

Portfolio Holder Briefing Note:

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Management Plan Review Consultation

Summary

1. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 places a statutory duty on constituent local authorities of an AONB to prepare and publish a Management Plan that 'formulates their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'. The management plan sets in place clear aims, policies and actions for the conservation management and enhancement of the AONB for a five year period and sets a longer term vision.
2. The first Kent Downs AONB Management Plan was published and adopted by the constituent Local Authorities of the AONB, including SDC, in 2004 as a 20-year strategy. The CROW Act and best practice indicates that this plan should be kept up to date and reviewed at five-yearly intervals.
3. The current edition of the Kent Downs Management Plan runs from 2009-2014. The Plan is therefore currently undergoing a 'light touch' review, and it is expected that the revised Plan will be considered by the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) in early 2014 in order to be submitted to the Secretary of State by March 31st 2014. John Bovington attends the JAC as a representative of SDC.
4. The revised plan will cover the period 2014 - 2019
5. The consultation period runs to the 27th September. Officer opinion is supportive of the draft review, and therefore this report is seeking approval of the Portfolio Holder.

Recommendation: Portfolio Holder supports the draft Management Plan review.

Summary of Review Process

6. During the Spring and Autumn of 2012, partners and stakeholders considered the existing management plan and proposed areas for review. The Unit also carried out monitoring to report on the current state of the AONB and to report trends and new priorities.
7. In Spring 2013 draft revisions were made in light of the information gathered in the review stage. This has now been published leading to the public consultation stage of the review process.
8. Consultation is currently being carried out. After this consultation period, the AONB Unit will respond to these comments. Any changes made to the

draft will be taken to the JAC for approval, followed by a final adoption of the Plan by the Local Authorities involved including SDC in early 2014.

Changes to the 2009 – 2014 Plan

9. The draft Management Plan is based fundamentally on the 2009-2014 Plan and is considered to be a 'light touch' review.
10. There are no major changes to the content of the Plan, but the review has enabled improvements to be made to the layout making it a more user-friendly document.
11. Necessary amendments have been made to reflect changes in legislation and policy, such as the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the recognition and implementation of the Localism Act through the production of Neighbourhood Plans. Particular reference has been made to Neighbourhood Plans within the Vibrant Communities Chapter of the revised draft.
12. The review has taken the opportunity to be clearer on policy wording and to strengthen the policies where required with some additions and alterations to the targets set for 2019. For example, Biodiversity Policy BD1 now has mention of the creation of new habitats and habitat corridors which will be pursued through collaboration to establish high quality Green Infrastructure. Green Infrastructure is a new term since the previous Management Plan Review, and is given emphasis within the Core Strategy (2011) to enhance networks of green open spaces and natural habitats across the District and cross boundaries. This also involves identifying green infrastructure links through collaborative work with neighbouring authorities, reinforcing the Duty to Cooperate.
13. The CROW Act requires the Management Plan to 'formulate the policies' for the local authorities for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. The policies in the plan are not, nor are they intended to be, planning policies and it is clearly recognised that it is for Local Planning Authorities to balance the impact of any development proposal on the AONB against all of the other material planning considerations.