

REVIEW OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND RELATED GUIDANCE

Summary: To present a review of the Board's work on climate change to date, the need to review the Climate Change Strategy for the Cotswolds AONB and related guidance and position statements and to recommend a timetable.

Recommendation: That the Board:

1. **Note the work on climate change to date**
2. **Subject to any agreed changes, adopt the timetable**

Officer Ref: Mark Connelly, Land Management Officer

Background

1. In October 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its special report (SR 15)¹ 'Global Warming of 1.5°C'. The report assesses the projected impacts at a global average warming of 1.5°C and higher levels of warming and identifies actions globally to transition land and ecosystems, energy, urban, infrastructure and industrial systems to limit warming to 1.5°C. In addition the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Living Planet report 2018² highlighted biodiversity loss, the threat of mass extinctions and the urgent need to reverse the over-exploitation of species, agriculture and land conversion.
2. As a result 287 District, County, Unitary & Metropolitan Councils across the country have declared a Climate Emergency to date including most of those covering the Cotswolds AONB. In October 2019 two Board members wrote to the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Chief Executive requesting that:

In light of the climate emergency the Board resolves to implement an immediate review of our land use guidelines and our policy on renewable energy to make it more accessible; and to report to the Board with recommendations by the summer of 2020.
3. An outline action plan was presented to the Board meeting on 17 December. The Board resolved to ask the Executive Committee at its meeting on 25 February 2020 to:
 - Consider the need and implications of reviewing our strategy, guidelines and position statements as they relate to climate change.
 - Identify which current work-streams should be stopped, delayed or downgraded to create capacity, or
 - Identify where additional capacity could be acquired to carry out this work.
 - Consider how the extensive work the Board has already done on renewable energy and climate change can be more fully accessible to the general public.
 - Update, where required in light of recent reports and information, our strategy, guidelines and position statements.
 - Maximise the skills of Board members to support officers in this important work.
 - Report to the Board at its March 2020 meeting with recommendations and a timetable for work.

¹ IPCC, Global Warming of 1.5°C, 2018 <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

² WWF, Living Planet Report 2018 https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/wwfintl_livingplanet_full.pdf

4. This paper develops the above bullet points and proposes a more detailed action plan. The Executive Committee discussed the paper at their meeting on 25th February 2020 and recommend the action plan to the Board.

The Board's approach to climate change

5. Climate change and its impacts on the Cotswolds AONB has been a core element of the Board's work since the adoption of the first statutory Cotswolds AONB Management Plan in 2004. The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2008 – 2013 set out the task to fully understand the impacts of climate change on the Cotswolds AONB and how to adapt to the impacts on the AONB in a way that conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the AONB. The Management Plan included actions to:
 - Encourage, support and analyse research on the impact of climate change on the Cotswolds AONB
 - Agree an action plan to encourage all those involved in the management of the AONB to address climate change issues by adapting land uses and by exploiting new opportunities arising out of mitigation strategies.
 - Provide and promote advice on energy conservation measures and on renewable energy compatible with the character and appearance of the landscape.
6. As a consequence the review of the Cotswolds AONB Farming Study broadened to include Forestry and an assessment of the impacts of climate change on farming and forestry. The Future of Farming and Forestry study also recommended the Board develop a Climate Change Action Plan and climate change proof all policies. This coincided with the publication of the UKCP09 figures and predictions by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which stressed the need for urgent action.
7. In 2012 the Board adopted the Climate Change Strategy³ for the Cotswolds AONB. *'The principal purpose of the Climate Change Strategy is to help those living and working in the AONB to make the Cotswolds more resilient to the impacts of climate change, guiding landscape change in a way that will minimise adverse effects on the inherent character of the area.'*
8. The strategy, which had been widely consulted on, included a range of measures for stakeholders such as local authorities, farm businesses, tourism organisations and agencies. Actions included ensuring priority species had climate space to move, ensure new housing aims for Zero Carbon Home Standard, adopting new land management practices, provide charging points for vehicles, promote 'active travel' and promote forms of renewable energy consistent with AONB and Board objectives.
9. The strategy informed the 2008 – 2013 Cotswolds AONB Management Plan that had a series of climate change policies, actions and tasks.

³ Cotswolds Conservation Board, Cotswolds AONB Climate Change Strategy 2012.

<https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Climate-Change-Strategy-adopted-June-2012.pdf>

10. The Renewable Energy Position Statement⁴ and Energy Guidance for Traditional Cotswold Buildings⁵ both followed in 2014. In 2015 a major review of the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines (LS&G)⁶ was started. The principal purpose of the review was to climate change proof the LS&G. Following consultation with stakeholders, the revised LS&G was adopted by the Board in June 2016.
11. From January 2012 to March 2014 the Board used some funding from the National Grid gas pipeline mitigation money to provide a Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Advisory Service for farms and rural businesses. Apart from advice the service financially supported several projects including a 15kw solar PV array on a farm building, rainwater harvesting to be used to wash a fleet of 15 community minibuses and to improve energy efficiency of a village hall
12. In partnership with a range of organisations and forestry businesses, the Board produced and adopted guidance on tree species and provenance for woodland creation, restocking and individual tree planting⁷ that aims to develop resilience to climate change and disease whilst keeping in character with the Cotswold landscape and existing woodlands.
13. Climate change mitigation and adaptation is a strong feature of the current, 2018 – 2023 Cotswolds AONB Management Plan⁸ which draws from and supports much of the above. The plan has polices for climate change mitigation and adaptation which are supported by policies in other sections of the plan.

Current accessibility

14. All of the current documents, guidance and position statements are on the Board's website. Links are provided in the footnote references of this report. All these documents are prepared with stakeholders and consultation periods.
15. We are aiming to improve navigation of the website to make documents easier to find. We are also looking at adding a reminder about Board key documents, policy and guidance to monthly internal newsletters to Board members and quarterly external newsletters. There is an important role for Board members to remain up to date on Board policy and guidance and to act as advocates for the Board to their network of stakeholders
16. The Landscape Strategy and Guidelines contains guidance on woodland creation and tree planting. It is not easy to find and with increased interest in tree planting it is important to make the information accessible well in advance of the tree planting season which starts in late October. Therefore, existing guidance will be drawn out of the LS&G and collated into a much slimmer document.

⁴ Cotswolds Conservation Board, Renewable Energy Position Statement 2017

<https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/renewable-energy-ps-2014-final-apr2014.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Energy-Guide-June-2014.pdf>

⁶ Landscape Strategy and Guidelines 2016 <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/our-landscape/landscape-strategy-guidelines/>

⁷ Tree species and Provenance 2017 <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Position-Statement-on-Tree-Species-and-Provenance-June-2017.pdf>

⁸ Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2018 – 2023 <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/planning/cotswolds-aonb-management-plan/>

Need for review

17. The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2018 – 2023 was adopted by the Board in September 2018. The next review process is due to start later this year for the next plan to be adopted in 2023 as required by the CROW Act 2000. The management plan does have some detail but mostly directs to using more detailed Board guidance and policy in position statements and the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines. The more detailed policy and guidance documents have no statutory required review cycle and any review is entirely in the hands of the Board.
18. Policy and guidance should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date with national policy and current science and with the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan after review and adoption.
19. The more recent reviews and subsequent adoption of the Landscape Strategy and Guidelines and Renewable Energy Position Statement were undertaken to ensure adaptation and mitigation of climate change balanced with delivering the conservation and enhancement and the understanding and enjoyment of the AONB.
20. The start point for review is the Climate Change Strategy. The intention was to review the Climate Strategy when new climate change projections are published. The Met Office published the recent figures in 2018. The headline results of UKCP18⁹ are broadly consistent with UKCP09 but with some differences such as temperature and rainfall. Other factors to feed into the review include the IPCC and WWF reports, the NFU's Achieving Net Zero ambition, new and emerging data e.g. from the revised Farm Carbon Cutting Toolkit and advances in technology.

Climate Change Strategy Timetable

21. The review of the Climate Change Strategy for the Cotswolds AONB is included in the draft Board Business Plan for 2020/21. Follow on reviews of the LS&G and Renewable Energy Positions Statement etc. will be considered depending on the findings of the review of the climate change strategy. The revised Climate Change Strategy is programmed for adoption by the Board by March 2021
22. To create capacity the following work-streams have been pushed back:
 - Geology Strategy,
 - Developing the Dark Skies Strategy
 - Taking forward future landscape work

Climate Change Working Group

23. To help with the Climate Change Strategy Review, a Climate Change Working Group is proposed (Agenda item 6). To achieve the review by March 2021, it is important that the working group will help create capacity through active engagement.
24. The suggested make-up of the Climate Change Working Group is:
 - Board members – one from each sector i.e. local authority, parish council and Secretary of State
 - External expertise – e.g. local authority Net Zero officer
 - Young person representative, e.g. from the UK Student Climate Network

⁹ UK Climate Projections (UKCP) <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/approach/collaboration/ukcp/index>

Other expertise can be brought in when relevant such as regenerative farming, soils and forestry.

The Colchester Declaration

25. In response to many local authorities declaring climate and extinction emergencies, AONBs have collectively agreed to increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity through the Colchester Declaration, signed at last year's National Association for AONBs conference. Key pledges within the Colchester Declaration are:
- To prepare a Nature Recovery Plan for each AONB by July 2020
 - To ensure all AONB management plans by 2024 include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero
 - That at least 100,000 ha of wildlife rich habitat outside of protected sites will have been created/restored in AONBs by 2030 to further support the natural movement of plants and animals.
 - That at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs by 2030 following the principle of the 'right tree in the right place'.
 - That by each AONB immediately adopting a species on the threatened list and by preparing and delivering a Species Action Plan, at least thirty species relevant to AONBs will be taken off the list by 2030.
26. To support the delivery of the Colchester Declaration the NAAONB is co-ordinating a national bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. It is early days but the Board has been included in the thinking to date.
27. To deliver the Nature Recovery Plan by July 2020, Simon Smith, Project Development and Business Planning Officer is changing role to become the Board's Development and Special Project Officer. Part of the role change will include taking the lead on the Nature Recovery Plan. The Cotswolds AONB Nature Recovery Plan will collaborate with the work already undertaken on Nature Recovery Networks/Plans for the West of England, Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire.

Timetable

Business Plan agreed by the Board	March 2020
Climate Change Working Group established	May 2020
Nature Recovery Plan prepared	July 2020
Tree planting guidance collated	July 2020
Revised Climate Change Strategy	March 2021
Programme of reviews, if required, of the LS&G and Renewable Energy Positions Statement etc.	March 2021

Supporting Papers

There are no supporting papers