

AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN POST-CONSULTATION VERSION

Purpose

To seek members' endorsement of the Post Consultation Draft AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 and to recommend the Plan for adoption, subject to the Habitats Regulation Assessment modified screening and realigning the Plan period.

Recommendations

That the JAC:

- A. Approves the Post Consultation Draft version of the AONB Management Plan and recommends the Plan for adoption by the local authorities and government agencies, subject to the Habitats Regulation Assessment modified screening.
- B. Endorses the realignment of the 5 year period of the AONB Management Plan to cover 2021-2026.

Key Issues

- The Post Consultation Draft of the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 has been prepared. The Post Consultation Draft (amended) and the version showing the amendments to the Consultation Draft Plan are available on the AONB website:- <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/2020-2025-consultation/>.
- The following documents are also on AONB website:
 - the table of comments received from the public consultation with the formal responses and proposed modifications to the Plan
 - The draft State of the AONB Report
 - The Screening Reports for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)
- The SEA Screening conclusion that the Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects is supported by Cadw, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.
- The HRA Screening was partially supported by Natural Resources Wales. Natural England have requested some modifications to the HRA screening which is now underway and needs to be completed before the Plan can be formally adopted by the local authorities and government agencies.
- The finalised Plan is anticipated before the end of the year with adoption likely early in 2021. Therefore it would be appropriate to re-define the 5-year Plan period as 2021-2026.

Reasons

The AONB Management Plan has been through a light-touch review and a public consultation process, concluding in January 2020. This produced 231 specific comments received from 18 organisations and individuals. The table of these comments along with the

response and recommended amendments to the Plan is available on the AONB website: https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/AONB-MP-consultation-draft-Comments-and-Responses-Sept-2020.pdf.

The preparation of the Post-Consultation draft AONB Management Plan has been delayed primarily due to the impacts and pressures caused by the Coronavirus Pandemic. The Post-Consultation draft is now published with versions showing the amendments as Tracked Changes and an amended version with all responses incorporated. These are available on the AONB website: <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/2020-2025-consultation/>.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/ EC) and Regulations apply to AONB Management Plans. Similarly the requirement for a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is outlined in Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and relates to the effects of the Plan on the internationally important habitats (Natura 2000 sites) and protected species for which the area is classified. Separate Screening Reports for the SEA and HRA of the Consultation Draft Management Plan were carried out. These are available on the AONB website (at the bottom of the webpage link above). These focused on the modifications from the previous Plan. The purpose of the SEA and HRA Directives is to ensure that plans and programmes that are likely to have significant effects on the environment are subjected to a strategic level (high and overarching) assessment during their preparation, to inform decision-makers and stakeholders of their likely effects, including for the HRA any in-combination effects with other plans.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Sections 89 and 90, require local authorities to publish AONB Management Plans at not more than five year intervals. The current Plan is dated 2015-2020, the Consultation Draft Management Plan (September 2019) was dated 2020-2025. However, as a consequence of the slippage in the finalising of the reviewed Plan, primarily due to the impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic, it would be appropriate to redefine the period of the new five year AONB Management Plan to commence in the New Year. Therefore it is proposed that the new AONB Management Plan will be for the period 2021-2026.

The State of the AONB Report (SoAR) establishes a foundation for measuring change, beneficial or adverse, in the state or condition of the AONB. Reporting on the State of the AONB provides a baseline for understanding the Special Qualities and the trends and pressures on the AONB. The draft SoAR is available on the AONB website: https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/State-of-the-AONB-Report-2020-v5.pdf.

Implications

The SEA Screening Report was submitted for statutory consultation and responses were received from Cadw, Natural England (NE) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). The conclusion of the submitted screening report is that “the Strategic Environmental Assessment will not be required for the Wye Valley AONB Management Plan. This is because the plan is unlikely to display significant environmental effects”. This conclusion was supported by Cadw, NE and NRW.

The HRA Screening Report was assessed by NE & NRW. The Assessment undertaken considered the effects of the proposed changes to the Management Plan between the 2015-20 Plan and the Consultation Draft Plan 2020-2025. In considering the changes proposed to the

Management Plan, the conclusion was that there were no likely significant effects. NRW supported this conclusion but emphasised the need to be clear that the Screening is only considering the effects of the modifications to the Plan. However, NE was of the view that they could not concur with the conclusion. But, with a few amendments, they considered that agreement could be provided if the Screening assessment only addresses the policies that have changes or additions. The amendments to the HRA Screening Report are being made. It is anticipated that the conclusions can be supported and the Plan finalised for adoption fairly swiftly.

Therefore it is proposed that the JAC can recommend the Post Consultation Draft version of the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 for adoption by the local authorities and government agencies, subject to the HRA being satisfactorily completed. It then seems appropriate to realign the 5 year period of the AONB Management Plan from 2020-2025 to cover the period 2021-2026, as it is unlikely to be fully adopted before the end of 2020.

The State of the AONB Report (SoAR) is still a draft, working document. The challenge for the use of any statistics for the AONB is the correlation of the data with the AONB boundary and between England and Wales, where the data is often gathered to differing methodologies. The collation of data is progressing, with the SoAR being updated as new data is assimilated.

Background

The current AONB Management Plans 2015-2020 is available on the AONB website <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/management-plans/>.

General guidance on AONBs in England and responsibilities on their designation and management is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-aonbs-designation-and-management#local-authority-responsibilities>