

**From:** David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment  
Mike Austerberry, Corporate Director for Enterprise & Environment

**To:** Environment, Highways & Waste Cabinet Committee – 3 October 2013

**Subject:** Adoption of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans.

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** N/A

**Future Pathway of Paper:** To Cabinet for formal adoption – unless Cabinet Committee choose to see the final draft again in January.

**Electoral Division:** County-wide with the exception of all electoral divisions within Dartford Borough & Thanet District administrative areas.

#### **Summary:**

This paper provides an overview of the revised Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans for the Kent Downs and High Weald and seeks recommendations on their progress towards formal adoption by Kent County Council.

Kent County Council (KCC) has a statutory duty, along with other local authorities within the boundaries of the AONB, to act jointly to prepare and review the Management Plans. This is the second review of the AONB Management Plans, originally adopted by KCC in 2004 – this iteration strongly reflects the original adopted plan. The statutory deadline for adoption is the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.

#### **Recommendations:**

The Environment, Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee is asked to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment on the Kent Downs and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans proceeding to adoption. They are asked to consider and endorse the Management Plans proceeding for approval or advise if the Committee would like to receive a subsequent paper, following finalisation of the plans, prior to adoption by Kent County Council.

## **1. Introduction**

This report provides an overview of the statutory review of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans. Its purpose is to inform Cabinet Committee Members of the background and process and highlight any significant changes, in order to inform a decision on the Plans' adoption.

## **2. Financial Implications**

The adoption of the revised Management Plans does not incur any additional costs for the Kent County Council.

## **3. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework**

The Kent Downs and High Weald AONB Management Plans support Bold Steps for Kent by helping to achieve a sustainable rural economy, supporting (through education, access and experiences) both visitors and residents alike and using the landscape to help to tackle disadvantage in rural Kent.

In addition, the AONBs and policies of the Management Plans support the achievement of the aims within theme three of the Kent Environment Strategy: valuing our natural, historic and living environment, in particular helping to achieve improved landscape condition and through advising on the care of the nationally significant landscapes that form the backdrop to popular long distance trails such as the North Downs Way and High Weald Landscape Trail.

### **To Help the Kent Economy Grow**

Both AONB Management Plans include targets and/or policies that support sustainable rural businesses - these contribute directly to Kent's rural economy.

### **To Put the Citizen in Control**

Through the Management Plans, targets and policies are included which deliver support for volunteering, training and education.

Unusually the creation and review of AONB Management Plans takes a truly 'bottom-up' approach – using detailed local knowledge, expertise and values to create a national policy document. The partnerships AONBs create work closely with communities and individuals to further the aims of the Management Plan.

### **To Tackle Disadvantage**

The rural disadvantaged are often forgotten, and both AONBs work hard to find ways to tackle issues such as fuel-poverty and transport, exemplified in their sustainable development aims.

## **4. The Report**

### **4.1 Relevant History & Background to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans**

The High Weald and Kent Downs are landscapes of national and international importance. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) were originally borne out of the 1949 National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act, which are now further supported in UK legislation by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW, 2000) and recognised internationally via the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

25% of the High Weald AONB is in Kent, and all of the Kent Downs is within the county (see Appendix 1 for a map of the landscape boundaries) – 34.3% of the county is covered by the AONB designation.

AONBs are a partnership and the Management Plans they produce are adopted by and belong to all authorities within their boundaries. They are unique in that they take a landscape-scale, partnership approach to delivering a wide range of shared objectives.

As required by the CRoW Act, 20-year Management Plans for the Kent Downs and High Weald AONBs were prepared and adopted in 2004, with a subsequent review and adoption in 2009. The deadline for the publication of the Plans' second review is 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, by which time all local authorities need to have adopted the revised Plans.

Kent County Council, and all the other participating local authorities, has committed resources to the production and review of the Management Plans. This includes Member participation (Members sit on the Joint Advisory Committee), officer involvement and funding. Funding for the Management Plan is shared between the Government (funds delivered direct from Defra) and the local authorities.

#### 4.2 Management Plan Review

The Management Plans are revised following the Guidance for the Review of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans (CA 221, 2006). The revised Plans remain fundamentally based upon the original Management Plan and both have been through a careful and thorough review process. Both AONBs gathered expert opinion (including from KCC officers) and this year have carried out online consultations to reach as wide an audience as possible. Assessed by peers, government agencies, utility companies, landowners and members of the public, these Plans have both a wide remit and audience.

Looking far ahead and making judgments about changing policies and then translating these into potential impacts upon our national landscapes is a skill unique to AONB Units.

Neither Plan has brought forward any major changes, although a few amendments and occasionally new policies have been included to tackle policy changes:

- The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reforms
- Localism Act (2011) and the role of the Big Society
- Energy security
- Threat of pests and diseases affecting the natural environment
- Potential increased development pressures through changes to the Planning System
- The need for a wider understanding of ecosystem/landscape services

These changes are detailed in Appendix 2.

From June 2013 to September 2013 the Plans underwent a formal consultation and work is now underway to finalise the documents ready for the adoption deadline. KCC's responses to the two consultations are provided in Appendix 3.

#### 4.3 Implications for Kent County Council

Kent County Council (KCC) is already committed to providing resources, both funding and officer time, to the two AONBs. It is not anticipated that the revised Management Plans will place any additional obligations on the County Council in terms of resources, although relevant units within the County Council will need to consider the revised Management Plans in relation to their operations. The revised

plans support the objectives of Bold Steps for Kent and the Kent Environment Strategy.

The plans wider implications have been assessed through a Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal and Equalities Impact Assessment.

## 5. Conclusions

The revision of the two Management Plans has successfully reacted to shifting policy, and the rapidly changing social and economic climate of recent times in addition to environmental pressures. Whilst some minor changes have been made, both Plans are fundamentally the same as the original adopted Plan.

None of the amendments deliver any implications for KCC; on the contrary they are often complementary with KCCs agenda, supporting Bold Steps for Kent and the Kent Environment Strategy.

The Plans are not anticipated to alter extensively from those published for consultation.

## 6. Recommendation(s)

### Recommendation(s):

The Environment, Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee is asked to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment on the Kent Downs and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans proceeding to adoption. They are asked to consider and endorse the Management Plans proceeding for approval or advise if the Committee would like to receive a subsequent paper, following finalisation of the plans, prior to adoption by Kent County Council.

## 7. Background Documents

- Kent Downs AONB Management Plan. 2009-2014 (May 2008)  
<http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/guidance-management-and-advice/management-plan>
- High Weald AONB Management Plan. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2009-2014 (March 2009)  
<http://www.highweald.org/management-plan/aonb-management-plan-2009-2014.html>
- Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans. Countryside Agency (August 2006)  
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40023>

## 8. Contact details

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