council is promoting a 'light touch' approach building on the common format, structure and timetable agreed between the AONBs. However, the reviews need to reflect changes in the statutory and legislative background, as well as new ways of partnership working, such as through the Devon Local Nature Partnership, the Devon Landscape Officers Group and Green Infrastructure Partnerships. The reviews also need to consider their approach to current issues, such as the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, the likely implications of Brexit on future land management and agri-environment schemes, the current review of the Draft Revised National Planning Policy Framework and the DCMS Culture White Paper launched in 2016.

In consideration of governance issues, the Government has recently announced a review into National Parks and AONBs. An independent panel will look at how these nationally important landscapes meet our needs in the 21st century – including whether there is scope for the current network of 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks to expand. This review will report in 2019, to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. It is uncertain as to whether they will report before the revised Management Plans need to be adopted.

The review should consider the actions within the Devon AONBs Adaptation Plan and how these may be further developed, particularly in joint work both with other AONBs but also other Partnerships such as National Parks, World Heritage Sites and Biosphere, where relevant.

4. The Process and Timetable in Devon

The County Council has encouraged the five AONBs Partnerships in Devon to develop a consistent approach to the development of their plans and to work to a similar timetable. To this end the Partnerships have agreed a common format and structure to their Plans and adopted the same timetable.

The Consultation Drafts of the Plans are currently being prepared and the local authorities are being requested to endorse the structure and outline content of the Draft Plan for consultation. It would be normal practice for this Committee to formally agree a full draft for public consultation but, due to the timetabling of meetings, this is not possible on this occasion. However, the Consultation Drafts will be approved by the AONB Partnerships on which DCC members are represented prior to consultation during late summer and early autumn.

At this point the County Council will be able to submit formal comments. Account will be taken of the feedback and comments and an amended draft Final Plan will be produced for each of the AONB Partnerships by November. Local authorities will be asked to adopt these Final Plans during January and February 2019. It is proposed that these will be signed off on behalf of the County Council by the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Community through the delegated decision process.

5. Draft Consultation Version of the Tamar Valley AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

The Consultation Draft of the Management Plan will adopt, as closely as possible, the common format and structure agreed for all the reviewed Devon AONB Management Plans. However, as the Tamar Valley AONB also encompasses

approximately 50% of area in Cornwall, it also is influenced by the Cornwall AONB Management Plan, which is different in structure. A list of the draft contents is provided by Appendix 1.

This Authority has already highlighted the following specific issues as requiring attention through the review of the Management Plan:

- changes to the planning system resulting from the review of the National Planning Policy Framework and the associated implications of the relevant local plans;
- potential implications arising from the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan;
- implications of Brexit on future land management and emerging agri-environment schemes;
- pressures from increasing demand for developments within and adjoining AONB boundaries, particularly to meet housing and renewable energy targets;
- a definition of 'major development' in an AONB context and a response to the cumulative effects of smaller developments;
- responses to climate change through natural flood management initiatives;
- the loss of tree and woodland cover through infectious diseases;
- the role of marine planning and the information available from the Rapid Coastal Zone Assessments including the National Mapping Programme;
- the increasing emphasis on neighbourhood planning, which should help to ensure that community needs are met whilst protecting the landscape character from the cumulative impacts of incremental, small-scale development;
- the importance of the environment for physical health and mental well-being and the potential of AONBs as outdoor classrooms and an educational resource;
- the focus on air quality as a component of landscape quality;
- and the concept of natural capital, ecosystems assessment and the emerging approach to the assessment of historic environment capital.

The Tamar Valley AONB has been the lead partner in the development of a landscape- scale scheme that encompasses the whole AONB and some of its setting, called the Tamara Landscape Partnership; this is currently under assessment by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is an integrated and wide-ranging programme that will help to pilot natural flood management and new approaches to land management based on a natural capital approach, engaging communities in the conservation of the cultural and historic environment, improving sustainable access and promotion of the area to new audiences and visitors, as well as developing key skills and providing opportunities for strengthening health and wellbeing in the outdoors. In this way, it will help to address many of the items listed above. The County Council has been a key partner on the Steering Group.

Area 10 of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site (WHS) coincides with the northern section of the Tamar Valley AONB. The WHS Partnership is also currently reviewing its Management Plan at present and is seeking adoption and implementation of Supplementary Planning Guidance. Both these documents need to be taken into consideration in the Tamar Valley AONB Management Plan review.

Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal will identify other aspects of the current plan that may need revision.

6. Financial Considerations

The Management Plan Review is being undertaken as part of the AONB services' core functions, for which Defra contribute 75% of the funding; the remaining 25% is provided between all the local authorities on the Partnership. These contributions are set out formally in a four-year Memorandum of Agreement, currently from 2014 to 2019/20. A new MoA will be required for the duration of the next five-year plan. Costs of undertaking the reviews are being met from these existing core budgets.

7. Sustainability, Carbon Impact, Equality and Public Health Considerations

It is a requirement that AONB Management Plans are subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitat Regulations Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment. These are being drafted and will be subject to consultation alongside the Management Plans. This should ensure that sustainability, environmental, equality and public health issues have been fully taken into account.

8. Legal Considerations

Under the CROW Act, the County Council and the relevant District Council(s) have a statutory duty for ensuring that AONB Management Plans are periodically reviewed. The current review process meets that responsibility.

9. Risk Management Considerations

Risks associated with the Management Plan can be categorised as: reputational, which may arise through the public consultation; legal, relating to not having statutory plans in place to ensure effective management of the AONB; and financial, related to lack of strategic context for making funding bids to deliver activity. All of these are being addressed by the AONB Team and Partnership through the review process.

10. Options/Alternatives

The County Council could have resolved to undertake the Management Plan Review itself or in conjunction with the relevant District Council(s). This would have ignored the existing governance structure and expertise of the AONB Partnerships.

11. Reasons for Recommendation/Conclusion

The review procedure will allow the County Council to fulfil its statutory obligation and to ensure that the Management Plan Reviews are subject to appropriate consultation. This Committee is asked to consider any issues which it believes will need to be addressed through the review and the production of the revised Management Plan.

Dave Black
Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Electoral Divisions: Bickleigh and Wembury, Okehampton Rural; Tavistock; and Yelverton Rural

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Contact for enquiries: Peter Chamberlain

Room No: Lucombe House AB3, County Hall, Exeter, EX2 4QD

Tel No: (01392) 382257

Background Paper	Date	File Ref.
Tamar Valley AONB Management Plan 2014-19	June 2014	http://www.tamarvalley.org.uk/care/aonb-management-plan/

pc040718wdc

sc/cr/Tamar Valley AONB Management Plan Review Consultation Draft

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