



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 13 SEPTEMBER 2023
Subject	ENDORSEMENT OF COTSWOLD NATIONAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-2025
Wards Affected	All wards within the Cotswolds National Landscape and its setting
Accountable Member	Councillor Carl Rylett – Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Janice Bamsey, Principal Planning Policy Officer Email: janice.bamsey@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To seek the Council's endorsement of the Cotswolds National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - AONB) Management Plan 2023 – 2025, produced by the Cotswolds National Landscape Board.
Annexes	Annex A – Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025
Recommendations	<p><i>That the Executive Resolves to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><i>1. Endorse the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023–2025 for use as:</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Part of the evidence base for the review of the Local Plan;</i>• <i>Part of the evidence base for the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans;</i>• <i>Part of the evidence base for the preparation and implementation of relevant Council strategies, policies and projects;</i>• <i>As a material consideration in the determination of planning applications; and to inform the development and delivery of the Council's services and activities.</i>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All • Creating 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/ Consultation	The Cotswolds National Landscape Board (Cotswolds Conservation Board) have undertaken extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including West Oxfordshire District Council, in the preparation of the management plan.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Cotswolds was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1966 in recognition of the national importance of its rich, diverse and high quality landscape. About a third of West Oxfordshire lies within the Cotswolds AONB - now known as the Cotswolds National Landscape.
- 1.2** The Cotswolds National Landscape Board (an independent statutory body, working in partnership with a wide range of other organisations) is responsible for preparing and publishing a management plan for the Cotswolds National Landscape, and reviewing it at intervals of no more than five years. In February 2023, the Board adopted the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023–2025¹, following a review of the 2018-2023 Management Plan and extensive consultation (including with this Council).
- 1.3** Although the Board will play an important role in the delivery of the Management Plan, its successful delivery is also dependent on a wide range of stakeholders. As the Plan's vision and policies are intended to guide the work of stakeholders, such as the Council, each local authority within the Cotswolds has now been asked to endorse the new Management Plan.

2. WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2031

- 2.1** Our current adopted local plan contains a policy – Policy EH1 - giving great weight to the conservation and enhancement of the Cotswolds' natural beauty, landscape and countryside, including its wildlife and heritage. The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan is specifically identified as a material consideration in decision making relevant to the AONB.
- 2.2** The approved Management Plan in operation at the time of the adoption of the Local Plan 2031(2013-2018) was endorsed by the District Council as supplementary guidance.
- 2.3** The subsequent Management Plan, covering the period 2018-2023, was also endorsed, except for those aspects that related to: the promotion of the Cotswolds as the Walking and Exploring Capital of England; and the promotion of the Cotswolds as England's next National Park.
- 2.4** Other documents and advice produced by the Cotswolds Board, including the Landscape Character Assessment, Strategy and Guidelines and Position Statements, are also material considerations which are taken into account when making planning decisions.

3. NEW MANAGEMENT PLAN 2023-2025

- 3.1** The new Management Plan runs for two years rather than the usual five. This is in anticipation of significant national and local policy developments for protected landscapes, especially in relation to climate action and the implementation of the Glover review on protected landscapes. During the two-year span of this interim plan, the Board intends to develop the evidence and data to build in meaningful targets towards net zero in the next plan.

¹ <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/planning/cotswolds-aonb-management-plan/>

3.2 The Management Plan sets out a clear vision (in Chapter 2) for the Cotswolds, underpinned by three key issues: the climate emergency; nature's decline and the ecological crisis; and health and societal change. From the vision and these key issues, a series of policies have been developed.

3.3 The policies are set out under three cross-cutting themes, together with two additional themes:

Cross-cutting: Climate change – mitigation and adaptation

Natural and cultural capital

Working together

Other: Conserving and enhancing – influencing and delivering for landscape, nature and the climate

Increasing understanding and enjoyment – ensuring access, learning and wellbeing opportunities for everyone

3.4 These themes reflect the topics and issues raised last year as part of our work on the review of both the Council Plan and the Local Plan. There may not, however, be complete alignment between the Management Plan and local authority plans. The Chief Executive of the Cotswolds National Landscape recognises this and stresses that endorsement of the Management Plan does not require full alignment.

3.5 The Cotswolds National Landscape Chief Executive explains it is intended that the Management Plan will help inform the development of future plans and so it is, to a certain extent, aspirational in nature. He highlights page 13 of the Plan which addresses this particular point and gives reassurance to local planning authorities where there is not alignment that their adopted policies will not be over-ridden:

“One of the areas which the Management Plan policies relate to is in the policy-making and decision-taking of local planning authorities (LPAs). For example, it is hoped that LPAs will have regard to the Management Plan policies when reviewing and developing their own policies, including those within their development plans. The Management Plan policies are aspirational and as such, they might go further than current policies in individual development plans. It is intended that these aspirational policies will aid in helping to develop and evidence new local plan policies.

The Management Plan should be a material consideration in planning decisions. However, it is recognised that planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the LPA's development plan (unless material considerations indicate otherwise)”.

3.6 The new interim Management Plan, and the review work to be undertaken over the next two years, will provide a useful resource for consideration as part of the work on the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041. The Board's emphasis on the need for all stakeholders to work

together and to deliver on the issues prioritised by the Government² (such as nature recovery and access to nature and the countryside) reflects our emerging approach.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The District Council could choose not to endorse the Management Plan. This may have implications for meeting our duty, under the CROW Act s.85, with regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape. There would also be potential confusion with the current policy wording of the Local Plan.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The report raises no direct legal implications.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The report presents no significant risks.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1 No specific issues identified.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Management Plan places considerable emphasis on the climate and ecological emergencies. Endorsement of the Plan will assist in addressing these.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None.

(END)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response>