

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 – 2025

Background Report

Executive summary:

The Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 seeks to address the many issues facing the Cotswold National Landscape, which includes helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plans are already referenced within the Development Plan (Joint Core Strategy and the Cheltenham Plan) in terms of making it clear that proposals will be required to be consistent with the Management Plan including the latest iteration.

1. Background

- 1.1. Endorse the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) is nationally designated for its landscape importance. The Cotswold Conservation Board is responsible for preparing the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan. There are existing policies in the Development Plan that reference the Cotswold AONB Management Plan. The Board have now produced the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 – 2025.
 - 1.2. Planning is at the heart of place making, strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, if we get this right, we will deliver connected and active communities.
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2. Implications

2.1. Financial, Property and Asset implications

The council owns some 110 hectares of land around Leckhampton Hill, the majority of which sits within the AONB. The Management Plan appears to have no adverse impacts in respect of those landholdings and indeed, provides a baseline for working with the Conservation Board to better enhance the environment and contribute towards the council's net zero commitments. The management plan is jointly funded and CBC already budget the required allocation meaning there are no additional financial pressures involved in the delivery of the plan.

The council is currently investigating how land within its ownership, both within and outside of the AONB, can be best utilised to promote environmental conservation and enhancement through use of various mechanisms including Biodiversity Net Gain and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS). The Plan appears to specifically support rather than hinder this approach.

In terms of development of council owned land outside of the AONB, the policies set out in Chapter Five, in particular at Policy CE10, are noted, as indeed are references to Major Development which may impact on the “setting” of the AONB within the supporting paragraphs and ancillary guidance.

The Plan will, therefore, have consequences for development of council owned land and property that are of sufficient scale to have such an impact. However, this principle has already been established and is enshrined with the Cheltenham Plan and Joint Core Strategy, as set out in the report below.

2.2. Legal Implications

Each local authority has a statutory duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 when exercising or performing any functions to ‘have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB’ which includes the Council’s role as a local planning authority. In addition to this the National Planning Policy Framework at paragraph 176 that ‘great weight’ should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty “...Areas of Outstanding Beauty” which have the highest status of protection.

The Council has acknowledged these requirements providing specific policy safeguards to the AONB at policy SD7 of the Joint Core Strategy and within Chapter 8 of the Cheltenham Plan in that both make reference to the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan. The Council also expressly acknowledges that the policy requirements of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan are a material consideration in determining planning applications which fall within the AONB and/or its setting.

The Council’s endorsement of the latest iteration of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 – 2025 will ensure that it continues to comply with its statutory duty and that the relevant policies of the Joint Core Strategy and the Cheltenham Plan remain up to date and carry full weight.

2.3. Environmental and climate change implications

The Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 will assist in terms of the delivery of the sustainable growth of Cheltenham and will have social and environmental implications. The outcomes of the statutory development plan will be key tools in articulating part of the council’s response to the Climate Emergency. The National Landscape Management Plan will help to:

- Create strong communities and ensuring social welfare, reflecting healthy place shaping commitments
- Address the climate crisis and some of the main causes of climate change. Considering the impacts of the climate emergency and the council’s commitment to being net zero by 2030 will help to ensure projects and policies are approved are in line with these climate commitments
- Address the ecological crisis, which has highlighted the negative impact our actions and behaviours have on plant and animal life. The UK has lost a lot of biodiversity (variety of plant and animal life) which is critical for our collective survival.

2.4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

Cheltenham Borough Council welcome the focus on “Increasing Understanding and Enjoyment; Ensuring access, learning and wellbeing opportunities are for everyone.”

3. Reasons for recommendations

- 3.1. Each local authority has a statutory duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB'. The National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') also requires that 'great weight' be given to those matters in decision making.
- 3.2. Policy SD7: The Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the adopted Joint Core Strategy (JCS) sets out, amongst other aspects, that "...*Proposals will be required to be consistent with the policies set out in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan*". Within Chapter 8 entitled 'The Cotswolds AONB' of the adopted Cheltenham Plan, paragraph 8.4 sets out, amongst other aspects, that "*In assessing proposals for development, the Council will be guided by ...Policy SD7 of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and the advice of the Cotswold Conservation Board with reference to the latest iteration of the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan*".
- 3.3. The Cotswolds National Landscape Board has a statutory duty to prepare a management plan for the Cotswolds National Landscape and review it at intervals of no more than five-years. The Board adopted the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 on 21st February 2023, following a review of the 2018-2023 Management Plan.
- 3.4. The Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 runs for two years rather than the usual five. The Board state that this is because they "...*anticipate significant national and local policy developments for protected landscapes during this period, particularly with reference to climate action. During the two-year span of this interim plan, we will further develop the evidence and data, so that we can build in meaningful targets towards net zero in our next plan.*" (<https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/planning/cotswolds-aonb-management-plan>).
- 3.5. The Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 is intended to guide the work of stakeholders, including local planning authorities, in helping to deliver the Management Plan's vision and outcomes.
- 3.6. The Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 sets out a vision, outcome and policies for the management of the Cotswolds National Landscape. The vision was drawn up in the light of three interlinked key issues:
 - Key Issue 1, The Climate Emergency;
 - Key Issue 2, Nature's decline and the Ecological Crisis; and
 - Key Issue 3, Health and societal changes.
- 3.7. There are three broad aims, which are:
 1. Cross Cutting Themes; Tackling 21st century issues through progressive partnerships;
 2. Conserving and Enhancing Natural Beauty; Influencing and delivering for landscape, nature and climate; and.
 3. Increasing Understanding and Enjoyment; Ensuring access, learning and wellbeing opportunities are for everyone.
- 3.8. There are 14 Outcomes and the 24 policies outline in detail how these outcomes can be achieved.

The Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 includes a 'contents at a glance' and this is replicated in the figure below. The Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025 is broadly considered to be consistent with existing Development Plan policies.

<p align="center">CROSS CUTTING (PURPOSES 1 AND 2)</p> <p align="center">Tackling 21st century issues through progressive partnerships.</p>			<p align="center">PURPOSE 1: TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE¹</p> <p align="center">Influencing and delivering for landscape, nature and climate.</p>								<p align="center">PURPOSE 2: TO INCREASE THE UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT OF THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE</p> <p align="center">Ensuring access, learning and wellbeing opportunities are for everyone.</p>		
OUTCOME 1: CLIMATE ACTION	OUTCOME 2: NATURAL & CULTURAL CAPITAL	OUTCOME 3: WORKING TOGETHER	OUTCOME 4: LANDSCAPE	OUTCOME 5: LOCAL DISTINCTIVENESS	OUTCOME 6: TRANQUILLITY	OUTCOME 7: DARK SKIES	OUTCOME 8: HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT & CULTURAL HERITAGE	OUTCOME 9: BIODIVERSITY AND NATURE RECOVERY	OUTCOME 10: RURAL LAND MANAGEMENT	OUTCOME 11: DEVELOPMENT & TRANSPORT	OUTCOME 12: HEALTH & WELL-BEING	OUTCOME 13: ACCESS & RECREATION	OUTCOME 14: SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
POLICY CC1: Climate Change – Mitigation	POLICY CC3: Natural & Cultural Capital – Principles	POLICY CC6: Developing a consistent, coordinated and landscape-led approach	POLICY CE1: Landscape	POLICY CE3: Local Distinctiveness	POLICY CE4: Tranquillity	POLICY CE5: Dark Skies	POLICY CE6: Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage	POLICY CE7: Biodiversity and Nature Recovery	POLICY CE8: Rural Land Management	POLICY CE10: Development & Transport - Principles	POLICY UE1: Health and Well-being	POLICY UE2: Access & Recreation	POLICY UE3: Sustainable Tourism
POLICY CC2: Climate Change - Adaptation	POLICY CC4: Soils	POLICY CC7: Compliance with Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act	POLICY CE2: Geology						POLICY CE9: Problem Species, Pests and Diseases	POLICY CE11: Major Development			
	POLICY CC5: Water	POLICY CC8: Working together								POLICY CE12: Development Priorities & Evidence of Need			
										POLICY CE13: Waste Management and the Circular Economy			

¹ In delivering purposes 1 and 2, the Board has a duty to foster the social and economic wellbeing of people living in the National Landscape. This duty is addressed through relevant policies under the two purposes.

3.9. Within Appendix 5 ‘Stakeholder Delivery– Priority Actions’ there is a table that sets out a list of recommended stakeholder actions, which the Board invites specific stakeholders to undertake in order to help deliver the Plan. For Local Authorities, this includes endorsing the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and recognising the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan as a material consideration in Local Plans and in planning decisions.

Appendices:

i. [Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025](#)