



# Northumberland County Council

CABINET

DATE: 06 AUGUST 2019

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## **NORTH PENNINES AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019-24**

**Report of:** Rob Murfin, Director of Planning

**Cabinet Member:** Cllr John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing & Resilience

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### **Purpose of report**

To consider formal adoption of the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2019-24.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the draft Management Plan is adopted by Northumberland County Council as the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan for 2019-24.

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

Adoption and implementation of the North Pennines AONB Management Plan will contribute to the achievement of the aim of the 'Places and Environment' section of the NCC Corporate Plan, which is to *'maintain and further improve the quality of our towns, villages and countryside, and make it easier for residents to access services and high quality, affordable homes and to travel using different modes of transport'*.

### **Key issues**

1. The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally important protected landscape, covering 1983km<sup>2</sup> of some of the most remote landscape in England. It is important for its high landscape value, its internationally important biodiversity (including blanket bog, upland heath, hay meadows and heavy-metal rich grasslands), its geology (it was the first place in Britain to be awarded the status of European Geopark) and its historic environment (including

- nationally important lead mining landscapes and important prehistoric and Roman remains).
2. Local Authorities have a duty, under Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to prepare a Management Plan for all AONBs within their area and to review these at least once every five years. The statutory purpose of the Management Plan is to formulate the local authority's policy for the management of the AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.
  3. There are many areas of the Council's work which have the potential to affect the special qualities of the North Pennines AONB. Planning policy and development management decisions control the nature of new development which can affect the landscape, natural or historic environment of the area. Similarly, highways works can affect the quality of streetscapes and the rural roads and rights of way network. Tourism is essential to the local economy, and developing tourism in ways that do not harm the special features of the area is a particular challenge. All of these themes are addressed in the Plan.
  4. The Management Plan describes the special qualities of the AONB and some of the issues facing them, sets the Vision for the AONB and includes a work plan with objectives and actions that need to be undertaken to achieve effective implementation of the Plan.
  5. The current Management Plan runs until 2019, and so a new Plan has been drafted to run for the succeeding five years to April 2024.
  6. Adoption and implementation of the Management Plan will enable all Council services to undertake their activities in the AONB in a manner that is consistent with the Council's statutory duties concerning its conservation and enhancement. It will also enable opportunities for economic development in the area such as growing the tourism economy to be achieved in a sustainable manner that is consistent with these duties.

## **Background**

1. Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a statutory designation established by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and given further impetus by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Together with National Parks, AONBs represent the nation's finest landscapes, and the primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. There are 34 AONBs in England, covering 14% of the country. The North Pennines AONB was designated in 1988. It covers an area of 1,983 square km of remote and unspoilt landscape; it is the second largest AONB in England. The AONB straddles the North East and North West of England and lies mostly within the boundaries of five local authorities: the three counties of Northumberland, Durham and Cumbria and the districts of Carlisle and Eden.
2. S.89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 imposes a duty on all local authorities whose area includes land designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to prepare a Management Plan for the AONB and to review this at least once every five years. The statutory purpose of an AONB Management Plan is to formulate the local authority's policy for the management of the AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it.
3. In common with all public bodies, local authorities have legal duties to have regard to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of AONBs. Guidance provided by Natural England states that 'natural beauty is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape

features and the rich history of human settlement over centuries’. Therefore the ‘natural beauty’ of the North Pennines AONB is best expressed as the special qualities of the landscape, embracing all of these elements. These special qualities are set out in Part One of the Management Plan and form the focus of the policies set out in the Plan.

4. Other more detailed policy documents have previously been produced by the AONB Partnership; the North Pennines Planning Guidelines and the North Pennines Building Design Guide provide greater detail to help guide development in, or having an impact upon, the AONB; these are adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents in Eden and Carlisle, and are material considerations in the planning system in Durham and Northumberland.
5. The Plan starts with a Vision looking ahead to 2030. To achieve this Vision, a range of indicative actions and desired outcomes are set out. These are summarised most effectively in the diagram on page 58 of the Plan.
6. The Plan also identifies the Top Ten Conservation Priorities for the AONB during the next five years. These are: peatland; species-rich grassland; native and mixed woodland and scrub; rivers and riparian habitat; breeding wading birds; arctic-alpine flora; dark night skies; specific species conservation, including raptors; archaeological sites and features; historic buildings and structures.
7. Broadly the Management Plan has the following desired outcomes: there is a more resilient landscape, richer in wildlife; natural and cultural heritage assets are maintained in good condition; natural and cultural assets are valued for their own sake and for all they provide for us; communities have a strong sense of place and people share their heritage with others; well managed heritage supports sustainable tourism and safeguards local services.
8. Examples of some of the actions/projects referred to in the North Pennines AONB Management Plan include: ensure conservation of the special truly dark night skies in the North Pennines; deliver a results-based outcome-focussed approach to agri-environment payments; continue restoration of peatlands; build community capacity to take a lead on conserving and celebrating natural and cultural heritage; promote activities which encourage overnight stays and improve the profile of the North Pennines as a destination, including building the UNESCO Global Geopark brand; support development of new walking and cycling products linked to public transport hubs.

### **Implications**

<b>Policy</b>	The statutory purpose of an AONB Management Plan is to formulate the local authority’s policy for the management of the AONB and for the carrying out of the authority’s functions in relation to it.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Management plan implementation is led and facilitated by the AONB Staff Team, which is funded jointly by DEFRA (75%) and the five local authorities. NCC currently contributes £22,660 per annum to the AONB Partnership, for which there is provision within the existing budget. The Staff Team is employed by Durham County Council as the accountable body.
<b>Legal</b>	S.89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 imposes a duty on all local authorities whose area includes land designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to prepare a

	Management Plan for the AONB and to review this at least once every five years. Adoption of the Management Plan will fulfil this legal duty.
<b>Procurement</b>	None
<b>Human Resources</b>	The new Management Plan will not create a need for additional human resources.
<b>Property</b>	The new Management Plan will not have any new implications for property.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A /	The new Management Plan does not have significant implications for any protected groups and so an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	Reviewing an AONB Management Plan at least every five years is a legal requirement for the Council, and so adoption of the Plan will mitigate the risk of legal challenge
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	None
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	None
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Adoption of the Management Plan will assist in carbon reduction in a number of ways. Implementation of the Plan will promote the restoration, creation and management of habitats such as peatlands and new native woodland that remove and store carbon from atmospheric sources. The Plan will promote reduction of emissions through increased use of public transport other more environmentally friendly forms of transport, such as electric bikes.
<b>Wards</b>	Haltwhistle, Haydon and Hadrian, South Tynedale

**Background papers:**

A copy of the Management Plan is available on-line at

<http://www.northpennines.org.uk/management-plan-review-2019-to-2024/>

**Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

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