

FARMING AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE COTSWOLDS AONB

Summary: To present an update on progress and revised version of the proposal for Farming and Rural development in the Cotswolds after Brexit.

Recommendation: That the Sub-committee:

- a) **Note progress on the proposal**
- b) **Comment on the draft table of potential impact on selected special qualities of the Cotswolds AONB.**

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Background

1. Board officers with the support of a farmers working group and the Conserving and Managing Sub-committee have been developing a proposal for farming and rural development in the Cotswolds AONB after the UK has left the European Union.
2. The Sub-committee received and commented on an earlier version of the proposal at their meeting on 7th September 2017. Following the meeting, a shorter version of the proposal has been written and discussed by a second meeting of the farmers group chaired by Lord Bathurst on 2nd November. That meeting confirmed that the proposal was along the right lines and chimed well with other proposals, coalescing around a set of common themes.
3. Discussion identified a number of points to be added to the proposal, some of which are in the longer version but had become casualties of condensing the text down. One of the key points made was the need to make the proposal more Cotswold specific. Apart from adding some specific references to the text it was agreed to include a simple table to highlight the key characteristics of the Cotswolds, the issues/problems faced and the type of incentive/action that could be delivered by post Brexit agri-environment and rural development. The table is to be circulated to the farmers group for comment. The amended proposal is attached as Appendix 'A' and the draft table as Appendix 'B'.
4. The farmers group agreed to hold a third meeting after the release of the Government's 25 year Environmental Plan to ensure the Cotswolds farming and rural development proposal will deliver the Government's priorities. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Gove MP has informed the Environmental Audit Committee that the 25 year Environmental Plan would be published before Christmas or in January. Defra would then publish the Agriculture White Paper in late spring to set out the shape of agriculture and farming after Brexit. The Agriculture Bill expected in summer 2018 will then set out the mechanisms needed to bring the system into place.

5. The Minister responsible for AONBs and National Parks, Lord Gardiner, visited the Cotswolds AONB, hosted by the Board on 8th November. The itinerary included a visit to Guiting Manor Farms with Nick Bumford, Business Manager and Director. A number of points from the agri-environment were made to the Minister during the visit. Following the visit the shorter form of the proposal has been sent to Lord Gardiner.
6. The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) was silent on the subject of farming after Brexit until shortly after the annual conference in July when a letter was sent to Lord Gardiner proposing that AONB Management Plans are used to help direct delivery of agri-environment and rural development support payments within AONBs. The NAAONB has now established an email based National Agriculture Sub-group to develop the proposal as to how management plans could help direct delivery of agri-environment and rural development support payments. The purpose of the group was to provide ideas and evidence to be presented to Lord Gardiner who can then reflect on the offer and provide feedback at the Chairmen's meeting in London in November. The Board's Land Management Officer was part of the sub-group.
7. Whilst the focus of the NAAONB is the use of AONB Management Plans to direct future agri-environment delivery, it is evident from comments from other members of the Sub-group that some other AONBs are also promoting local design and delivery.
8. The Chairman of Natural England, Andrew Sells, met with Martin Lane, Director on 23rd October and was interested in the proposal and indicated that Natural England is keen to develop a new scheme through pilots and that the Cotswolds would be a good candidate. This was also raised with Lord Gardiner on the 8th November visit.
9. The process of developing the Board's proposal to date has involved:
 - Draft Management Plan 2018 – 2023
 - Presentation to Post Brexit Farming Conference 17th March 2017
 - Cotswolds Farming Forum 27th April 2017
 - National Parks proposal finalised
 - Farming Working Group – 11th July 2017
 - Discussion at Executive Committee 20th July 2017
 - Initial proposal sent to Lord Gardiner
 - Brief outline in presentation to local MPs
 - Presentation of proposal to Board 5th October
 - Participation in NAAONB National Agriculture Sub-group
 - Proposal discussed with Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England 23rd October 2017
 - Second Farming Working Group 2nd November 2017
 - Key points raised with Lord Gardiner, 8th November

Supporting Paper(s):

Appendix 'A' – Farming and Rural Development in the Cotswolds AONB.

Appendix 'B' - Draft table of potential impact on selected special qualities of the Cotswolds AONB.