

BRIEFING NOTE FOR THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND PLANNING

ENDORSEMENT OF THE SUFFOLK COAST AND HEATHS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-28

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PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To report receipt of the new Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-28 and to seek agreement, from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning, to its endorsement by Tendring District Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parts of Tendring District became an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) on 20 July 2020 following an Order signed by the Government minister with responsibilities for AONBs on behalf of the Secretary of State. This brings with it many benefits but some additional burdens. The most significant burden is the requirement on AONB local authorities is to draft an AONB Management Plan and review it every five years as required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).

Once drafted the Management Plan is subject to review and scrutiny by the Joint Advisory Committee. Tendring is represented on the Joint Advisory Committee by Cllr Matthew Bensilum supported by Officers from the Planning Policy Team. Once the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee has signed off the draft was subject to a 12 week public consultation, screening for a Habitats Regulations Assessment and subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. All these elements have been completed and the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-28 is now seeking formal endorsement from its Local Authority partners.

For Tendring the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning has delegates powers sign off such documents. 'Endorsement', rather than 'adoption' has been chosen for this Management Plan as it aligns with the less formal nature of the document. The plan needs to be published before 31 Dec 2023 so it can take over from the previous five-year Management Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning agrees to the Council's endorsement of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-28 as planning guidance to fulfil statutory requirements to update management plans every five years and to assist in planning decisions.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The AONB Management Plan accords with a number of the priorities set out within the Council's recently adopted Corporate Plan 2024-2028. Most notably, the aspirations for 'championing our local environment' and 'working with our partners to improve quality of life'.

RESOURCES AND RISK

Like many AONBs the Management Plan is drafted by the AONB staff team, that Tendring part funds as part of 25% of core costs that the 7 local authorities are required to find to draw down the other 75% of core costs associated with the core functions of the staff team from Defra.

The Management Plan is prepared by the AONB Steering Group who are based in Suffolk County Council. Tendring District Council has representation in this group via member and Officer involvement, but it is not TDC who prepare the Management Plan.

LEGAL

AONBs are recognised by and subject to several pieces of United Kingdom legislation and policy and local policy, including:

- National Parks and Access to Countryside Act (1949)
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)
- 25 Year Environment Plan (2018)
- National Planning Policy Framework (2021)
- Local Planning Authority Local Plans (Various)

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Area or Ward affected: Those areas within the AONB designation to the north of the District.

Consultation/Public Engagement: The Management Plan was the subject of a 12-week public consultation over the summer of 2023.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Introduction

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally designated landscape that has the legal purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

The AONB now extends into Essex and parts of Suffolk. The extension was made by an Order signed by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Lord Gardiner, with responsibility for AONBs on the authority of the Secretary of State, on 7 July 2020.

The legal status of the AONB requires relevant authorities such as statutory bodies and statutory undertakers, such as utility providers, to pay regard to the purpose of the AONB when taking decisions.

The Coast & Heaths AONB is one of 38 such designated landscapes in England and Wales. Most of the land in the AONB is in private or charitable ownership. AONB status brings many benefits for residents, visitors and businesses.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan status

The purpose of the Coast & Heaths AONB Management Plan is to fulfil the statutory duty placed on local authorities to adopt and publish a plan for the AONB as outlined in Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).

Once endorsed, the Management Plan forms the AONB policy for local authorities in the AONB. By endorsing this Management Plan, the local authorities have committed to working to deliver its objectives and have regard to the plan in the exercise of their wider responsibilities. Once endorsed, the Management Plan will form planning guidance what Officers need to take account of in their decision making.

The Management Plan also informs how relevant authorities will pay regard to the statutory purpose of the AONB.

Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) states:

In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.

Beyond the legal requirements, this Management Plan provides the framework for the co-ordination of action from partnership organisations and others whose activities impact upon the AONB.

The Management Plan reflects the need for co-ordinated activity to ensure that the purposes of the AONB are met and that communities, businesses, individuals and organisations work together in a coherent manner.

The Management Plan identifies the need to monitor changes within the AONB, be they from the delivery of the plan itself or actions outside the influence of the partnership such as climate change or the actions of others.

Contents of the Management Plan

The Management Plan details the purpose and context of the AONB. It defines what an AONB is, and why they are important, not only for promoting beauty but also habitat creation and local tourism.

A detailed description of this particular AONB is given, including its area and geography. The AONB's land designations are also noted, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar Sites.

A section on the roles and responsibilities of Local Planning Authorities is given which details the importance of Local Plan policies for the AONB. Interpretation of national planning guidance is also given in this section.

An assessment of the previous AONB Management Plan (2018-2023) is detailed which shows that the majority of proposed projects within the AONB were completed in that period.

Vision For The Future

The next section details the aspirations for the AONB into the 2040s. A high level vision for the area is given as:

The Coast & Heaths AONB is recognised as a special place by residents and visitors alike for its landscapes, wildlife and heritage. The impacts of climate change are being mitigated and adaptation is the norm. It is contributing to wildlife recovery and provides opportunities for all sections of society to recharge and improve their physical and mental health. The farming sector is thriving and is supported to deliver projects for the public good, the tourism sector is trading on the backdrop of an outstanding landscape. Nationally significant infrastructure projects seek to avoid harm to the area's natural beauty and contribute to delivering the AONB purpose.

A more detailed exploration of the vision is given, which splits into environmental, social and economic features.

Themes

A detailed description of the AONB is given delving into key themes within the AONB. These include:

- Landscape
- Coasts and estuaries
- Nature recovery
- Land use and planning
- Farming
- Forestry and woodland
- Landscapes for all
- Climate change
- Working together

Management Plan Policies

A number of policies are given which broadly reflect the above mentioned themes. These policies are envisaged to be used in decision making when considering development within the AONB. It is however worth noting that some of these policies fall outside of the land use planning system, in particular 'Landscapes for all' and 'working together'.

Landscape – This policy aims to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The policy also requires that proposals that would impact the area's dark skies should minimise light pollution.

Coasts and estuaries – This policy requires that activities carried out within and adjacent to the AONB consider the statutory purpose of the nationally designated landscape.

Nature recovery – This policy recommends that the AONB nature recovery plan is included when considering nature recovers strategies and projects.

Land use and planning – This policy requires that land management within or adjacent to the AONB conserve and enhance its natural beauty. The policy also requires that nationally significant infrastructure projects pay the same regard.

Farming – no specific policy.

Forestry and woodland – no specific policy.

Landscapes for all – This policy encourages those visiting the AONB to consider its statutory function.

Climate change – This policy encourages climate change mitigation to be considered in decision making. The reduction of greenhouse gases is also promoted.

Working together – This policy details how partnership working can assist in the delivery of projects within the AONB.

Other Submitted Documents

The Management Plan was also accompanied by a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). Both of these assessments found no significant impacts caused by implementation of the Management Plan.

Conclusion

Officers consider that the AONB Management Plan is an acceptable way of implementing the statutory function of the AONB; to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

Whilst not as formal as designation as 'adopting' this Management Plan as formal planning policy, Endorsement will give some weight to this Management Plan.

Therefore, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning is respectfully asked for agreement for the Council's endorsement of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-28.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-28

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None