

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 3 January 2024

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Blackdown Hills AONB and East Devon AONB Management Plan reviews

Report summary:

Approval is sought from East Devon District Council on the attached timetables and public consultation processes for the Blackdown Hills AONB and East Devon AONB draft statutory AONB Management Plans that lie within the district. In due course, in future years, formal approval for the final draft of both AONB Management Plans will be required following the completion of a public consultation, the timeframe for this is outlined in the attached background papers to this report. This will then be sent to Defra/Natural England confirming that the Management Plans have met the legislative requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Cabinet agree the proposed timetables and public consultation processes for the review of the Blackdown Hills AONB and East Devon AONB Management Plans as required under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000.

Reason for recommendation:

This will provide the Council's approval for the two AONB Partnerships to begin the process of reviewing their Management Plans on behalf of East Devon District Council.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information [Management Plan Review 2022-25](#)
[Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan Review 2023-2025 Timetable](#)

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
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Report in full

1. Summary

- 1.1 Under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, East Devon District and other relevant Councils are required to produce Management Plans for the East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONBs and review them at intervals of not more than 5 years. East Devon District and other relevant Councils have authorised both the East Devon AONB Partnership and the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership to carry out this duty on our behalf.
- 1.2 The CROW Act and recent (draft) guidance from Natural England provides advice on the scale, nature and content of Management Plans. A Management Plan should serve to highlight a vision for the AONB and contain a five-year Delivery Plan detailing objectives and targets for the delivery of the Plan. The Plan should be reviewed every five years and, following an extension from the Secretary of State in July 2023, the current AONB Management Plans are due to be reviewed by December 2025. The delivery of the Plan is subject to availability of funding from the Local Authorities, Defra and other parties and is currently a discretionary duty.
- 1.3 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act amends legislation relating to England's Protected Landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). This will facilitate the preparation of enhanced Protected Landscapes' Management Plans and places a stronger requirement on partners to contribute to their delivery. The aim is to ensure Protected Landscapes organisations and their partners collaborate effectively, creating a national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that can be enjoyed right across the country by everyone.
- 1.4 Two months after Royal Assent, the existing duty on relevant authorities in England to have regard to the purposes of Protected Landscapes will be replaced by a duty to seek to further those purposes. Defra have advised that they will work closely with stakeholders to explain this change, the intent behind it and what actions might need to be taken. In addition, the new legislation also enables the Secretary of State to make regulations which will;
 - Set out how relevant authorities are to comply with this strengthened duty,
 - Require Management Plans to contribute to meeting Environment Act 2021 targets and set out how Management Plans are to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes
 - Place a duty on relevant authorities in England to contribute to the preparation, implementation and review of management plans. Government will work closely with partners

and stakeholders to develop the regulations to ensure they are proportionate, align with government priorities and balance the varied needs of the nation.

- 1.5 Approval is sought from East Devon District Council on the attached timetables and public consultation processes for the draft Management Plans. In due course, in future years, formal approval for the final draft of both AONB Management Plans will be required following the completion of a public consultation, the timeframe for this is outlined in the attached background papers to this report. This will then be sent to Defra/Natural England confirming that the Management Plans have met the legislative requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- 1.6 When the process is fully completed both AONB Management Plans will be recommended by the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Group and East Devon AONB Partnership respectively to the Council for adoption as the statutory Management Plan for the two AONBs which fall within East Devon.
- 1.7 The AONB Management Plans which cover East Devon provide a management framework for conserving and enhancing these nationally important landscapes. It will then be incumbent on the “stakeholders” within the AONBs to continue to support activities that benefit the landscape through the Delivery Plans for both AONB Management Plans.
- 1.8 Annual Reports of both AONBs will be produced that will serve to highlight the work of the AONB Partnerships to stakeholders and the communities of East Devon. The success of the Delivery Plan will depend on the long term support from Defra and local authorities.

2. AONB Management Plan review process

- 2.1 The review stages currently as planned are shown in the attached papers. It is currently anticipated that the revised Management Plans will be ready for confirmation to Defra by March 31st 2025 with the option to extend this, subject to Defra/Natural England requirements or staffing/resources placing additional time or preparation demands on the review process. The Management Plan reviews must be completed by December 31st 2025.
- 2.2 In order for the current AONB Management Plans to remain valid beyond their current period (2019-2024) the AONB Partnerships have recommended their extension until such time as the revised plans are adopted in 2025.
- 2.3 As part of the review process the AONB Partnerships have previously been required to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal on the Plans, to ensure their policies and actions would not have potential for a negative effect on the environment or sustainability of their areas. Measures in the afore mentioned Levelling Up and Regeneration Act replace SEA with Environmental Outcomes Reports, the details of which are due to be set out in secondary legislation. Due to timing issues with this, it is likely that Devon AONBs will use the existing SEA framework for the external environmental assessment of Management Plans, subject to any clear guidance emerging from Defra/Natural England.

Financial implications:

There are no direct financial implications from the recommendation in the report

Legal implications:

The legal issues are dealt with in the body of the report.