

**CABINET
30 MAY 2019**

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMY AND REGENERATION

**THE BLACKDOWN HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019 - 2024**

Cabinet Member: *****

Responsible Officer: Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy & Regeneration.

Reason for Report: To receive the final draft of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-2024 following a period of formal consultation.

RECOMMENDATION:
That Cabinet recommend to Council that the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 be adopted.

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 budgeted 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 on all statutory authorities under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (section 89) to ensure AONB Management Plans are prepared and reviewed periodically. There is a further statutory duty under section 85 on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when exercising or performing any function affecting land in AONBs.

Risk Assessment: There is a legal risk associated with not having an up-to-date management plan in place; and financial risk if Defra was to reduce or remove their contribution to AONB running costs as the risk would fall on the contributory statutory authorities.

Equalities Assessment: The AONB Management Plan is subject to its own Equality Impact Assessment.

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 A review of the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan was considered by Cabinet on the 30th August 2018 at which time it was resolved to agree public consultation on the review of the management plan.

- 1.2 Under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, Mid Devon District, together with the other contributing local authorities, Devon and Somerset County Councils, East Devon and South Somerset District Councils and Taunton Deane Borough Council are required to produce a Management Plan for the Blackdown Hills AONB and subsequently review it at intervals of not more than five years. Accordingly, Mid Devon District Council, together with the other partner organisations authorised the Blackdown Hills AONB partnership to carry out a review on its behalf; co-ordinated by the AONB team.
- 1.3 The CROW Act 2000 and guidance from Natural England /Defra provides advice on the scale, nature and content of Management Plans: A Management Plan should serve to highlight a vision for the AONB and contain objectives, policies and targets for the delivery of the Plan. The Plan should be reviewed every five years. The delivery of the Plan is coordinated through the AONB Partnership and subject to availability of funding from Defra, the Local Authorities, and other parties.
- 1.4 The review of the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan followed former guidance to ensure a broadly consistent approach both nationally and locally. The partnership agreed that the reviews should be conducted with as light a touch as possible given the status of the UK's relationship with the EU and potential changes over the next five-year period, particularly in environmental policy and programmes, including the current Government review of National Parks and AONBs (the Glover review).

2.0 THE REVIEW

- 2.1 The review process has been a participatory one, with members of the Partnership Management Group, local authority officers and other stakeholders involved in identifying key matters and considerations, in advance of a wider six-week public consultation on the revised draft (held October – November 2018).
- 2.2 The Plan was also screened under Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment regulations to ensure policies in the Plan meet these assessment requirements.
- 2.3 Following public consultation, the draft Plan has been revised and the final version of the Management Plan has undergone a formal consultation with the statutory consultee, Natural England before local authority adoption. It has been confirmed that the Management Plan meets the legislative requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

3.0 THE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-2024

- 3.1 The draft plan attached at **Appendix 1** to this report sets out a vision for the Blackdown Hills AONB in 2029, which was first set out in 2009 to provide the long term goal for management of the AONB. The management plan also sets out the policy framework for the conservation and management of the Blackdown Hills AONB for the next five years. Its purpose is to:
 - Highlight the special qualities and significance of the AONB
 - Present a vision for the future of the AONB
 - Set out objectives and policies to secure the vision

- Identify what needs to be done, and by whom
- State the condition of the AONB and how the effectiveness of its management will be monitored
- Reflect the views and aspirations of a wide range of AONB stakeholders and parties with an interest in it
- Co-ordinate the work of different partner organisations

3.2 The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership recommends the attached AONB Management Plan for adoption by the Council as the statutory Management Plan for the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for the period 2019-2024. The plan has already been adopted by East Devon District Council and Devon County Council. It will be formally confirmed to Defra following local authority adoption.

Contact for more Information:

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Background papers: Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024
Cabinet 30th August 2018

Circulation of the Report: