

FINDINGS FROM THE 'FUTURE LANDSCAPES' COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Summary: To present the findings from the Future Landscape workshops

Recommendation: That the findings are noted

Reviewed by the Executive Committee: Yes / No

If yes, the Committee's comments:

Officer Ref: Mark Connelly, Land Management Officer

Background

1. The Future Landscape workshops were originally part of the Cotswold@50 Project; a project to engage local communities in creating a vision for the future Cotswolds, drawing on evidence of past change and its drivers, on current knowledge of global influences and government response to it and using scenarios to challenge popular presumptions.
2. The project started in June 2016, during the Cotswolds AONB's 50th anniversary, and was supported by a grant from the Summerfield Trust. Other strands of the project included appealing for old photographs of the Cotswold landscape, particularly post-war, to compare with today's landscape. The project struggled due to staff changes and it was not until September 2019 that the workshops, the final part of the project, took place.

Community workshops

3. Four community workshops were organised at locations across the Cotswolds AONB; Charlbury, Broadway, Marshfield and Northleach. The locations were selected as they represented different landscape types, pressures and local authority areas. Village halls/Community Centres were used as the venue in each community. The objectives of the workshops were:
 - Discuss past change and how the Cotswolds may change in the future.
 - Discuss the impact of different interventions and constraints.
 - Identify and discuss trade-offs which may include letting some existing special qualities go and introduce new features in the landscape.
 - Identify the direction communities want future landscape change to take and how this can be achieved.
4. The workshops were led/facilitated by Mark Connelly, Land Management Officer supported by Board members, officers and Voluntary Wardens who helped organise venues, promote the workshops, sort out tables, etc. and make tea and coffee.

Change Scenarios

5. To aid discussion three different scenarios were written by Janet Dwyer, Professor of Rural Policy and Director of the Countryside and Community Research Institute at the University of Gloucestershire. The three scenarios are Liberalisation, Localism and Enhanced Protection and Conservation. The three scenarios are attached as Appendix A.

Scenario images

6. The written scenarios are quite complex and would take too long to digest in a workshop. Therefore images of the three scenarios were created by LDA Design using a photograph overlooking Guiting Power to represent a 'typical Cotswold view'. The scenario images had to be realistic but required an element of exaggeration to make the changes visible and provoke discussion.

The Workshops

7. All four workshops worked well. There was some concern that describing the events as 'workshops' may put people off, however, all the participants readily engaged in the task sessions and discussions.

Attendance

Charlbury – 17

Broadway – 27

Marshfield – 9

Northleach – 14

8. The participants were mostly from the immediate area of each workshop and were typical Cotswold residents with an interest in the area surrounding their village/town. All were over the age of 40 and most of retirement age plus. Young participants were notably absent.
9. Powerpoint was used to introduce the project and pose a series of questions and tasks. The first of which was 'landscape is not static – it constantly changes' to which there was no disagreement. This was followed by three tasks.
 - Discuss and list what defines the Cotswolds and to identify their top three
 - Discuss and list what is driving change in the landscape.
 - What Cotswold landscape do you want to see in 2040 and how could this be achieved.

The results

10. The most frequent responses to the workshop tasks were:

A. What defines the Cotswolds?

- A.1. A fairly wide range of features that define the Cotswolds were listed ranging from dry stone walls, beechwoods, views and rolling landscape to, grasslands, tranquillity, sheep and footpaths. From the top three most important, the most frequent responses were:
- Stone - listed the most either as limestone, dry stone walls and stone buildings.
 - Landscape – listed as rolling hills, gentle hills, variety of landscape and Cotswold scarp
 - Villages/buildings and architecture – listed as Cotswold stone building and roofs, small villages, vernacular architecture and churches
- A.2. The long list of items identified fit strongly with the Cotswolds AONB Landscape Character Assessment and the Local Distinctiveness and Landscape Change report. The strong focus on stone is particularly notable. The full listings from each workshop are available on request.

B. What is driving change?

- B.1. The forces for change identified in the workshops was comprehensive and included demographic changes, traffic, tree disease, money and urbanisation. The most frequent responses were:
- Housing and development – very strong at all four workshops. All four workshop locations have recent development either completed or under construction.
 - Tourism – also strongly felt at all four locations where the impacts of increasing tourism is obviously being felt in the form of numbers of visitors and the problems they bring such as limited car parking and traffic.
 - Changes in farming practice – leading to less wildflowers, fewer hedges and monoculture.
 - Traffic and lack of public transport – also links to tourism, housing development and population growth. This response was stronger in Broadway and Northleach.

Climate change was identified as a driver of change but with low frequency.

C. What Cotswold Landscape do you want to see in 2040?

- C.1. The range of responses listed was quite consistent across the four workshops with some local variation driven by local issues such as changes in land ownership. The most frequent responses were:

- i. Farming diversification and changes in practice – particularly to counter intensification and loss of wildlife. There was interest in the idea of agri-forestry.
 - ii. Affordable housing – whilst housing and development was seen as driving change, most of what is being built is not accessible to the local population. There was support for some development, but small scale, reflecting local design, based on local need, affordable and energy efficient/carbon zero
 - iii. Local energy – there is clear interest in the idea of small scale energy production that benefits the local community. The most popular was photovoltaics on roofs and as small field arrays.
 - iv. More trees and woodland – there was recognition, however, that trees and woodland should fit with the landscape.
 - v. Local food – grown to supply the local community either directly or via local traders. This was also seen as an approach to farm diversification and farm business sustainability.
 - vi. Public transport and less cars – both for tourists and residents. All four locations have experienced a reduction in bus services alongside an increased population and reduction in local services resulting in increased reliance on the car. The exception was Charlbury which has a regular rail service although traffic from tourism was identified as an issue.
11. From the written responses and discussion there was a clear preference for a mixture of the localism and enhanced protection/conservation scenarios. There was also a clear lack of support for liberalisation.
12. The most unexpected result was the support for local energy generation. There was only one mention of wind power with the focus being on photovoltaics. There seems to be acceptance of the idea of small scale field arrays for the benefit of the local community but strong support for photovoltaic panels being placed on roofs of houses and industrial units etc.
13. Whilst discussing traffic and cars, two communities, Charlbury and Marshfield flagged up deliveries as an issue. Marshfield suggested limiting parcel deliveries to the Post Office so there would be only one delivery a day, not several by different companies.

D. How do we achieve it?

14. Having identified what the participants wanted to see in the Cotswolds landscape in 2040, the follow up question was how do we achieve it? Responses from all four workshops centred around financial incentives, policy, information/education and guidance.
15. There is a clear interest in localising decision making, not just for planning but also for incentives for food and energy production and public transport. One group in

Northleach suggested more direct community involvement and benefit from energy through a Community Energy CIC and another, through discussion, was interested in the idea of Community Supported Agriculture.

16. One table at the Marshfield workshop had a more extreme response to 'how can this be achieved' than expected by itemising nationalising land and setting up a Kibbutz. Whilst perhaps tongue in cheek, it was in response to changes in local land ownership.
17. It is also notable that some groups within the workshops flagged up the need for taxes to provide funding to achieve some the outcomes they would like to see. This response may well not be the same if the workshop was held in a more challenged urban community

Next steps

18. The results from the four workshops even with a small sample size and narrow geographical range and age structure of participants are of great interest and use as was the approach taken to the workshops.

Cotswolds AONB Management Plan

19. The process of management plan review has, in the past, included local participation events in village halls across the Cotswolds. However, management plans can be quite a dry subject and attendance has been very low. The approach taken by the Future Landscape Workshops received a more positive response and enthusiastic participation and is something that can be used or developed further for any future Management Plan community workshops. Some focus will need to be placed on engaging with groups who did not participate including young people and communities outside the AONB area who have an interest or could benefit from the Cotswold countryside.

Development of policy and guidance

20. The results of the four Future Landscape workshops provide a clear steer from the communities involved as to what they see as important and want to see in the future. Potential uses for the results include:
 - The review of the Cotswolds AONB Climate Change Strategy
 - Informing input into ELMS design, both in terms of results and engaging the public in discussing what public goods and services they would like to see and paid for
 - Provide evidence for future project proposals designed to deliver changes in the landscape.
 - Providing evidence for any future review the Board's Position Statements on Renewable Energy, Affordable Housing and Neighbourhood Plans.

Supporting paper(s): Appendix 'A' Future Landscape Change Scenarios