**DARK NIGHT SKIES**

AGENDA ITEM 10

**Summary:** To present a report on the benefits of darks skies, the potential for dark skies designation and the criteria and process for application.

**Recommendations:**

**(a) That the Board resolves that the dark skies of the Cotswolds AONB should be actively conserved and enhanced and enable the public to understand and enjoy them;**

**(b) That a draft Position Statement on Dark Skies and Artificial Light is prepared for adoption at the March 2019 Board meeting;**

**(c) That the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines for the Cotswolds AONB is reviewed by June 2019 to ensure the recognition, conservation and enhancement of dark skies is properly taken into account;**

**(d) That the support of local authorities and parish councils is sought in acknowledging the dark skies of the Cotswolds and their conservation and enhancement leading to appropriate local plan policies;**

**(e) That opportunities are sought to raise public awareness of the importance of dark skies and their protection and enhancement;**

**(f) That appropriate external funding bids are made and resources secured in order to make an application to the IDA for Dark Sky reserve status and for maintaining that status.**

**Officer Ref:** Mark Connelly, Land Management Officer (01451 862006)

**Background**

1. To aid the Board’s understanding of the importance of dark night skies, the potential of seeking a dark skies designation and the processes involved, the Board established the Dark Skies Task and Finish Group. The remit of the group is:
* To review the potential for a Dark Skies designation for the Cotswolds AONB, taking account of CPRE’s dark skies research and the development of other dark sky sites, parks and reserves within the UK;
* To review the criteria and application process and develop an action plan for securing dark skies status for the AONB or significant parts of the AONB;
* To review and propose updates to the Board’s Tranquillity and Dark Skies Position Statement.

The members of the group are:

George Lambrick - Cotswolds Conservation Board

Liz Hodges - Cotswolds Conservation Board

Neil Havard - Cotswold Astronomical Society

Robin Smitten - Chipping Norton Astronomical Society

Richard Lloyd – CPRE, Gloucestershire

Mark Connelly – Cotswolds Conservation Board

1. The task and finish group’s report on Dark Night Skies is attached at **Appendix ‘A’**. The report fulfils the first two parts of the brief. A draft position statement on Dark Night Skies and Artificial Light is in preparation and is to be presented to the Executive Committee in February 2019.

3. Dark skies are currently included in the Board’s position statement on Tranquillity and Dark Skies. By separating dark skies into a specific position statement may require a Tranquillity Position Statement if it is considered tranquillity is not adequately covered by the new Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2018-2023.

4. The key points from the Dark Night Skies report are:

* The Cotswolds AONB has areas of good quality dark skies but this area has diminished
* Dark night skies and their conservation have a wide range of benefits
* Designation as Dark Sky Reserve carries significant weight
* Evidence to support designation is based on the sky quality survey and is therefore not guaranteed
* Seeking, gaining and maintaining Dark Sky Reserve status will require the creation and maintenance of a post for as long as the Board wishes to keep the designation
* Designation is not an essential requirement to undertaking activity to conserve and enhance dark skies

5. Resources for dark skies, particularly for a part-time officer, need to be a medium to long-term commitment. External funding may be a possibility but comes with the risk of inconsistency over time and therefore potential loss of designation. The Board has recently gained funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for the Glorious Cotswolds Grassland project and is developing two project proposals with which to approach the HLF, limiting obvious options for external funding. However, a regional level HLF bid, assuming this option will be available from January 2019, is a possibility. It may also be possible to seek a partner organisation to lead a bid on behalf the Cotswolds to avoid the Board being compromised with its existing and proposed bids.

**Supporting Paper:**

**Appendix ‘A’** - Dark Night Skies - report to the Cotswolds Conservation Board from the Dark Skies Task and Finish Group.