



**Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural
Beauty
Management Plan
2014 - 2019**

**Strategic Environmental Assessment – Post
Adoption Statement
April 2014**

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CHILTERNs AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT – POST ADOPTION STATEMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This document is the Post Adoption SEA Statement for the Chilterns AONB Management Plan. It has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 16(4) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 1.1.2 Although the AONB Management Plan deals with environmental issues the SEA process has still proved beneficial in terms of balancing a wide spectrum of often conflicting environmental and social issues, highlighting potential conflicts and seeking to find resolutions to these conflicts. For example, there is a requirement to balance the needs of landscape character whilst tackling climate change. This report provides an account of how all aspects of the environment and sustainability have been embedded in the Management Plan and the requirements of the SEA Directive have been met.
- 1.1.3 The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 was adopted by the Chilterns Conservation Board on the 25th March 2014.
- 1.1.4 Part 4 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CRoW Act) created a statutory responsibility for local authorities and conservation boards to produce AONB management plans and to then review adopted and published plans at intervals of not more than five years.
- 1.1.5 The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2008-2013 was adopted in 2008, and has been reviewed in accordance with the requirements of Section 89(5) of the CRoW Act 2000 and 'Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans' (Countryside Agency, August 2006).
- 1.1.6 The statutory AONB Management Plan is a way of bringing innovation and excellence through best practice to a complex geographical area when considered in terms of local governance. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan acts as a guide for local authorities, statutory agencies and people who live and work in the Chilterns. It seeks to provide cohesion between the various bodies that impact on the AONB. The Chilterns AONB is covered by a complex local government system which makes delivering the plan far more challenging.

1.2 The Chilterns AONB

- 1.2.1 The Chilterns AONB extends as a continuous area between Reading, at its south-western end, and Luton, and as a separate, detached block between Luton and Hitchin at its north-eastern extremity. It encompasses the most scenically attractive parts of the chalk escarpment, its rolling foothills and the heavily wooded south-east facing dip slope. The AONB covers an area of 833 sq. kms (324 sq. miles) and includes parts of 13 local authority areas – three County Councils, two Unitary Authorities and eight District and Borough Councils.

1.3 The Management Plan and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- 1.3.1 SEA is a statutory assessment process under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (the SEA Regulations, Statutory Instrument 2004, No 1633) which require formal SEA of plans and programmes likely to have significant effects on the environment whose preparation began on or after 21st July 2004. The approach for carrying out the SEA of the Management Plan 2008 is based on current best practice and the *Practical Guide to the SEA Directive*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (September 2005). Requirements of the SEA Directive are clearly signposted throughout this report.
- 1.3.2 The assessment has been undertaken by the Chilterns Conservation Board in order to fully integrate the SEA with the production of the Management Plan.
- 1.3.3 The post adoption statement is the final output of the SEA process. Its main purpose is to demonstrate how the comments and recommendations made by the Environmental Report have been taken into consideration. The post adoption statement also needs to explain how consultation comments have been integrated into the SEA process. Additionally monitoring measures proposed in the Environmental Report need to be confirmed or modified in light of the consultation process.

2. Integration of environmental considerations

- 2.1 The Chilterns Conservation Board has been committed to achieving environmental and social sustainability from the start of the Management Plan preparation process and the Management Plan went through numerous iterations and extensive consultation and revision. Many rounds of assessments took place which helped highlight environmental effects and guide more sustainable Broad Aims and Policies in the next round of drafting. All of these assessments are documented in the Environmental Report Post Consultation Statement and in previous consultation and internal versions of the Environmental Report which are available from the Board on request.
- 2.2 It is clear that the plan has been very successful in integrating and balancing differing and often conflicting environmental objectives and effects. It also demonstrates the inherent self-regulatory nature of the plan in ensuring that during implementation one policy does not conflict with another.
- 2.3 Throughout the development of the plan the SEA process has enabled a number of specific improvements to be made to the plan. In addition it has had an overall role in improving the robustness of the plan. It has also enabled the Board and others to focus attention on the environment and sustainability and specific issues raised in the baseline and scoping phase.
- 2.4 In summary the Management Plan scores very highly in terms of environmental and social sustainability.

3. Integration of consultation responses

- 3.1 Consultation is integral to the SEA process and the Chilterns Conservation Board has undertaken extensive consultation throughout the Management Plan preparation process. This section details the consultation activities undertaken for the SEA process, and describes how consultation comments on both the Scoping Report and Environmental Report informed the Management Plan.
- 3.2 A six week consultation was undertaken at the SEA scoping stage (May to June 2013) with the statutory consultees (Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage) and other key stakeholders. In line with best practice and the Board's desire to be as inclusive as possible, a wide variety of stakeholders were consulted.
- 3.3 Scoping report responses were received from:
- Natural England
 - English Heritage
 - Environment Agency
 - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Central Bedfordshire Council
 - Luton Borough Council
 - Milton Keynes Council
 - Aylesbury Vale District Council
 - Chiltern District Council
 - Dacorum Borough Council
 - South Buckinghamshire District Council
 - South Oxfordshire District Council
 - Wycombe District Council
 - Bradenham Parish Council
 - Chesham Town Council
 - Downley Parish Council
 - Hambleden Parish Council
 - Harlington Parish Council
 - Henley Town Council
 - Ibstone Parish Council
 - Radnage Parish Council
 - Sonning Common Parish Council

- Stokenchurch Parish Council
 - Tring Town Council
 - Turville Parish Council
 - Wendover Parish Council
 - West Wycombe Parish Council
 - Wigginton Parish Council
 - Woodcote Parish Council
 - NFU
 - National Trust
 - RSPB
 - A small number of local residents
- 3.4 The consultation responses to the scoping report can be found in Annex A of the Environmental Report.
- 3.5 The Management Plan and SEA have been developed in close consultation with key stakeholders. As a result many alternatives have been considered and the Broad Aims, Policies and Actions have gone through numerous iterations before being included as drafted in the version of the Management Plan that was consulted on. In addition to the formal consultation process for the draft Management Plan and the Environmental Report a lot of effort was put into working with stakeholders to ensure that the Management Plan is as robust as possible. Task group meetings were held with key stakeholders on the key issues included in the 2008-2013 Management Plan in order to identify emerging issues and to gather opinion on the direction that the reviewed Management Plan should take. This formed the basis for development of the Broad Aims and Policy options.
- 3.6 As each phase of Broad Aims and Policy options were developed an SEA was undertaken for each of them. The findings of this assessment were then considered by officers and the Board's Management Plan working group who then made amendments to the Broad Aims and Policy options in light of this assessment. Adjustments were then made to the SEA to reflect these changes. The draft Plan and the accompanying SEA were then published for a 12 week consultation process (from 27th September to 20th December 2013) with key stakeholders and also the public via the Board's website. Following consultation, comments were taken on board and the Broad Aims and Policies were revised and the accompanying SEA amended. Consultation comments and the amendments made in light of these comments have been recorded as part of the process of producing the Management Plan as well, and can be obtained from the Conservation Board.
- 3.7 Earlier versions of the Management Plan and accompanying SEA from these consultations are available from the Board. Following public consultation the

Management Plan was not fundamentally altered. However, care was taken to ensure that the recommendations made in the SEA assessments had been taken on board where possible. Responses from this consultation have also been considered and changes to the Final Management Plan were made which are reflected in the Environmental Report.

Table 1 Consultation timetable

<i>Publication</i>	<i>Consultees</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Scoping Report	Consultation with statutory consultation bodies, partner organisations and the public	May to June 2013
Draft Environmental Report	Consultation with statutory consultation bodies, partner organisations and the public in tandem with the publication of the draft AONB Management Plan.	September to December 2013
Post adoption statement produced	No consultation required. The statement describes how consultation comments have been fed into the final Management Plan	April 2014

4. Reasons for choosing the Management Plan as adopted

- 4.1 The consideration and assessment of different alternatives and subsequent consultation processes undertaken during the SEA influenced the shape of the Management Plan. In response to these assessments and public consultation feedback the draft Management Plan was revised in a number of ways to strengthen and clarify policy. The Board considers that the adopted Management Plan strikes a balance between all environmental needs and the success of the Management Plan. Where there is the potential for policies or actions individually to cause negative effects these have been mitigated by other policies within the Management Plan. It is intended that the final Management Plan as adopted will make a significant contribution to advancing all aspects of the environment.
- 4.2 The Board considers that the SEA process has been of significant help in developing and strengthening a balanced Management Plan that promotes and protects all aspects of the AONB's environment. The SEA, along with the Board's demonstrated and ongoing commitment to the environment, will ensure that the AONB will emerge as a leader in Sustainable Development, benefiting both the environment and people living and working in the Chilterns.

5. Monitoring

- 5.1 The purpose of monitoring is to measure the environmental effects of a plan, as well as to measure success against the plan's aims and policies. It is therefore beneficial if the monitoring strategy builds on monitoring systems which are already in place. It is also recognised that the monitoring requirements typically associated with the SEA process are recognised as placing heavy demands on authorities with SEA responsibilities. For this reason, wherever possible existing indicators and data sets that are being routinely collected have been used. The Chilterns Conservation Board has particular problems in gathering data and undertaking monitoring because of its size and complexity, and given that its boundaries intersect other political and planning boundaries. Therefore, whilst sharing data with the Local Authorities that make up the AONB is possible, it is unlikely that a true picture of the environment within the AONB will be achieved without some further data manipulation, either by aggregation or disaggregation.
- 5.2 However, monitoring is particularly useful in answering the following questions:
- Were the assessment's predictions of environmental effects accurate?
 - Is the plan contributing to the achievement of desired environmental objectives?
 - Are mitigation measures performing as well as expected?
 - Are there any unforeseen adverse effects? Are these within acceptable limits, or is remedial action required?
- 5.3 Monitoring can also provide useful information for future plans and programmes. The Board is required to ensure that monitoring information is appropriate to their needs and is up to date and reliable, and that sources of information are referenced. Moreover, the Board will need to decide in advance any action that is required to correct unforeseen effects that are highlighted by monitoring results, i.e. this will trigger an alternative course of action or new mitigating measure.
- 5.4 The monitoring proposals have also identified any data gaps that exist so that consideration might be given to how these could be addressed in the longer term.
- 5.5 Monitoring reports will be published annually as new information becomes available.