

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 4 June 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## **Adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030**

### **Report summary:**

East Devon District Council together with other local authorities has previously authorised the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to undertake a review of the current AONB Management Plan on their behalf, as required under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Public consultation on the reviewed management plan took place in January to March 2025, and now adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan by East Devon District Council and the other relevant local authorities is required before publishing the management plan and lodging it with Defra.

### **Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

### **Recommendation:**

That Cabinet agree to adopt the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030.

### **Reason for recommendation:**

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 relevant local authorities are required to prepare and publish a plan which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and review the Management Plan at intervals of not more than 5 years. East Devon District Council with other local authorities has authorised the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to review the Management Plan for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape on their behalf. The review has been completed and the plan is ready to be published.

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### **Portfolio(s) (check which apply):**

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☒ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational

- ☐ Finance
- ☒ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Medium Risk; The Management Plan is a statutory document that requires adoption by East Devon DC as part of the Local Plan's key policies documents and as a framework for providing guidance on the management of the National Landscape. A third of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape lies within East Devon and so failure to adopt the Management Plan would present a risk to the Council's statutory undertakings and obligations.

**Links to background information:**

[Management Plan 2025-30](#)

[Delivery Plan](#)

[Appendices](#)

**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

1.1 Under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, East Devon District Council, together with other local authorities is required to produce a Management Plan for the designated Blackdown Hills AONB (now known as National Landscape) and review it at intervals of not more than five years (exceptionally, Defra authorised a 12-month-plus extension to the review of the current Plan). Along with the other relevant local authorities, East Devon District Council has authorised the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to perform this duty on its behalf; this work is co-ordinated by the National Landscape team and has been previously reported to Cabinet in January and July 2024.

1.2 The CROW Act (and as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) and guidance from Natural England provides advice on the scale, nature and content of Management Plans. A Management Plan should serve to highlight a shared long-term vision for the National Landscape and contain ambitions, targets and actions that seek to further the statutory purpose, i.e. to conserve and enhance the designated AONB. The delivery of the Plan will be subject to availability of funding from Defra, the local authorities, and other parties.

1.3 The National Landscape Partnership has taken the opportunity to undertake a more thorough review than in the previous review cycle to ensure that the management plan remains fit for purpose and forward looking. The Plan is expected to contribute to Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (including protected landscapes targets) and key drivers include addressing the significant issues of the climate emergency and nature recovery, taking account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Plans and local authority climate action plans.

1.4 The review process has been a participatory one, with members of the Partnership Management Group, local authority officers and other stakeholders involved in agreeing the approach and identifying key matters for consideration, in advance of a wider public consultation on the draft management plan (held January to March 2025).

1.5 The Plan was also screened under both Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment regulations to determine whether policies in the Plan could have significant environmental effects, concluding that further detailed assessment was not required in either case.

1.6 Following public consultation the draft Plan has been revised, and the final version of the Management Plan is required to undergo a final formal consultation with the statutory consultee, Natural England, before local authority adoption. At the time of writing, we are awaiting formal approval for the Management Plan from Natural England, confirming that the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan meets the legislative requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Having received informal comments during the consultation period no issues are anticipated, and it is expected that this confirmation will be in place prior to the Cabinet meeting.

1.7 The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan is recommended by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to East Devon District Council for adoption as the statutory Management Plan for the designated Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the period 2025 to 2030. The Plan will be formally confirmed to Defra following adoption by all the partner local authorities, expected by mid-July.

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#### **Financial implications:**

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the report.

#### **Legal implications:**

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.