

# Your Guide to the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



[www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk)



# Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**The Cotswolds is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful areas of England and is a living, working landscape much loved by people from across the world.**

It is one of 40 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales and is the largest AONB in the country.

The Cotswolds is limestone country, part of the oolitic limestone belt stretching across England from the English Channel to the North Sea. The western edge of the Cotswolds forms a dramatic escarpment overlooking the Vale of Evesham and the Severn and providing a magnificent backdrop to places like Bath and Cheltenham. Historic villages shelter under its edge, beech woods and grassland line its face and ancient forts can be found on the crest. To the south east, the land gently dips away with rolling wolds and river valleys. Broad open views of arable fields with woodland alternate with scenes of village, pasture and water meadow.

Throughout the area, Cotswold stone features in buildings and walls acting as a unifying thread blending the towns, villages and farms with their surrounding landscape.

# Shaping the Countryside

## Natural influences

Underlying much of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is oolitic limestone used for distinctive Cotswold walls and buildings. The colour of the stone varies from silvery white to golden ochre, depending on the iron oxide content.

The natural features of the Cotswolds are unique and complex. The dramatic escarpment, which in some places rises to more than 300 metres, has progressively eroded south-eastwards over thousands of years. Erosion has also resulted in the creation of deep, wide valleys.

## Human influences

Pre-historic people left their mark on the Cotswolds in the form of Neolithic long barrows such as Hetty Pegler's Tump near Uley and Belas Knap, south of Winchcombe.

During the Bronze Age, from 2,500 BC, stone circles and isolated stone monuments were constructed. The Rollright Stones near Chipping Norton are a relic of this period. In the Iron Age that followed, from 750 BC, tribes built hill forts and defensive enclosures many, such as the remains at Crickley Hill Country Park, Leckhampton Hill, Painswick Beacon and Uley Bury can still be seen today.

The Romans arrived in the Cotswolds around AD47 leaving an important impression on the landscape. The remains of villas and other settlements have been found throughout the area, although the most lasting influence is that of

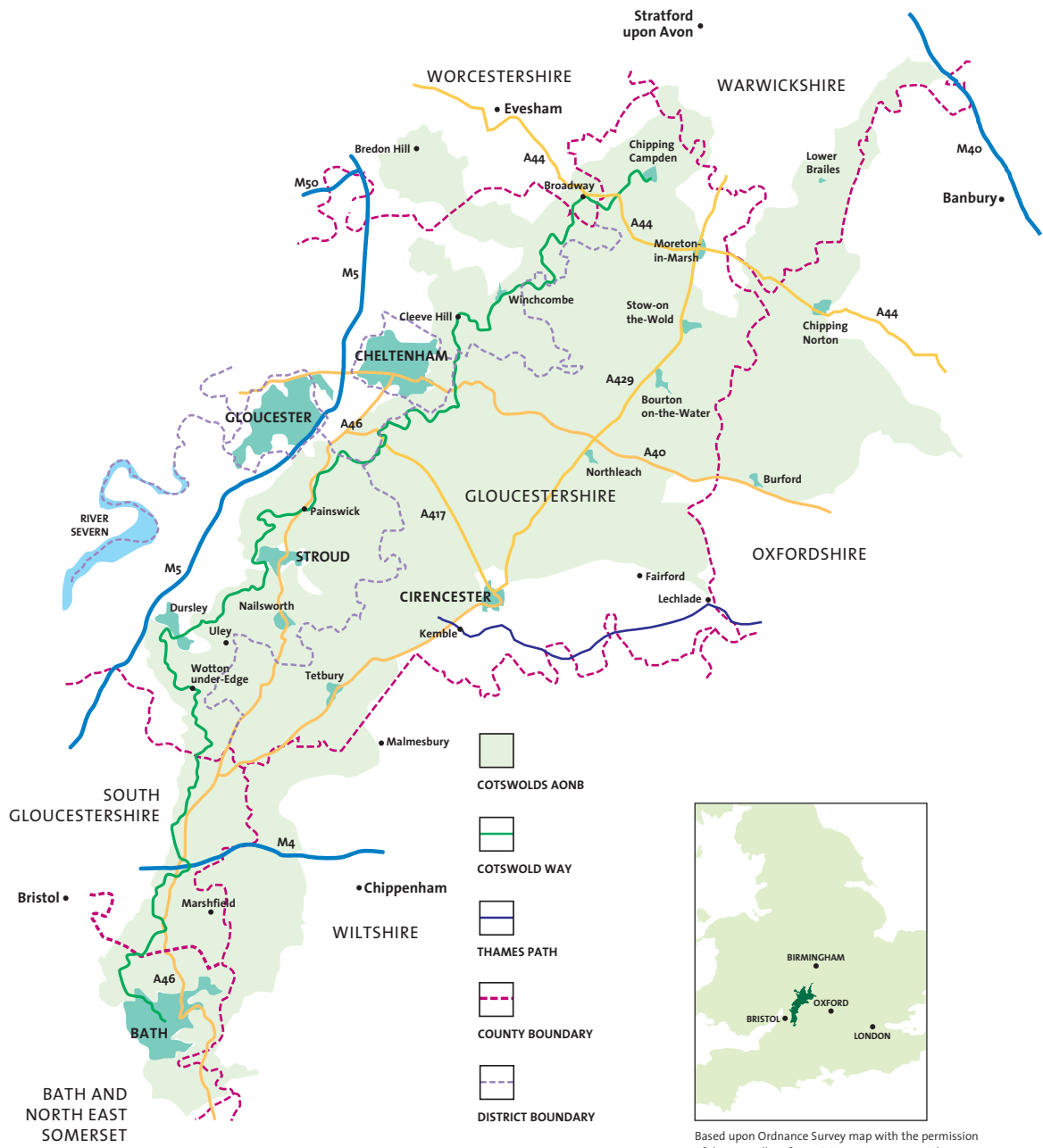
Roman roads. The most prominent of these is the Fosse Way, running the length of the Cotswolds between Bath and Moreton-in-Marsh.






The golden age of the Cotswolds came with the growth of the wool trade in the late Middle Ages. This prosperity led to the development of magnificent churches, manor houses and market towns including Painswick, Northleach, Chipping Campden, Marshfield and Chipping Norton.

During the 17th and 18th centuries the cloth industry influenced the area around Dursley, Chalford, Painswick and Stroud. Old cloth mills can still be seen, particularly along the rivers and streams in the Stroud area.

The King Stone, part of the Rollright Stones near Chipping Norton





-  COTSWOLDS AONB
-  COTSWOLD WAY
-  THAMES PATH
-  COUNTY BOUNDARY
-  DISTRICT BOUNDARY



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# An Outstanding Landscape

## Becoming an AONB

The countryside of England and Wales contains a rich diversity of scenery that is of great value to the nation. In 1949 the Government decided to protect these areas by giving them special status.

Tracts of land, often remote, with wide open spaces and significant opportunities for public outdoor recreation became National Parks. Those areas with extensive fine landscapes and a great variety of character became Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

18% of countryside in England and Wales has now been given AONB status. Together with National Parks they account for around 25% of the countryside.

- The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty
- AONBs should safeguard agriculture, forestry, rural industries and the economic and social needs of local communities
- Being an AONB means that the Cotswolds remains a living, working environment and the very features that attract people will be here for future generations to enjoy
- AONBs should meet the demands for recreation without this conflicting with the conservation of their natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other users

40 areas of countryside have been designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Cotswolds was designated an AONB in 1966 and extended in area in 1990. It is the largest AONB in England and Wales covering 2,038 sq kms (790 sq miles).

In June 2000, the Government confirmed that AONBs were equal in landscape and planning policy status to that of National Parks.



A view towards St James Church - one of the 'wool' churches' - in Chipping Campden



# The Land

Typical farmland in the central Cotswolds >

- More than 80% of the Cotswolds is agricultural land
- Over half of the country's flower-rich jurassic limestone grassland is in the AONB
- The area contains internationally important lowland beech and yew woodland

## Farmland

The majority of the land in the Cotswolds is farmland, with mixed and arable farms divided by a network of dry stone walls and hedges. The landscape of the Cotswolds has been influenced by centuries of agriculture and expert land management by the farming community.

Typical High Wold Cotswolds landscape



The Cotswolds was traditionally known as a sheep farming area. Agriculture today is characterised by a mix of land uses including arable land, grassland (or pasture for cattle and horses) and woodland. These provide a rich landscape and an abundance of wildlife. There are more holdings over 100 hectares in size within the AONB than in other parts of England. At the other end of the scale there is also a high proportion of holdings under five hectares in size. Farms and farm buildings are well maintained and much of the farmland in the AONB is well managed.

## Grassland

In 1935 almost 40% of the Cotswolds was covered with flower-rich grassland. Since then, more intensive farming methods have meant that unimproved grassland sites have declined. The Cotswolds contain less than 3000ha of wildflower grassland, about 1.5% of the total area. Although much reduced this is still a very important wildlife feature. There are more than 300 wildflower grasslands known but their average size is small with few sites bigger than 20ha. These grasslands are rich habitats for wildlife, often containing more than 100 species of wildflowers and grasses on each site.

Many grassland sites are accessible to the public through the public rights of way network. Some, such as Crickley Hill Country Park, Painswick Beacon and Leckhampton Hill, are enjoyed by thousands of people every year.





# The Land

Arable farming at the heart of the Cotswolds >

## Woodland

Woodland amounts to nearly 9% of the area and is an important feature of the landscape, particularly along the escarpment, in secluded valleys and in significant blocks in the east. Much of the woodland cover is ancient, semi-natural and predominantly hardwood. Fine examples of ancient beechwoods can still be seen along the escarpment and incised valleys. In Neolithic times this type of woodland extended over the whole of the Cotswolds. Mixed oak, ash, sycamore and maple are found as you travel eastwards from the scarp and conifers have become part of the landscape.

## Quarries

Stone is one of the distinctive qualities of Cotswold towns and villages. Limestone is an important source of material for stone slates, walls and building stone for use in local buildings. The continuing supply of building stone is important and local quarries can meet this need.



## Pressures on the landscape

Economic changes have affected the management of flower-rich grassland, woodlands, hedges and dry stone walls, in some cases this has resulted in the extinction - or near extinction - of rare species such as the Large Blue and Adonis Blue butterflies. More recently set-aside and farm diversification are having a major impact on the landscape. These changes increase the need to balance conservation with changes in land use in the Cotswolds.

Development issues continue to challenge the area. Wind turbines, telecommunications towers, development associated with tourism and recreation and increased traffic all have a major impact on the character of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The decline in the number of sheep and cattle means a reduction in grazing which has potentially adverse consequences for the landscape and wildlife, although initiatives within the AONB are trying to reverse this trend.

Quarries in the Cotswolds provide high quality building stone needed for Cotswold buildings, dry stone walls, aggregates for road building and the construction industry, as well as providing valuable employment opportunities for local people. However, there are a series of environmental considerations that should be taken into account including the impact on the landscape and the lorry traffic associated with quarries.

< Walking in Westonbirt Arboretum



# The Built Environment

- The AONB has a large number of Conservation Areas and specially protected or 'listed' buildings
- The Cotswolds contains a network of dry stone walls estimated to be over 6,000 kms (4,000 miles) in length - equivalent to the Great Wall of China

## Buildings

The appearance of many villages and towns in the Cotswolds is the result of a style created by craftsman builders from the Medieval period onwards. Stone from local quarries was used extensively, so that whole villages were built of the same material. A distinctive style was established which was copied and developed, with many variations, throughout the area. This style is easily recognisable - a steep pitched roof with ridge tiles and coping, tall chimneys, symmetrically balanced design with evenly spaced windows, large window sills of stone or wood and detailed window surrounds of stone. It is one of the most important characteristics of the AONB and one which attracts international interest.

## Dry stone walls

Dry stone walls create the most recognisable field boundaries in the Cotswolds. There have been dry stone walls in the area since Neolithic times although much of what is seen today is from the 18th and 19th centuries, when large areas of open fields and downland were enclosed.

Dry stone walls are also extremely valuable for wildlife. Where they are adjacent to wide field margins and tracks they provide shelter and act as wildlife corridors, something that will become increasingly necessary as species move north in response to climate change. Walls are also important for sheltering over-wintering invertebrates. Whilst being a feature readily associated with the Cotswolds, dry stone walls often do not fulfil an agricultural purpose in today's farmed landscape.

## Pressures on the built environment

Development pressures have a major impact on the environment in the Cotswolds. Housing needs and industrial development can be at odds with the landscape. There is a risk of eroding the identity and distinctiveness of the towns and villages in the AONB. New development can look the same throughout the country, often ignoring local character. With increasing demand for rural living and further growth in second homes and tourist accommodation, development pressures are growing.



# The People

- Attracts 38 million visitors a year
- Two million people live 'on the doorstep' within 20 minutes drive of the Cotswolds
- Has been inhabited and shaped by people for over 6,000 years

## Residents

More than 157,000 people live in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The main employment opportunities are farming, tourism and quarrying, with some light engineering and service industries. However, many people travel outside the area to work.

Traditional market towns are important centres for people living in the AONB and continue to provide a range of local services.

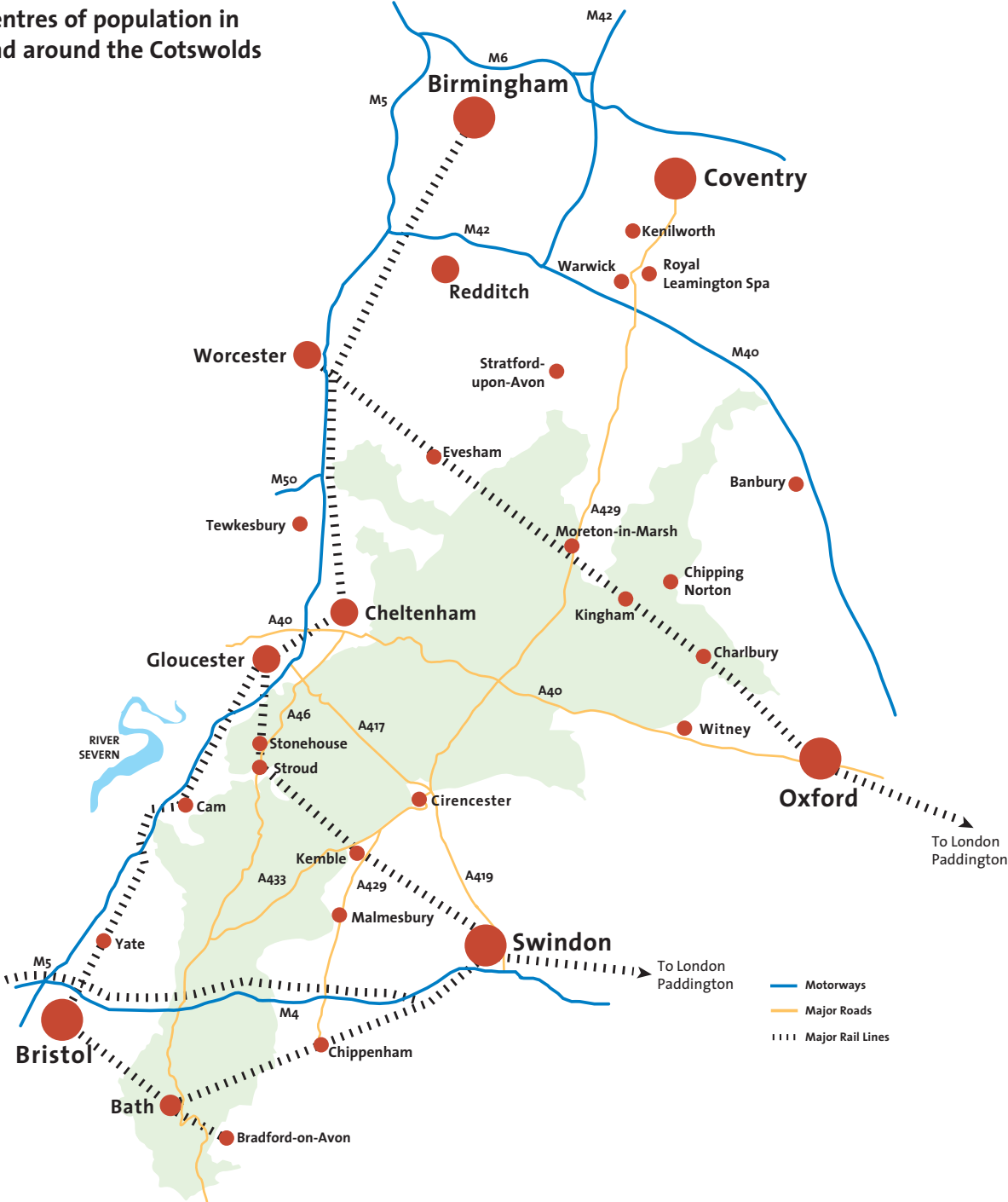
Results from the 2001 census show that the majority of people in the area are aged between 30-64 years of age and the main occupations are categorised as 'managers and senior officials', closely followed by 'professionals'.

## Artists and craftspeople

In the late 19th century the Cotswolds became a focus for people who wanted to escape from nearby towns and cities. Leading these early visitors was William Morris who settled in the area, promoting its buildings through his writing and founding the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. His work had wide repercussions - leading to the world famous Arts and Crafts movement being strongly represented in the Cotswolds and the area's growing popularity with painters, musicians and poets, including Vaughan Williams and Laurie Lee of 'Cider with Rosie' fame.



# Centres of population in and around the Cotswolds



# The People

## Visitors

Tourism is the main industry in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Cotswolds is one of the most popular destinations in England. Many people visit the Cotswolds from the surrounding urban areas, helped by motorway and rail networks. The high visitor numbers also reflect the Cotswolds national and international reputation as the quintessential English landscape.

Out and about enjoying the Cotswolds



## Pressures on people

During the past 30 years there have been considerable changes in the structure of communities in the AONB. These include the out-migration of local people unable to afford to buy their own home, a loss of local facilities and services, an increase in second homes and tourist accommodation, more people working from home, an increase in the number of older people and a loss of traditional land-based rural skills. The high cost of housing also means that people in low paid jobs have to live outside the AONB and travel into the area to work.

In addition, visitor and recreational pressures in this popular tourist area can contribute to local congestion at viewpoints and popular villages.





## Fact file:

# Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

- Cotswolds Area of Natural Beauty is the largest of 40 AONBs in England and Wales
- Landscape equal to National Parks
- Larger than Dartmoor and Exmoor National Parks combined

## Grassland

- Contains over half the country's total jurassic limestone grassland that has not been affected by modern farming (3,000 hectares/ 7,413 acres)
- Found on shallow, free draining and alkaline soil it is an important wildlife habitat
- Remnant wet grasslands along river valleys
- Huge reduction in the amount of flower-rich grassland in the Cotswolds between 1935 and 1999 (45% grassland in 1935 compared to 1.5% in 1999)
- Over 400 flower-rich grassland sites remain

## Walls

- Contains over 6,000 kms (4,000 miles) of dry stone walls estimated to be the equivalent to the length of the Great Wall of China
- Over 50% of the dry stone walls are derelict or not stockproof
- Cotswold stone has been quarried in Farmington since Roman times

## Plants

- Cotswold pennycress is found as a native plant in the Cotswolds. There are only two other sites where the plant is found outside the AONB.
- Cotswolds is the core area in the country for meadow clary
- Significant numbers of round-leaved feather moss, shepherd's needle and juniper
- One of three areas in the country for red helleborine

## Woodlands

- Internationally important lowland beech and yew woodland on scarp slopes and in valleys
- Has some of the finest gardens and arboreta in the country

## Recreation

- Has two National Trails - the Cotswold Way and a small part of the Thames Path
- There are miles of public footpaths in the Cotswolds making it ideal for walkers. Cycling and horse riding are also popular pursuits

## Wildlife

- National stronghold for duke of burgundy and small blue butterflies
- The Adonis Blue butterfly is back after a 40 year period of extinction in the Cotswolds and there is a re-introduction programme for the Large Blue butterfly taking place near Stroud.
- Contains 10% of the number of breeding horseshoe bats
- Home to the endangered species of snail, Lauria semproni, found on only one wall in the Cotswolds

## Nature conservation

- Contains three National Nature Reserves (NNRs)
- More than 80 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Two Local Nature Reserves



## Farming

- Over 80% of the Cotswolds is farmland
- The local breed of sheep is traditionally known as the 'Cotswold lion' which produces the long, thick fleece on which the wealth of the Cotswolds was founded.
- There are 3,020 farm holdings with an average size of 56 hectares
- There is a wide range of sizes of farm holdings ranging from large (over 100 hectares) to small (under five hectares)

## Historic Environment

- Just under 17,000 known archaeological sites
- Over 2,000 prehistoric sites eg. Neolithic long barrows, Iron Age hill forts and stone circles, such as the Rollright Stones
- Over 1,000 Roman sites especially villas and roads (with major towns just outside the AONB)
- Traditional features in the landscape such as sheepwashes, stones stiles and dew ponds
- More than 7,000 post-Medieval and modern sites

## People

- More than 157,000 residents in the Cotswolds AONB
- 38 million visitors a year
- Tourism is the main industry
- The Romans arrived in the Cotswolds around AD47 building now famous roads and the great town of Cirencester
- William Morris, one of the leaders of the Arts and Crafts Movement, lived in the area for 25 years and was greatly influenced by the Cotswold countryside and architecture
- Morris dancing is found all over England but is particularly associated with the Cotswolds
- There are more than 340 Cotswold Voluntary Wardens who carry out conservation work and lead guided walks

A farm track near the village of Turkdean in the AONB

## Buildings

- Medieval Cotswold wool merchants built themselves splendid stone houses and endowed magnificent 'wool churches' which today still dominate many Cotswold towns and villages
- Stone-built villages are one of the best known features of the Cotswolds, with their coloured stone buildings



# Cotswolds Conservation Board



## Cotswolds Conservation Board works:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB
- to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB, ensuring that these complement the conservation and enhancement of the area.

In fulfilling these roles, the Board seeks to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the AONB.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board has chosen to use a 'Cotswold' sheep as its mascot because it represents the long-standing strength and success of the area. Traditionally known as the 'Cotswold Lion' these sheep are descended from a breed that the Romans introduced to the Cotswolds. Their long 'Lion-like' mane and fleece produced the wool that ensured the success of the British wool trade from the Medieval period onwards and forged the success of the Cotswold Wool merchants.

## Cotswolds Conservation Board

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