

# South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2009-2014

## A Summary

### Inspirational South Devon

The South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is one of Britain's finest protected landscapes. It is loved for its rugged cliffs, sandy coves, peaceful countryside, pretty villages, rolling hills, colourful hedge banks, and secretive estuaries. It is an ancient countryside created by generations of human activity. The AONB is also home to 34,000 people, a thriving work place, a centre for active community life and a popular destination for visitors.

At a time of great change and pressure for the countryside and our seas, everyone has a part to play in shaping the future of this very special place. The Management Plan seeks to ensure we hand onto the next generation an area still worthy of its national designation.

### Purpose of the AONB Designation

AONB is the statutory designation applied to 49 of the nation's finest landscapes. They are designated by Natural England and are confirmed by the Secretary of State.

The purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

A Policy statement on AONBs provides further clarification, stating that:

- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The Government has confirmed that AONBs share with national parks the same highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and that their landscape qualities are equivalent.

### Duties of Local Authorities

- A management plan must be produced for each AONB. The duty falls to local authorities, which must act jointly to produce the plan. (In the case of the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the relevant local authorities are South Hams District Council, Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Plymouth City Council). The management plan must be revised at intervals not exceeding five years.
- The purpose of the management plan is to formulate the policies of local authorities for the management of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.
- The Act places a statutory duty on all public bodies "to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB" when exercising or performing any functions affecting the AONB.

### The AONB at a Glance

**Designation:** The designation of the AONB in South Devon was confirmed by government in 1960.

**Extent:** The AONB covers 337 square kilometres (130 square miles) of coastline, estuaries and countryside.

**Administrative areas:** 98.02% of the AONB lies in the South Hams/Devon County administrative area; 1.95% lies in Torbay; and 0.03% lies in Plymouth City. The AONB spans 43 Parish Councils.

**Heritage Coast:** The AONB incorporates the South Devon Heritage Coast covering the 75 kilometres of coastline between Wembury Beach and Sharkham Point.

**Coastline & beaches:** The coastline of the AONB measures 97km and contains 68 beaches ranging from large scale popular amenity beaches to isolated rural beaches.

**Estuaries:** The AONB contains the five estuaries of the Yealm, Erme, Avon, Salcombe-Kingsbridge and Dart. The far west is bordered by Plymouth Sound.

**Farmed Area:** 26,867 hectares or 84% of the AONB is farmed.

**Public rights of way:** There are 375 km of public rights of way.

**Historic sites:** There are 3481 Historic Environment Record entries including: 65 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, 565 hectares of Historic Parkland at 7 sites, 39 historic Conservation Areas and 1309 Listed Buildings.

**Nature conservation:** There are 2296 hectares of nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest at 17 sites including four European level Special Areas of Conservation, two National Nature Reserves and one marine Local Nature Reserve. There are 173 County Wildlife Sites.

### Our Vision for the AONB

Our vision for the AONB is a place recognised and treasured forever for its natural beauty and distinctive character:

- its rugged coastline with wooded estuaries, secluded river valleys, rolling hills and abundant wildlife;
- its patchwork fields, Devon hedges, green lanes, historic settlements and archaeological remains shaped by centuries of maritime and farming tradition;
- its rural tranquillity, fresh air, clean water, fertile soils and mild climate;
- its living, working countryside where community and economic activity sustain the landscape and bring prosperity and social well-being to its residents.

### Forces for Change – the threats facing the AONB

This is a time of great change for the AONB, with many conflicting pressures. These include:

**Development and building** – the requirement for 60,000 new homes in the sub-region by 2026 means that areas immediately adjacent to the AONB boundary and within will come under increasing pressure for development. This will have direct impacts in terms of new building and indirect impacts on the AONB such as increased light pollution, traffic, noise, waste water loadings and recreational pressures.

**Loss of tranquillity** - only 8% of the AONB experiences truly dark skies at night and only 20% of the AONB falls within the category of 'most tranquil' countryside. The situation has been getting worse.

**Population growth and recreation trends** – there are some 450,000 people within a 30 minute drive of the AONB, and the number is increasing. This brings traffic pressure and congestion, and some noisy and intrusive recreational activities disturb the tranquillity of the AONB and spoil the enjoyment of others. Trespass, noise, disturbance of wildlife, car obstruction and the poor management of dogs continue to be a focus of concern.

**Climate change** – this is bringing more extreme storm events, increased risk of coast erosion and localised flooding, bypasses of waste water treatment works and soil loss from farmland. Summer temperature rises may bring new pests and diseases like blue tongue and more frequent algal blooms, deoxygenation events and fish deaths in estuaries and other water bodies.

**Pollution** – 58% of AONB waterbodies are at high or moderate risk of failing water quality targets by 2016. Diffuse agricultural pollution and nutrient enrichment, algal blooms, feminising hormones,

antibiotics, medicine by-products and local pollution from boating activities (sewage, fuels and antifoulants) are all perceived to have damaging impacts on the estuarine environment and are threatening bathing waters and the viability of commercial shellfisheries.

**Declining wildlife** - 33% of the AONB's most important wildlife sites remain in unfavourable or declining condition. The condition of marginal habitats such as coastal grasslands is of particular concern as livestock numbers decline and scrub encroaches. Invasive non-native species continue to expand.

**Damage to historic monuments** – 75% of AONB protected monuments are at *high or medium risk* of damage or destruction within the short term.

**Decline of working population** - there is a shortage of labour and the traditional land management skills on which the AONB landscape depends, such as hedge-laying and stone-faced banking repair.

**Changes in farming** - the break-up of medium sized family farm holdings over recent years is accompanied by a sharp decline in the number of livestock which will hit conservation grazing schemes, affect landscape character, visitor experience, culture and traditions.

**Loss of services and facilities** - there is a continuing steady loss of essential facilities needed to support countryside rural community life, recreation and tourism, including hotel bed spaces, low cost accommodation, local shops, public toilets and cafes, especially affecting the more remote coastal areas.

## What We Want to Achieve

Each theme of the Management Plan sets out policies and objectives. The objectives are as follows:

### Objectives for landscape

- To develop tools and resources to assist in monitoring, understanding and managing changes in landscape character and condition.
- To prevent the deterioration in condition of those special qualities of the AONB landscape under threat from visual intrusion.
- To engage communities in recognising, understanding and appreciating the special qualities of the AONB.

### Objectives for natural resources

- To reach and maintain at least *good environmental quality* for all rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwaters.
- To maintain the AONB free from litter and pollution.
- To manage and conserve the AONB's soils resource.
- To understand and respond to the impacts of predicted climate change on the natural beauty, landscape and special qualities of the AONB.
- To raise awareness of the types and scales of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy technologies that are consistent with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

### Objectives for wildlife and geology

- To conserve and enhance the biodiversity and geodiversity of the AONB.
- To bring European, national, regional and local designated sites under positive conservation management.
- To promote awareness of the duty to have regard for biodiversity (*s40 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*) and ensure that all public bodies are responding positively to this duty, particularly in relation to biodiversity forming the special qualities of the AONB.

## Appendix 1

- To increase understanding of non-native invasive species affecting the AONB and stimulate action to reverse their spread where action is practicable.
- To develop effective biodiversity monitoring frameworks that enable meaningful reporting of trends in priority AONB habitats and species.

### Objectives for historic environment

- To conserve and enhance the historic environment features of the AONB.
- To involve and engage communities in exploring and celebrating the historic environment and local distinctiveness of the AONB.
- To improve our knowledge and understanding of the extent and condition of the AONB's historic environment resource and use this information to inform management decisions.

### Objectives for farming and forestry

- To conserve and enhance the working landscape of the AONB, and the special qualities managed by its custodians.
- To control the environmental impacts of managing the working landscape on other natural resources and public health.
- To conserve and enhance the grassland resource of the AONB.
- To improve standards of locally produced sustainable woodfuel and increase installed woodheat capacity as a means of securing the conservation and enhancement of AONB trees and woodlands.
- To improve access to high quality advice and support, for AONB land managers.
- To increase awareness and improve understanding of the inter-relationships between our protected landscape and its farmers and land managers.

### Objectives for the coast and marine environment

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the high quality, nationally significant coastline of the AONB.
- To clearly define the special qualities of the AONB at the coast and its inter-relationships with the neighbouring marine environment; and enable full account to be taken of the AONB in coastal and marine planning and management.
- To improve public awareness and understanding of the marine and coastal environment; and reduce the negative impacts of people's activities.
- To maintain and improve the quality and appearance of the most heavily used coastal destinations, particularly focusing on urban fringe sites that act as gateways to the AONB where they are experiencing intense recreational pressure or are at risk from marine erosion.
- To develop the policy framework and coordinated management of the coast and marine environment.)

### Objectives for estuaries

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty and distinctive character of the AONB's estuaries.
- To engage communities in recognising, understanding and appreciating the natural beauty, special qualities and individual characters of the AONB's estuaries.
- To develop research programmes that inform coordinated decision making and adaptation initiatives.
- To sustain the traditional economy and recreational enjoyment of the AONB's estuaries.

### Objectives for recreation and tourism

## Appendix 1

- To ensure the South West Coast Path National Trail, the area's strategic recreational routes and the wider public rights of way network are maintained to a high standard and are well utilised; and link paths are promoted in partnership with landowners especially where these provide opportunities for safer walking and riding between settlements.
- To reduce barriers to participation in countryside recreation and access, particularly for young people, neighbouring urban populations and those disadvantaged by poor mobility, health or opportunity.
- To improve safety and resolve conflicts between different recreational and commercial users of green lanes, bridleways, estuaries, beaches and inshore waters.
- To secure public access to the coastal corridor and beaches through the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill following its enactment.
- To strengthen the environmental and economic performance of the tourism sector.

### **Objectives for planning and development**

- To ensure that great weight is given to the purpose of AONBs in planning policies and development control decisions.
- To ensure that appropriate development is only provided for where it would conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONB.
- To ensure that no development is permitted outside the AONB which would damage the natural beauty, character and special qualities of the AONB itself.
- To ensure that land use change is consistent with the distinctive landscape character of the AONB, and conserves and enhances its natural beauty and special qualities.
- To ensure suitable arrangements for engagement with coastal partnerships are provided for when the new marine spatial planning system is introduced.

### **Objectives for highways and transport**

- To increase the range of opportunities for public transport and community transport.
- To reduce the impacts of traffic and heavy transport on minor roads.
- To conserve distinctive and historic highway features.
- To increase the number of safe off-road routes linking settlements.
- To undertake landscape enhancements to car parks.

### **Objectives for rural economy and services**

- To promote business development, adaptation and diversification.
- To strengthen supply chains and distribution networks for local food, fuel and materials.
- To develop economic activity programmes linked to the AONB's natural resources and environmental quality.
- To improve access to services for local communities.

### **Objectives for community and culture**

- To develop sustainable, multi-functional community facilities.
- To increase opportunities for local participation and volunteering.
- To improve the quality and extent of provision of public open spaces and facilities for sport and play.
- To develop local governance and delivery capacity.

### **Objectives for awareness and education**

- To increase awareness and appreciation of the AONB designation, its natural beauty, distinctive character and special qualities.

- To increase levels of awareness amongst relevant authorities of the statutory duty to have regard for the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB.
- To raise the profile and influence of the AONB through national, regional and sub-regional communications.
- To increase awareness and understanding of the AONB as a living, working landscape.

### Objectives for partnerships and management

- To review management and partnership arrangements for the AONB to ensure they remain effective and fit for purpose.
- To increase reporting by relevant authorities on compliance with the statutory duty of regard for the AONB purpose by relevant authorities.
- To ensure that the AONB Management Plan is reviewed and published to meet statutory requirements.
- To raise the profile and influence of the AONB through national, regional and sub-regional partnerships.
- To secure and increase the funding for AONB Partnership projects and programmes.

## The Action Programme

A Delivery Plan is provided in a separate document and forms Part 2 of the AONB Management Plan. This lists the projects and activities for conserving and enhancing the South Devon AONB. The document is not just an internal delivery plan for the AONB Partnership and Staff Unit: it includes a wide spectrum of actions to be undertaken by many different organisations, agencies, authorities, community groups and individuals. The delivery plan will be updated annually.

## Monitoring Performance

The Management Plan sets out measures of progress and success for each theme and action. A summary of progress will be published in the AONB Annual Report. Performance measures are being introduced for all AONB services, to ensure effective management. Work is in hand to adopt a national method for tracking the “health” of AONBs.

## Find Out More

The AONB Management Plan in full can be viewed on the website [www.southdevonaonb.org.uk](http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk) . Further information is available from South Devon AONB Unit, Follaton House, Totnes, TQ9 5NE.