



NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

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Summary

This paper brings forward some topics for discussion to inform content for the Management Plan, building on work by the Partnership in earlier meetings.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to comment on the topics raised and input to discussions.

Background

The Partnership has held discussions to progress the Management Plan review at its meetings during 2023:

- 23rd March – identification of key issues
- 20th July – workshop on content ideas for new plan vision
- 23rd November - workshop on 3 topics: Land Management, Planning, Community & enjoyment.

The team continue to move forward the plan review process and an on-line survey of public opinion is about to be launched. Due to the launch of the Targets and Outcomes Framework and imminent receipt of new data, we have paused work on data gathering related to the old key indicators, which are now effectively superseded.

The information gathering exercise from partners is continuing, and any Partnership members are still welcome to make written contributions on the following:

- Evidence and influences – any key relevant recent reports, data, strategies, policies.
- The current plan - which sections of the current Plan have been the most useful, which you think need updating or changing and how, and any topics on which you think policies or guidance should be added.

Discussion for this meeting will focus on three areas:

1. First thoughts about the new targets and what incorporating them into the Management Plan might mean are shown in Appendix 1.
2. The parallel process of Sustainability Appraisal of the Management Plan requires the useful stage of identifying potential conflicts between Management Plan policies and other environment, social and economic objectives, and how the conflicts may be

minimised. Draft text setting this out is given at Appendix 2 for comment and discussion.

3. A couple of contrasting examples of Management Plan Visions from the Cotswolds and Cornwall National Landscapes are given in Appendix 3 for comment.

<p>List of Background Papers</p> <p>Agenda item and papers on Management Plan Review at Partnership meetings 23rd March and 20th July 2023.</p> <p>Current Management Plan 2019-24 https://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/a-special-place/aonb-management-plan</p>
<p>Human Rights Act Appraisal</p> <p>The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.</p>
<p>Environmental Appraisal</p> <p>The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.</p>
<p>Risk Management Appraisal</p> <p>Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.</p>
<p>Community / Consultations Appraisal</p> <p>The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.</p>
<p>Appendices</p> <p>Appendix 1 Initial thoughts on the new targets and the Management Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2 Draft analysis of potential conflicts from Sustainability Appraisal process</p> <p>Appendix 3 Example visions from other National Landscape Management Plans</p>

Appendix 1 Initial thoughts on the new targets and the Management Plan

Target (précis)	Notes/ implications
1. Restore/create >250,000ha of wildlife-rich habitats by 2042.	National target to be apportioned. Most likely habitats in the Shropshire Hills are heathland, woodland, meadows and grassland, ponds and wetland, river corridors. Definition of 'restore' matters.
2. 80% of SSSIs into favourable condition by 2042.	Presumably % by area rather than % of number of sites? Requires long term planning for 2042 target date. Natural England have lead role.
3. 60% of SSSIs having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by Jan 2028.	Short term target linked to 2 above. Natural England have lead role.
4. Continued favourable management of all existing priority habitat outside SSSIs and include restored/created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.	Complicated wording based on not going backwards where progress has been made. A good aim, but where work has been grant supported its long term is not guaranteed. Unsure that condition monitoring of all priority habitat is in place to provide data for this?
5. 65 - 80% of land managers adopting nature friendly farming on >10 -15% of their land by 2030.	Definition of 'nature-friendly farming' needed. Presumably doesn't necessarily mean no production on these areas. Depending on definition, some farmers are likely to achieve much higher % of land than this.
6. Net greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.	A standard target from national scale down but hugely challenging. Many aspects including travel patterns/choices of residents. Data has not been cut to National Landscapes to date but presumably will be from now.
7. Restore c130,000 hectares of peat by 2050.	National target to be apportioned. This probably means deep peat, of which we have only 40ha recorded so our share of the target would be very small.
8. Increase tree canopy and woodland cover by 3% of total land area by 2050.	National target to be apportioned. Some landscapes aren't suitable for much increased tree cover but ours is, if done in the right ways. Historically, new woodland creation has been quite low in the Shropshire Hills however due to value of farmland. Recent afforestation proposals by Forestry England are a new pattern.
9. Improve and promote accessibility and engagement for all (using Access for All metrics).	The metrics have a strong focus on physical access with not much on engagement of other under-served groups. Important role of countryside site providers. Interesting that this is included when a second statutory purpose for National Landscapes about people is not being progressed.
10. Fewer nationally designated heritage assets at risk.	Need data on how many/which are at risk as first stage. Important role for Historic England.

Appendix 2 Draft analysis of potential conflicts from Sustainability Appraisal process

Some of the issues are similar to previous plans, but the context continues to change. This analysis is refined and updated from that in the Sustainability Appraisal for the 2019-24 Management Plan and is draft text offered for comment. These are necessarily brief considerations of large and complex topics which will also be addressed elsewhere in the Management Plan. The italic text at the end of each paragraph is intended to point towards ways in which the potential conflicts identified can be overcome or minimised. The topics fall into two broad categories around:

1. Potential side-effects of protecting the landscape and natural beauty (which protection results directly from the designation), and
 2. Broader issues around environmental transitions, which are applicable everywhere, but play out differently in a protected landscape.
- The policies of the Management Plan are generally **strong for overall sustainability** as well as conserving and enhancing natural beauty, and there are many more positive interactions between issues than negative ones.

The National Landscape and processes supporting it, including the Management Plan, are an important means to navigate some of the key issues for the area towards a sustainable future.

- The high quality of the **environment of the Shropshire Hills is a huge economic asset** which, if sensitively used and not damaged by inappropriate development, can deliver great long term economic benefits. The environmental assets of the Shropshire Hills support many kinds of sustainable economic activities and possibilities, and the quality and direction of economic progress need to be considered.

It remains important to demonstrate the positive economic effects of the environment and of looking after it.

- The high quality environment of the Shropshire Hills and protection of it as a National Landscape contribute to problems of **affordability of housing**, through high demand and limits on supply. Policies enable affordable housing to be allowed where other forms of development would not be. The higher standards, e.g. of design, sought in the National Landscape may add to costs.

A robust system is required to ensure that affordable housing can be provided to meet social needs, but in keeping with the high quality landscape. Potential higher costs may be somewhat overcome by good guidance and economies of scale. Some of the higher costs are more likely to return to the local economy (e.g. through using local materials), with knock-on benefits.

- **Nature recovery and landscape character.** Measures to strengthen the nature recovery network may change the current character and appearance of the landscape but will almost always do so in ways which are positive for landscape quality and natural beauty.

We need to be willing to embrace landscape change which is positive ecologically.

- There is rightly an increased **urgency to net zero** and reducing greenhouse gas emissions (notably this is now included in Protected Landscape targets). This affects every economic sector and part of society – including land management, transport, tourism, planning and built development. Avoiding the most serious effects of climate change requires changes and compromises now, some of which may be sacrificing

short-term benefits but often these changes will bring other benefits. e.g. to people's health from changing diets and more active travel. Measures to reach the net zero target are sometimes perceived as limiting the economy, but there is great potential for sustainable economic progress through these changes, and the costs of not mitigating climate change would be extraordinarily high.

There is a need to plan for 'just transition' where sections of society could be disproportionately affected by changes.

- **There is increased pressure on land** and a risk that a narrow focus on food security creates a falsely polarised apparent choice between food production or nature. Food production is of course important and medium and long-term food security depends on a high quality environment. Maintaining functioning natural systems is important to human needs. To make better land use choices we need to look at the whole food system including eating patterns, food waste, etc as well as land management.

We need to highlight areas of common ground between food production and the environment e.g. soil health. We also need to pursue integrated models and new ideas for land use which improve human health and local food system resilience as well as maintaining nature and functional ecosystems. The simplistic narratives of 'either food or nature' should be challenged with a more positive model.

- **Renewable energy** such as solar and wind generation will continue to pose a challenge in terms of what level of impact on the protected landscape is considered acceptable. Impacts on biodiversity, heritage, landscape and resources also need to be considered. Community based renewable schemes have stronger overall sustainability credentials taking into account social benefits too.

The relative lack of detailed guidance means that decisions will probably continue to turn on case by case merits. All means of reducing carbon emissions need to be actively promoted, including energy conservation, carbon management in soils, biomass and small scale renewables.

- There may be a perceived conflict between **climate change adaptation measures** and measures for climate change mitigation, such as in application of limited resources.

In reality, both are needed. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence there is still work to do to convince some people that the current unprecedented changes to climate are human-induced and that action on emissions by the UK is worthwhile since every country must act if there is to be a global solution.

- There could be a **tension between nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and nature recovery**. For example a narrow view of land management decisions based on carbon alone could lead to actions which are harmful to nature, e.g. tree planting on high ecological value grasslands, tree plantations focussing on fast-growing non-native species.

The climate and ecological crises need to be addressed together by integrated measures.

- As a rural area, many people are very **dependent on transport by private car and some people are very constrained in travel opportunities and choices by cost**. Policies affecting transport and traffic in the area come mostly from national and county policy rather than the National Landscape Management Plan.

Influencing patterns of behaviour will be a long-term process and will require significant investment and commitment to alternatives. There is evidence of the economic and social value of reducing transport, and the level of homeworking is increasing.

CHAPTER 2 - VISION

A COTSWOLDS VISION: A NATIONAL LANDSCAPE FOR EVERYONE

A time of opportunity

The Cotswolds is good for us; we feel better when we are here and engaged with the natural beauty of the landscape around us. In recent years we have been reminded of the intrinsic relationship between ourselves and the natural world – and the condition it is in. We believe the Cotswolds National Landscape offers opportunities for optimism, regeneration, wellbeing, and inclusion.

Challenges lie ahead

We are in the midst of a global climate emergency and an ecological crisis. Our awareness of ongoing social and economic inequalities is heightened. In the Cotswolds, these concerns are as real for us too, and we face significant challenges: climate change; threats to wildlife and habitat; changes to the farming landscape and agriculture; finding ways to deliver opportunities for younger people and provide for an ageing population; and achieving access to, and involvement in, the countryside for everyone – in ways which help benefit the countryside and encourage a diverse range of people to appreciate and care for the Cotswolds.

What can we do, and how should we do it?

To address these issues and begin to make improvements, we need to challenge ourselves. We must avoid complacency, and not adhere doggedly to past beliefs – this will hold us back, and limit how much positive change we can introduce. Instead, we need to embrace new ways of thinking in order to find win-win solutions which both conserve and enhance natural beauty, and serve the people who are here. We will work hard, and in partnership – to find outcomes which offer the most positive benefits and the least negative impact. We will need to demonstrate collaboration and leadership. We will need to be energetic and proactive. We will need to be bold, brave, and confident. Above all, we will need to acknowledge that we can't do it all alone – we want to work with other organisations and individuals to achieve results which benefit all of us, and nature.

The future should be bright

The treasured landscapes which make the Cotswolds nationally and internationally important are diverse in character, as are the people who live, work, and visit here. There is no 'one size fits all' for the future – but we have a greater opportunity than ever before to pull together as communities across the Cotswolds, and to work with each other to harness our dedication and expertise to forge the future of the Cotswolds. This place, the Cotswolds National Landscape, is for everyone, from all walks of life. In sharing it and looking after it, we will continue to create a place that is vibrant, unique, welcoming, and truly special – for people and for nature. We will work towards ensuring that the Cotswolds stays a working landscape, where agriculture thrives and supply chains are secure. Our communities should be connected and diverse, but self-sustaining. Visitors should feel welcome to enjoy being here, confident about access, and motivated to give something back to help look after the landscape. This should be a place where the landscape, nature, and people work in harmony with each other.

The Cotswolds will be a place that will inspire generations of people to look after it – now and in the years ahead.



20 Year Vision

This is the Cornwall AONB Partnership’s vision statement which captures the essence of where we aspire to be in 20 years (2016 -2036).

The Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a national asset, critical to Cornwall’s economy and the wellbeing of communities. The special qualities of the Cornwall AONB are conserved, enhanced and appreciated by all who live, work and visit, inspiring those people to be connected with the landscape.

It is our intention that the status of the Cornwall AONB, as a nationally and internationally important protected landscape – with equal status and protection to a national park, is recognised and understood by all. This includes the landscape characteristics that combine to give the Cornwall AONB its natural beauty, unique identity and sense of place.

Through effective Partnership working the protected landscape plays a crucial role in nature recovery, resilience to climate change and conservation of the historic and natural environment, by consideration of four key priorities:



People



Place



Nature



Climate

Our Primary Purpose is to conserve and enhance Natural Beauty.

With inclusivity at the heart, everyone should be supported to understand the value of the Cornwall AONB. These stakeholders benefit from a protected landscape that provides the opportunity for prosperity, good health and a high quality of life, allowing them to recognise, contribute, and reinvest in the landscape in order to sustain these benefits in the long term.



Lapwing in the mist | Jane Lewarne

