

Cotswolds Management Plan 2023 – 2028

Issues Paper

Introduction

The current Cotswolds National Landscape management plan was adopted in September 2018. There is a legal requirement to review it and have an updated plan in place within five years (September 2023). This paper summarises some of the issues to be considered as we embark on this review.

1. National Guidance

The last formal guidance for the review of AONB (sic) management plans was issued by the Countryside Agency in 2006. Natural England, NAAONB, and National Parks England are working together to develop new management planning guidance. To this end a scoping report has just been commissioned which is due to report at the end of March. It is likely that details of this new guidance will emerge during the development of this management plan, and will need to be accounted for.

A review of the original guidance highlights some points which are helpful to bear in mind when embarking on the production of a new plan:

- The management plan (the plan) is a statutory document required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This review is our opportunity to ensure that it contains the content and policies that will better support our purposes when given statutory authority.
- It should focus on our statutory purposes. These are likely to change as a result of the government response to the Landscapes Review so we will need to anticipate these changes and be ready to accommodate them as they emerge.
- It is the document for the place and all of its stakeholders, not the organisation. The business plan is the guiding document for the organisation.
- It is the overarching strategic document for the area. It should contain appropriate links to other appropriate strategies and plans.
- It has an important role to play in securing commitment from public bodies to the purpose of AONBs, including action to comply with S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 – the ‘duty of regard’. This duty is likely to be strengthened as a result of the government response to the Landscapes Review.
- The process of producing the plan should galvanise partners and secure commitments to action.

2. National Policy Development

The context of the Cotswolds National Landscape has changed dramatically in recent years. There is greater awareness of the need to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, nature conservation thinking has developed into nature recovery and the pandemic has changed the relationship many people have with their local environment.

Central government policy is reflecting these changes not least through the passage of the Environment Bill and the government's response to the Landscapes Review. More details will emerge throughout the plan's review period but we already been given a clear indication of Defra priorities:

- Nature
- Climate change
- Diversity
- Public health

3. Cotswolds National Landscape Policy Development

Similarly, policy development within the Cotswolds National Landscape and its partners has also developed rapidly in response to these changing times. Examples of recent work involving consultation and/or policy development that can inform the plan include:

- Vision
- Public access survey
- Nature Recovery Plan
- Recent position statements:
 - Housing
 - Landscape Led Development
 - Renewable Energy (coming)
- Climate Change Strategy
- Climate Crisis Commitment

4. Cotswolds National Landscape Forward Planning Day

A very successful forward planning day held in July 2021 provides a sound basis for developing our thinking. Some of the results of this workshop are included in **Appendix 'B'**. These include a composite 'themes tree' drawn up by the consultant following the event. The main themes in order of number of references in the workshop are:

- Collaboration & leadership
- Inclusivity diversity and access
- Climate and environment
- People and community
- Biodiversity and nature (including landscape)

The workshop went on to describe the sort of place we want the Cotswolds to be as a collection of outcomes. These outcomes have been arranged under the main themes and grouped under common secondary themes where appropriate **Appendix 'C'**. This exercise has provided an excellent insight into the current thinking of Board and team members. This will help inform the development and ordering of policies under outcomes in the next plan.

5. Initial assessment of the 2018 – 2023 Management Plan

The content of the current plan can be considered in the light of the desire to produce a shorter more focused plan. A good starting point is to consider some of the ways the two previous plans have been used in practice.

- Policies along with the special qualities, definitions and priorities are used when responding to development proposals and the development of strategic documents by stakeholders.
- In addition to the above the vision and description, particularly the drivers for change are used in developing funding and project proposals.
- The monitoring indicators have in part been used in the production of 'state of' reports.

The content of the current plan can be categorised in the light of this.

Essential content – what gets used in practice

- Vision
- Special qualities – statement of significance
- Policies – arranged under outcomes (goals) under our purposes
- Definitions and priorities (within appendices)

Justification - evidence for the essential elements (include within appendices)

- Description - portrait of the place
- Drivers for change – and resulting policy context
- Links to further evidence
- Links to other plans and strategies

Process elements

- Delivery plan – priority actions for stakeholders
- Monitoring indicators