



COMMITTEE: CABINET

DATE: 9 JUNE 2020

**TITLE OF REPORT: NORTHUMBERLAND COAST AREA OF
OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN 2020-24**

Report of: Rob Murfin, Director of Planning

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

Purpose of report

To consider formal adoption of the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2020-24.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the draft Management Plan is adopted by Northumberland County Council as the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan for 2020-24.

Link to Corporate Plan

Adoption and implementation of the Northumberland Coast 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 Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a nationally important protected landscape, which covers an area of 138 square km along 64km of coastline from just south of Berwick-upon-Tweed to the Coquet Estuary. The AONB is only 2.5km wide at its widest point, and yet it contains a tremendous variety of features of natural, historical and cultural value. The area is best known for its sweeping sandy beaches, rolling dunes, rocky headlands and isolated islands. Amid this striking land and seascape is abundant evidence of 7000 years of human activity, conflict and spiritual pursuit, while a host of national and international nature conservation designations attest to the great variety of important habitats and species in the AONB.
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 Northumberland Coast 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 2020, and so a new Plan has been drafted to run for the succeeding four 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.
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 Northumberland Coast 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. The Plan starts with a Vision looking ahead to 2040 and a series of four aims:
 - Aim 1: To ensure that the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB are conserved and enhanced

- Aim 2: To ensure that the communities in and around the AONB are thriving places to live and work
 - Aim 3: The designation of ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ and the special qualities of the Area are understood and valued for their contribution to life in the wider region and are seen as being worthy of protection
 - Aim 4: The AONB provides a high quality, clean environment that is welcoming and accessible to all
5. Under each aim are a series of objectives with policies, and then priority actions. These will shape the annual work plan of the AONB staff unit and also the work of the wider partnership.

Implications

Policy	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.
Finance and value for money	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 £33,700 per annum to the AONB Partnership, for which there is provision within the existing budget.
Legal	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.
Procurement	None
Human Resources	The new Management Plan will not create a need for additional human resources.
Property	The new Management Plan will not have any new implications for property.
Equalities (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.
Risk Assessment	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
Crime & Disorder	None

Customer Consideration	None
Carbon reduction	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.
Wards	Berwick West with Ord, Norham and Islandshires, Bamburgh, Longhoughton, Alnwick and Amble West with Warkworth

Background papers:

A copy of the Management Plan is available [here](#).

Report sign off.

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

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