

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

**REVIEW OF THE BLACKDOWN HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL
BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2014-2019**

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Chesterton
Responsible Officer: Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy & Regeneration.

Reason for Report: Mid Devon District Council together with other local authorities have authorised the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership to undertake a review of the Management Plans for the AONB by April 2019, as required under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

This report is to update Members on the proposed review of the Blackdown Hills (AONB) Management Plan and to seek approval to undertake public consultation in that respect.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the public consultation on the review of the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan be agreed.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The AONB Management Plan is relevant to all 4 corporate priorities: economy, homes, community and environment and in particular to Aim 3 Environment - protecting the natural environment and Aim 3 Homes – planning and enhancing the built environment.

Financial Implications: The cost of reviewing the management plan is being met as part of the AONB service's core functions, for which Defra contribute 75% of the funding; the remaining 25% is provided between all the local authorities on the Partnership and these contributions are set out formally in a Memorandum of Understanding from 2016/17 -2019/20.

Legal Implications: There is a legal duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to ensure AONB Management Plans are periodically reviewed. The current review process meets that responsibility.

Risk Assessment: Risks associated with the Management Plan can be categorised as reputational, relating to not undertaking full public consultation; legal, relating to not having statutory plans in place to ensure effective management of the AONB; and financial, related to lack of strategic context for making funding bids to deliver activity.

Equalities Assessment: AONB Management Plans are subject to Equality Impact Assessment. This will be drafted and subject to consultation alongside the management plan itself.

1.1 Under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, Mid Devon District, together with other local authorities, is required to produce a

Management Plan for the Blackdown Hills AONB; initially by 1 April 2004 and then review it at intervals of not more than five years thereafter. The review for the 2014-19 Plan therefore needs to be completed by April 2019. Along with all other relevant local authorities, Mid Devon District Council has authorised the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership to carry out this duty on its behalf; this work has been co-ordinated by the AONB team as part of its core functions.

- 1.2 The CROW Act 2000 and subsequent guidance from Natural England/Defra and National Association for AONBs provides advice on the scale, nature and content of Management Plans. A Management Plan should serve to highlight a shared vision for the AONB and contain objectives, policies and targets for the delivery of the Plan. The delivery of the Plan is dependent on the actions of a range of partner organisations and subject to availability of funding from the local authorities, Defra and other parties.
- 1.3 The review of the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan is following established guidance to ensure a broadly consistent approach both nationally and locally. In line with others, the AONB Partnership agreed that the current review should be conducted with a 'light touch' approach, building on the existing common format and structure of the current plans across Devon, and recognising the uncertainties around the UK relationship with the EU and potential changes over the next five-year period, particularly in environmental policy and programmes. However, the reviewed plan also needs to reflect changes in the statutory and legislative background, new ways of partnership working and current/developing policy and issues e.g. the Government's 25-year Environment Plan, including the review of National Parks and AONBs and public health/well-being agendas for example.
- 1.4 To identify key matters and considerations, the past year has seen a period of review with key partners and Partnership members in advance of a wider public consultation on a draft plan. The briefing note at **Appendix A** summarises the review process and proposed approach to content and structure of the new plan. The consultation draft of the Management Plan is currently being prepared and the local authorities are being requested to confirm that they are content with the review process and endorse the structure and outline content of the Draft Plan for consultation.
- 1.5 A 6-week public consultation is proposed to be carried out between late September and November 2018. Account will be taken of the feedback and comments and a final draft version will be produced for consultation with the statutory consultees, Natural England. Following this, the AONB Management Plan will be finalised and local authorities will be asked to adopt the Plan by March 31st 2019.
- 1.6 Approved to undertake public consultation in connection with this review has already been resolved by East Devon District Council (11th July 2018) and DCC (East Devon Locality County Committee 12th July 2018).

Contact for more Information:

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Background papers:	Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-19 https://blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/blackdown-hills-aonb-management-plan-2014-19.pdf
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