

From: Paul Crick, Director of Planning and Environment

To: David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment

Decision No: 14/00027

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

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: On 3rd October 2013, the Environment, Highways and Waste (EHW) Cabinet Committee RESOLVED that the Management Plans proceeding for approval be endorsed.

Future Pathway of Paper: Formal adoption of Management Plans by Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment by 31st March 2014.

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 represents the final process in the formal adoption of these two revised Plans 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 Plans. The statutory deadline for adoption is the 31st March 2014.

Recommendations:

Following endorsement of the revised Management Plans by the Environment, Highways and Waste (EHW) Cabinet Committee in October 2013, the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment is asked to formally adopt both the Kent Downs and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans.

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 the Cabinet Member of the background and process prior to 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

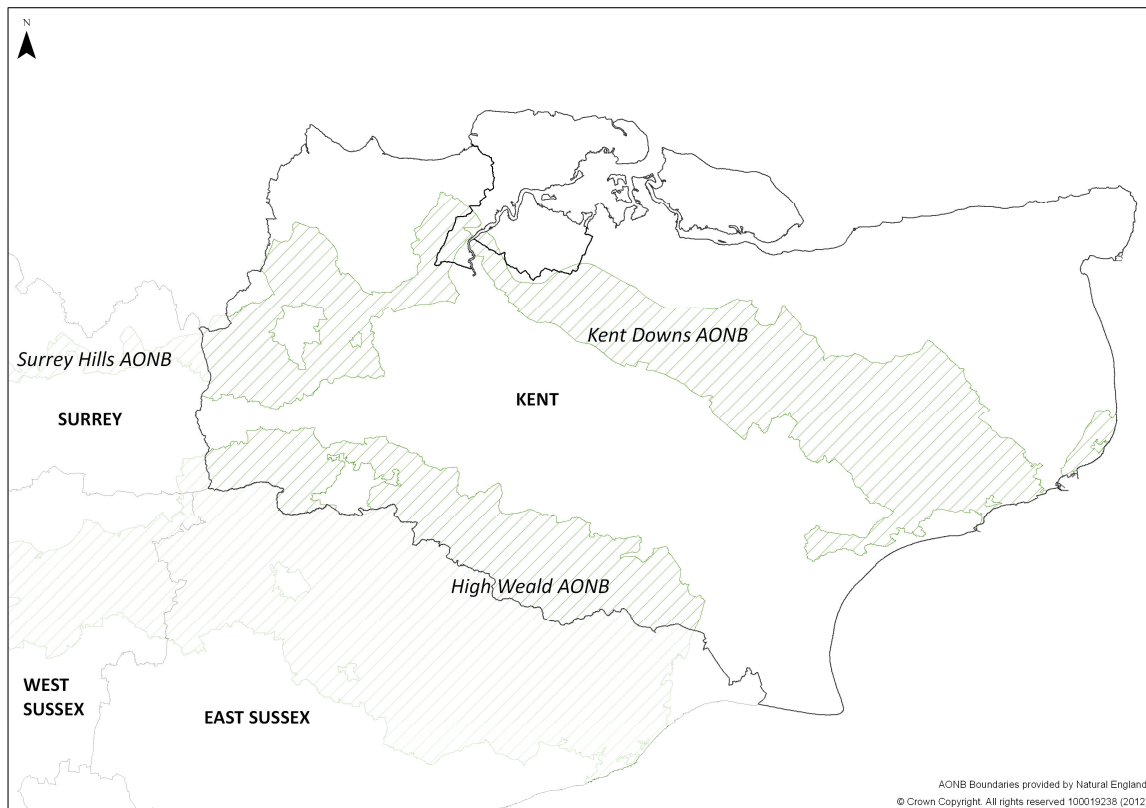
The rural disadvantaged are often forgotten, and both AONBs work hard to find ways to tackle issues such as fuel-poverty and transport, exemplified in their sustainable development aims.

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:



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 31st 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, which are undertaken on their behalf by the two AONB Units. 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

Further details of these changes can be found in the October 2013 EHW Cabinet Committee papers under item D3.

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.

4.4 Pathway to Adoption

From June 2013 to September 2013 the Plans underwent a formal consultation; KCC's responses to the two consultations can be found in the October 2013 EHW Cabinet Committee papers under item D3. Following consultation, the Plans underwent minor revisions, although neither altered extensively from those published for consultation.

In October 2013 both Plans were presented to the EHW Cabinet Committee for endorsement to proceed to adoption early in 2014, this was agreed.

In November 2013, the AONB Joint Advisory Committees confirmed that the Management Plans were suitable to proceed to adoption. By March 2014, each constituent authority is statutorily required to formally adopt the Plan(s).

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.

Due process has been followed and both Plans are now ready for formal adoption by Kent County Council.

6. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

For the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment to formally adopt the Kent Downs and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans, as previously endorsed by the EHW Cabinet Committee.

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. 2nd edition 2009-2014 (March 2009)
<http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan.html>

Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans. Countryside Agency (August 2006) <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40023>

October 2013 EHW Cabinet Committee paper on the adoption of the Kent Downs & High Weald AONB Management Plans (item D3)
<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=749&MIId=4911&Ver=4>

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