



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 23 APRIL 2025
Subject	COTSWOLDS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025 - 2030
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Chris Hargraves – Head of Planning Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Chris Hargraves – Head of Planning Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To consider and endorse the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030.
Annex	Annex A – Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030 Annex B – Policy Summary Overview
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of the report; and2. Formally endorse the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030 attached at Annex A.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/	The management plan has been the subject of extensive consultation

Consultation	including with West Oxfordshire District Council. The plan has been finalised and adopted by the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) Board and the Board is now seeking formal endorsement from all relevant local authorities.
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Members will be aware that around one third of West Oxfordshire falls within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL¹). It is a legal requirement for a National Landscape to have a management plan in place under Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and such plans must be reviewed every 5 years or sooner.
- 1.2** The Cotswolds National Landscape Board have prepared a new management plan covering the period 2025 – 2030. It was formally adopted by the Board on 25 February 2025 and the Board is now seeking formal endorsement from relevant local authorities including West Oxfordshire District Council.
- 1.3** The purpose of this report is to provide a brief summary overview of the new management plan so that Members are able to make an informed decision as to whether they wish to formally endorse it or not.
- 1.4** A copy of the full management plan (note: this is an ‘undesigned’ version) is attached at Annex A and a summary overview of the plan’s policies, prepared by WODC Officers, is attached at Annex B.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Cotswolds National Landscape, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), holds significant environmental, cultural, and economic value, contributing to biodiversity, heritage, and the overall quality of life for residents and visitors.
- 2.2** As a nationally protected landscape, it is imperative to maintain its special qualities, scenic beauty, and tranquillity, particularly in light of growing development pressures.
- 2.3** The management plan has a key role to play in this respect and contains a comprehensive summary of the key issues facing the Cotswolds National Landscape, and the management policies and actions needed to conserve and enhance it.
- 2.4** Although the Cotswolds National Landscape Board is responsible for preparing and publishing the management plan and clearly has an important role to play in its delivery, the success of that delivery is also dependent on a wide range of stakeholders, with the policies of the management plan intended to guide the work of others.
- 2.5** It is now a legal requirement for relevant authorities including West Oxfordshire District Council to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape. Helping to deliver the outcomes, policies, and targets of the management plan is an important component of fulfilling this duty.

¹ The re-branded name for the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) with effect from November 2023

3. OVERVIEW - CNL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025 – 2030

- 3.1 The management plan (hereinafter referred to as ‘the plan’) is a statutory plan, which sets out the vision, outcomes and policies for the management of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) for the period 2025-2030. A full copy of the plan is attached at Annex A.
- 3.2 In terms of structure, the core of the plan comprises four main components:
- Vision
 - Key Issues
 - Special Qualities
 - Outcomes and Policies
- 3.3 The vision emphasises the importance of the creating an inclusive, accessible space that supports wellbeing, fosters connection with nature, and addresses environmental and social challenges. Through collaboration, innovation, and sustainable practices, it aims to ensure the landscape remains vibrant, resilient, and beneficial for both people and wildlife, inspiring future generations to care for it.
- 3.4 The vision has been drawn up in the light of three identified key issues; the climate emergency, nature’s decline and the ecological crisis and health and societal changes. The plan explains that it is the impact of these key issues, amongst others, on the special qualities of the CNL that has informed the plan’s outcomes and policies.
- 3.5 In terms of the special qualities of the CNL, these are the aspects of the area’s natural beauty which make the area distinctive and which are considered valuable, especially at a national scale.
- 3.6 These are usefully laid out and include its limestone geology, which shapes both the landforms and traditional buildings. Key features include the dramatic escarpment with expansive views, open high wolds, river valleys, dry stone walls, and ancient woodlands. The area is known for its tranquillity, dark skies, and rich biodiversity, including limestone grasslands. Distinctive settlements reflect the region’s architectural heritage, while numerous trails offer opportunities for recreation.
- 3.7 Additionally, the Cotswolds has a deep cultural and historical legacy, with landmarks from prehistoric times to the Arts and Crafts Movement.
- 3.8 Drawing on the identified key issues and special qualities, the plan then sets out a broad range of outcomes and policies, arranged under three main headings:
- **Cross-cutting themes** – tackling 21st century issues through progressive partnerships.
 - **Conserving and enhancing** – influencing and delivering for landscape, nature and climate.
 - **Increasing understanding and enjoyment** – ensuring access, learning and well-being opportunities for everyone.

- 3.9** The outcomes express the desired state of the CNL and the policies outline how this can be achieved.
- 3.10** There are 14 outcomes in total. These focus on achieving net zero emissions, enhancing biodiversity, and conserving the area's distinctive character, tranquillity, and dark skies. They emphasise collaborative partnerships, sustainable land management and responsible development. Additionally, the outcomes promote improved water quality, preservation of cultural heritage, inclusive access, and sustainable tourism. The landscape is also envisioned as a space that supports public health, wellbeing, and a strong sense of local identity.
- 3.11** Supporting the 14 outcomes are 23 policies. These are set out in full at Annex A and are summarised in tabular form at Annex B.
- 3.12** The policies are the most important and utilised part of the management plan, serving five main purposes:
- They are the principles for how the CNL should be managed;
 - They provide a framework for action by all stakeholders;
 - They represent the policies of the CNL Board;
 - They are intended to guide, influence and be used by stakeholders in their own plans, policies, proposals, work programmes and decision making;
 - Together with other guidance produced by the CNL Board, they are intended to facilitate a consistent and coordinated approach across the whole of the CNL.
- 3.13** It is important to note the inter-relationship and distinction between the policies of the CNL management plan and those set out in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.
- 3.14** The Local Plan forms part of the statutory development plan for West Oxfordshire and under planning legislation, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with it unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 3.15** The CNL management plan does not form part of the statutory development plan and therefore does not carry the same weight in planning terms as the Local Plan. However, the current West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 confirms through Policy EH1 that the management plan and related guidance documents are a material consideration in decision-making relevant to the CNL.
- 3.16** As well as being an important material consideration in their own right, the CNL Board envisage the management plan policies helping to inform emerging Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans both in terms of providing supporting evidence as well as ideas for policy development.

4. ENDORSING THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 4.1** Helping to deliver the outcomes, policies and targets of the plan is an important part of the District Council's legal obligation to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the CNL. The CNL Board has therefore written to the District Council seeking its formal endorsement.
- 4.2** In seeking the Council's endorsement, the Board has suggested that, in addition to helping to inform plan-making and planning decisions, the management plan can feed into more general Council strategies, policies and projects as well as the development and delivery of the Council's services and activities.
- 4.3** Having reviewed the Management Plan in its entirety, Officers are pleased to recommend to Members that the plan should be formally endorsed.
- 4.4** As set out in full at Annex A, the plan is comprehensive and covers a range of topical and relevant issues, many of which overlap with the priorities outlined in the current Council Plan.
- 4.5** As outlined in the plan itself, the most important and most utilised part of the plan is the policies themselves. A policy summary, prepared by WODC officers is attached at Annex B for ease of reference. There are 23 policies in total and these cover a range of salient issues including climate change, partnership working, nature recovery, agriculture and tourism.
- 4.6** Many of the policies already align with the current Local Plan and others provide a helpful basis for the emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041.
- 4.7** In some instances, some of the policies (e.g. Policy CE14: Major Development and CE15: Development Priorities and Evidence of Need) stray beyond national policy and don't fully align with the approach taken in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.
- 4.8** The management plan acknowledges this and recognises that many of its policies are 'aspirational' and, in effect, sub-ordinate to the local plan and national policy.
- 4.9** As such, the fact that some of the policies are not fully aligned with the local plan or national policy, does not in itself present a significant concern and as such, the recommendation of Officers is that it is formally endorsed by Members.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1** The District Council could choose not to endorse the CNL management plan, however, as explained in the report, it is now a legal requirement for relevant authorities including West Oxfordshire District Council to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape. Helping to deliver the outcomes, policies, and targets of the management plan is an important component of fulfilling this duty.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The report raises no direct financial implications. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), the Council has a statutory obligation to make sure all decisions have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswold National Landscape.
- 6.2** In parallel with all other local authorities within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) the Council pays an annual subscription (2024-25 this was £11,453.40) to CNL to enable its functioning as the organisation with responsibility for conserving and enhancing this protected landscape within West Oxfordshire, and across the landscape as a whole, thereby fulfilling the Council's statutory obligation.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The report raises no direct legal implications.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1** The report presents no significant risks.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1** The report raises no particular issue in terms of the Equalities Act 2010 or the public sector equality duty.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** The climate and ecological emergencies form a central component of the CNL Management Plan.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1** None.