

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL DECISION

DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR PETER BRYANT. THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT

WITH ADVICE FROM: THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT



DECISION NO: 18/19 DE 369

SUBJECT: Adoption of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019 - 2024

KEY DECISION: NO

BACKGROUND:

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 local authorities and Conservation Boards (where applicable) are required to produce Management Plans for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) within their boundaries and to review them at least every 5 years. These plans describe in more detail how the AONBs will be protected to maintain their special character. The existing Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan (see Decisions No. 13/14 DE 233) has been reviewed by the AONB Partnership on behalf of partner authorities and rolled forward for the period 2019-2024.

The Mendip Hills AONB is a significant local landscape which has national recognition, safeguarded by statutory designation. The AONB is a key resource for both residents and visitors, providing important wellbeing, health, environmental and economic benefits.

The Mendip Hills AONB falls within the five local authority administrative boundaries of Somerset County Council, North Somerset Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, Mendip District Council and Sedgemoor District Council. Elected Members from each Local Authority sit on the AONB Partnership Committee alongside representatives of other stakeholders. This Committee oversees the delivery of the Management Plan.

The Management Plan has been consulted on, amended and is now being presented for approval prior to sending a copy to the Secretary of State.

The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership agreed that the Management Plan review was to be conducted with as light a touch as possible and that the review process was manageable and economical in terms of resources required.

The AONB Partnership Committee approved the Draft Final Management Plan 2019- 2024 at their meeting on 22 November 2018 subject to changes identified via the formal consultation process. The Partnership agreed that the Chair or Vice-chair will decide if

there have been any material changes to the plan after this stage. The Vice-chair Cllr Liz Richardson confirmed there has been no material changes to the plan on 22 January 2019 and that it be recommended to the five local authority partners for adoption, as required by the CROW Act. An Annual Delivery Plan agreed by the partners will accompany the Management Plan and this will include monitoring information.

As the 'competent authority' under the Habitats Regulations 2010 the Mendip Hills AONB was required to assess the Management Plan to determine whether policies in the plan would affect Natura 2000 sites. The screening report concluded that the Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect on the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites assessed. Therefore, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment was not required.

In order to ensure compliance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC relating to Strategic Environmental Assessment a screening report was produced. This report concluded that the plan is unlikely to result in significant effects on the environment.

The Management Plan has also been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment as required by the Equality Act 2010.

The management plan is broken down into a number of themes covering landscape quality, biodiversity and geo-diversity, historic environment and cultural heritage, natural resources, land management, access, recreation, tourism, development and transport, and participation.

Following early consultation with key stakeholders it was accepted that the revised Plan needed to recognise new agendas and a changed context, including:

- Defra 25 Year Environment Plan
- New planning legislation and National Planning Policy Framework
- Leaving the European Union
- Increased development and population levels
- National Character Area profiles
- Natural Capital and ecosystem services
- Public sector funding cuts

The review has resulted in a slight restructuring of themes, some rewording of current objectives and a few new objectives to take forward. These include a greater emphasis on health benefits and green infrastructure. As a result of national policy directly related to protected landscapes, the major changes have been made to the context to show the importance of the Mendip Hills in providing benefits to society (ecosystem services) and the relationship between them.

DECISION:

That North Somerset Council adopts the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 as required by the CROW Act (2000). This will help to conserve and enhance the AONB and will enable the Council to deliver its specific duties under the provision of section 85 of the CROW Act.

duty, the AONB Management Plans should be taken into consideration, where appropriate, when determining planning applications and in drafting Local Development Documents to ensure a consistent approach to policy development and to help protect the AONBs.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) gives 'great weight' to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, and states that 'planning permission should be refused for major developments in [AONBs] except in exceptional circumstances...'.. This means that the management plans can have significant weight in planning and other decision-making that affects the AONB.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The full text of the Plan is available on the Mendip Hills AONB website <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/management-plan/>


SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):

Signed: .....Executive Member for Environment

Date: 27-3-2019.....

WITH ADVICE FROM:

Signed: ..... Assistant Director (Placemaking and Growth) Development and Environment. In accordance with paragraph 1.5 of the Council's constitution (May 2018), officer authorisations and delegations

Date: 20/3/19.....

REASONS:

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, local authorities are required to produce and adopt management plans for AONBs within their boundaries. The Act also requires local authorities to review Management Plans every five years.

The purpose of the management plans is to provide a framework for coordinated management of these outstanding natural and built assets.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

None

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Delivery of the Management Plan is by the whole Partnership, together with others who have an interest in the area. The Plan cannot be implemented solely by the AONB Unit. It depends on the financial support of many stakeholders, including farmers, landowners, parish councils, trusts, volunteers, public agencies and Government organisations.

There are no tasks within the management plan that will incur expenditure for North Somerset Council.

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act (2000)

CONSULTATION

Consultation on the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan has been undertaken with all statutory stakeholders, the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee, other organisations and the wider public. A Statement of Consultation has been included in the management plan.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Adopting the management plan will ensure the Council is not in breach of its statutory duty under the CROW Act 2000. Adopting the plan will enable the Council to fulfil its duties to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of AONBs when carrying out its operations and statutory duties within both AONBs.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes and this is included in the management plan documentation.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The provisions of Section 85 of the CROW Act also require local authorities to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of AONBs when carrying out their operations and statutory duties within the AONB. To demonstrate compliance with this