

# SCOPING REPORT

## Arnside/Silverdale AONB Management Plan

*This report relates to the review of the Arnside and Silverdale AONB Management Plan. It sets out the way in which we intend to assess and consider the review of the existing Management Plan.*

### **Background to the Management Plan Review**

AONB Management Plans are statutory plans whose purpose is to provide a framework document for ensuring delivery of the statutory purpose of AONBs, that of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of their designated landscapes. This function of the Management Plan is not a static one, it must respond appropriately to new challenges (such as climate change) or to changing political and regulatory conditions (for example, in agricultural funding). The plan's focus, however, remains on the primary purpose of conserving the qualities of the designated areas.

The legislation which set out the requirement for AONB Management Plans also made it a legal requirement for those plans to be reviewed at least every 5 years. Lessons from the development of previous Management Plans nationally suggests that the Plans should have been more aspirational, and more spatially explicit about their outcomes. They should be clearer about how they add value to existing plans and strategies; and that they should be more responsive to new issues. The 2004-2009 Arnside and Silverdale AONB Management Plan was highly regarded and several parts of it were identified as representing good practice. The focus of guidance on the review process therefore reflects this and the current review is therefore likely to focus on the areas and issues that were omitted or have increased in importance since the present plan was written.

The existing Management Plan includes statements regarding the significance of the designation, the special qualities, the notable habitats and landscapes, which sets out the high qualities and special character of the area, and twenty-year vision based around retaining the AONB's sense of distinctiveness, sympathetic use of resources, and effective management and partnership. This will be replicated within the reviewed Plan, although some amendment of content will be likely with some sections requiring considerable updating and revision.

The plan is guided by a number of objectives, which are constructed around broad themes, each of which has a specific vision of the AONB in twenty years time. Additionally there is a cross-cutting Overall Vision for the AONB, which is the philosophical foundation on which much of the plan rests. The ten main themes are set out below in table one. Alongside the eight themes carried over from the 2004-2009 Management Plan, two new themes have been added, which the review process has to consider;

- Sustainability / Renewable Energy
- the Seascape / Coastal Management.

These were identified some time ago, prior to establishing the current review. The first resulted in the adoption of an AONB Statement on Renewable Energy in 2005 and the second, the preparation of a report on Coastal Management during the early part of 2007.

In addition to these changes (and changing the order of the visions, to include the Marine Vision immediately after that considering the terrestrial landscape), it has been suggested that only a relatively small number of other changes and modifications should be considered. Such changes will mostly concern updating legal and factual information from the original plan and improving content regarding the issues that have taken on new emphasis over the intervening time.

<b>Table One</b>	<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Summary of changes to Vision statements</b>	<b>Status</b>
	Landscape and Rural Land Management	Carried forward with several changes	Amended
	Seascape and Coastal Management	Based on Coastal Management paper 2007 and significant amends made by Review sub-group	New theme ----- amended
	Natural Heritage	Carried forward with several changes	Amended
	Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage	Carried forward with minor changes	Maintained
	Communities – People, Jobs and Services	Re-worded with significant changes	Amended
	Access, Recreation and Enjoyment	Carried forward with minor changes	Maintained
	Built Environment – Residential and other development	Carried forward - some text removed	Amended
	Travel and Transport	Carried forward with minor changes	Maintained
	Environmental Education and Awareness	Re-worded with significant changes	Amended
	Sustainability and Renewable Energy Generation	Partly based on A/SAONB Statement on renewable energy 2005 -significant amends made by Review sub-group	New theme - ----- amended

### ***Current progress on the Management Plan Review***

Initial work has suggested that the current structure is reasonably robust and there is little need to repeat the very extensive public consultation which underpinned the development of the 2004-2009 Management Plan. Where the existing plan is more general in nature rather than explicit about its priorities and outcomes for the period some general improvements should also be possible, without producing an entirely new Management Plan.

The current Plan and its associated Action Plan were produced as a single document and reproducing this following the review would be expensive. It has therefore been agreed by the AONB Executive (meeting in November 07) that the Management Plan and the Action Plan that results from this review should be produced as two separate documents. Additionally it is proposed that the action plan will be principally available as an electronic disc or web-based document rather than hard copy. The Plan and a summary will be produced in both printed form and as electronic copies.

The AONB Executive first considered the visions during their meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007, where there were a number of issues raised which indicated some limited scale amendments were required to the existing visions and to the two proposed new visions. Consequently the AONB Service redrafted all the vision statements; on the whole making minor changes that retained the spirit of the earlier statements largely unchanged. This limited re-writing was then considered by both the Review Working Groups and the Executive then given an opportunity to ratify the proposed changes.

The next steps are to undertake a similar examination of the Issues and the Objectives contained in the original Management Plan. Examination of the Forces for Change associated with each theme will be undertaken by the Officers Review Group with their recommendations subject to agreement by the Executive. This is regarded as expedient given that this matter is one best judged by professional staff.

Each of these stages will be open to widespread comment by all interested parties, partly through circulation of review documents, but more widely using web-based consultation and information distribution.

### **Management Plan Review Priorities:**

The process of review is intentionally an iterative one, with each stage of the review generating another subsequent stage, until a consensus is achieved. In order to complete the review within a reasonable timescale and ensure that it is effective and does not make too intensive a demand on available resources it is necessary to look at specific areas of the current Management Plan in separate, well-understood divisions.

Therefore because of the over-arching nature of the Vision statements, which truly establish the scope and ambition of the Management Plan, it is apparent that close scrutiny of the visions is the necessary first step of the review process, in order to set the scale and scope of the review in overall terms. Table Two sets out the proposed programme of review, giving as far as possible an indication of what stage will be completed within specific timescales. The process is already well established and much work has already been undertaken. It is important to note that the deadline of March 2009 for delivery of the review and any revised Management Plan is set and not negotiable.

<b>Table Two. Review Stage</b>	<b>Timetable</b>	<b>Status</b>
Issue statutory notice regarding the Review	25 <sup>th</sup> July 2007	completed
Review and amend Vision Statements	July 07 - January 08	with Exec
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) – Scoping Report and consultation	July 07 - December 07	Out to official consultation
Natura 2000 sites Appropriate Assessment process	October 07 to January 09	On going
Examine/amend Issues associated with Themes	November 07 - January 08	with review groups
Executive's decision on extent of review	23 <sup>rd</sup> January 2008	pending
Examine & amend "Forces for Change" for Themes	December 07 - March 08	first re-drafts
Examine & amend Objectives related to each Issue	January 08 - March 08	first re-drafts
Assessment & amendment of Issues /Objectives against SEA Objectives	March 08 - April 08	not started
Web-based consultation on all above stages	January 08 - June 08	pending
Review Context Report and drafts of Environmental Report & Management Plan presented	June 08	not started
Assessment & amendment of reviewed plan against SEA Objectives and Environmental report	June 08	not started
Consultation (informal official and public)	June - July 08	not started
Assessment of consultation outcomes and any amendment of reviewed/revised plan tested against SEA Objectives & Environmental report	August 08	not started
Draft version of reviewed/revised plan	Early September 08	not started
Consultation (formal official and public)	September - November 08	not started
Assessment of consultation outcomes and Final Management Plan to Local Authorities for adoption	December 2008	not started
Statement published on Environmental Report findings influenced Plan Review	January 2009	not started
Presentation to Ministers/Defra of approved plan	March 2009	not started

## ***Issues relevant to the Management Plan Review***

When considering this report, the partnership bodies are asked to concentrate on the issues which the review will cover. In this section of the report we have set out *in italics* how these issues will be considered.

**Climate change:** In the long-term climate change will have substantial effects on the AONB, both in terms of possible consequences (e.g. through habitat changes, coastal erosion and sea level rise) and possible actions developed in mitigation or for adaptation to the impacts experienced (e.g. renewable energy and habitat management). Over the five year lifetime of the revised plan (2009 –2014), the actual consequences are unlikely to be significant – with a possible exception being the frequency of storm events – however over the term covered by the vision, greater changes are likely and will need to be accommodated and adapted to.

*Mitigation measures will focus on the contribution that the AONB can make to carbon-sinks and renewable energy resources in the AONB and surrounding areas. The pressures for positive action by all will increase as attention focuses on the delivery of emissions reduction targets. The review will need to consider the potential opportunities within the AONB (for example, woodland coppicing, wood-fuel supplies, maintenance/re-wetting of peat mosses), impacts on landscape character, and needs in terms of fuel poverty, and business adaptation. Adaptation measures will focus on coastal issues, planned re-alignment, habitat creation, eco-system network linkage and re-assessment of management for transitional habitats. Potential sites for planned coastal retreat exist on land between the railway line and embankment at Quaker Stang and also at New Barns.*

**Spatial and Development Planning:** Planning in the AONB has a significant role in identifying areas for renewable technologies, meeting needs for affordable housing, and supporting business and farm diversification.

*Responsibilities for planning have changed considerably since the first Management Plan was produced, such that the role of the County Councils has declined, and greater importance is now placed on District plans (Local Development Frameworks).*

*Within the forthcoming Marine Bill there may well be a Coastal/Marine Planning initiative, of which we will have to take due regard, anticipating the likely outcomes, if and when the bill becomes law.*

**Communities – Quality of Life:** Much work has been conducted on quality of life & welfare in rural areas. This includes such matters as accessibility to key services, fuel poverty and other matters for which local authorities have a variety of responsibilities. However, there are also other matters, such as emergency response management, access to hospitals, tourism impacts and leisure provision, which are particular concerns within rural areas and they also equally affect the communities of the AONB.

*In many cases these issues are subject to other strategies and work will be needed to identify relationships and ensure contradictions are avoided. Partnership working / 'buy in'. The main context for the Management Plan has to be on how Communities can act to help deliver the statutory purpose of designation, recognising that there are some aspects of Community life that the AONB has little direct impact upon.*

**Governance:** There are a number of national strategies (including several Government White Papers) aimed at devolving local decision-making and strengthening community involvement.

*This part of the review will examine opportunities where local involvement could contribute to the decision and policy making functions of the AONB Executive and Partnership. This will also help inform other parts of the review looking at levels of responsibility among the AONB Partnership 'buy in' etc.*

**Heritage features:** Heritage features in the AONB range from distinctive examples of vernacular building traditions to features of industrial archaeology (e.g. lime kilns, and quarry workings), and isolated ancient monuments. Together with other features of the countryside, particularly field boundaries and woodlands, these combine to form special 'historic' landscapes, which make a significant contribution to the character of the AONB.

*The review should consider the extent to which the Management Plan reduces pressures on exposed archaeology, maximising opportunities to promote cultural heritage within the AONB and identifying what management of inter-tidal environments can be reasonably deployed regarding eroding archaeology within the Bay. It will also need to consider ways of protecting traditional buildings from unsympathetic modernisation, conversion and re-use. To a certain extent these issues cut across other topics (e.g. tourism and planning).*

**Farming and land management:** Farming and land management remain very significant to the future of the AONB and will be subject to considerable debate during the Management Plan review as a whole. However, within this are a number of significant priorities which the appraisal will consider. In particular, these include surface run-off drainage into sensitive wetlands and the consequences of farm diversification on demand for modern farm buildings.

*Within Lancashire it has been proposed to establish a biodiversity framework, which would identify networks of special environments across the County and map ways to protect these from pressures such as climate change. There are other networks being developed, particularly concerning wetlands, (crossing the County boundary) which are highly relevant to the AONB. The review provides an opportunity to establish sites that will form part of these developing networks/frameworks within the area. It will also need to take seriously the continuing habitat loss, particularly of limestone grasslands to scrub woodland.*

**Tourism:** Since the 2004-2009 Management Plan was adopted, a ‘Sustainable Tourism Strategy’ has been established for the AONB. The review will need to take a broad view of this in relation to issues identified elsewhere in the review process. In the main, the effects of tourism (positive and negative) will manifest through other topics, where these consequences will be considered.

*There are many effects on other Themes of the Plan, which Tourism heavily impacts upon – such as Transport and Travel, Access and Recreation,*

**Accessibility:** Accessibility has become a greater priority, particularly within the context of National Strategies such as “Outdoors for All” and Diversity, recently published in draft form by Defra, all the local authorities and many of the other partner organisations now have strategies or are undertaking specific projects to “mainstream” accessibility into their work. Ensuring delivery of the recently published Rights of Way Improvement Plans by the two Access Authorities with responsibilities in the AONB should also become an objective of the revised Plan.

*The review will look at how these priorities can be reflected in the Management Plan, and proposals are likely to come forward which will need to be assessed in terms of their possible impacts (footpath upgrades, barrier reduction, path erosion, wildlife disturbance and accessibility to local services.) Diversity and inclusion objectives will also need thorough consideration within the revision process.*

## **Forces for Change relevant to the Management Plan Review**

### Climate change

There is only very limited information on the likely **local** effects of climate change and few well-developed predictions. Within the lifetime of the Management Plan the effects may be very small and probably within the limits of natural variability. However within the period covered by the Vision Statements, the environmental impacts are likely to involve habitat changes, water resource constraints, increased storm effects, more frequent drought conditions, measurable sea level rise and increased soil and river erosion. The cumulative effects of infrastructure provision for renewable energy supplies (e.g. wind turbines, photovoltaic arrays etc) and bio-mass/biofuels crop production could also be significant.

### Historic environment and landscape quality

The expansion of modern farm buildings, conversions of traditional farm buildings, car parking and road improvements and “urbanising” infrastructure all have had marked impacts on the landscape and historic character of the area, and are likely to continue. The increasing influence of market forces on agricultural production will also be likely to drive landscape scale change in and around the AONB.

### Local Quality of life and demographics

The local quality of life (based on indices of health, traffic accidents, housing quality, crime figures, etc.) is generally good in the area, when compared with some other parts of Cumbria and Lancashire. However great care is needed to interpret such information as standard measures of environmental quality are designed for urban environments, whereas many rural issues although related are materially different.

Population demographics within the AONB are different from the regional and national averages, particularly with regard to young people and retired populations. Census Data is not available cut to AONB boundary and therefore approximations are necessary based on data for the whole of each of the Six parishes, only two of which are entirely within the AONB.

### Biodiversity

While the AONB is a very bio-diverse area, there are many problems with woodland and grassland management (partly due to lack of stock grazing) and the declining condition of species rich hedgerows. Some species will become marginalised by changes to the local environment driven by agricultural change, climate change and small scale localised activities. It is also likely that some other species may benefit from these changes, although introductions and aliens may be greater beneficiaries rather than native species.

### Transport and the economy

The northwest sees more journeys by private car than the average for England as a whole, whilst in some districts the percentage of households without access to private transport is higher than the national average. Private car ownership in rural parts of Lancashire and Cumbria has increased, although access to services by those reliant on public transport is significantly limited either geographically or temporally or both. Travel costs are high and likely to continue the increasing trend experienced in the recent past.

### Community participation

The number of community-led initiatives such as the publication of Parish Plans for all the parishes\* of the AONB is testament to growing participation and cohesion in rural communities. The recently established Bittern Countryside Community Interest Company is another delivery mechanism that can work outside local authority structures and is firmly rooted within the community itself.

\* The Plan for Beetham Parish is not yet published and development will continue during the Management Plan review period.

### ***Terms of reference for the Management Plan Review Groups***

Technical Officers Review Group:

This group will be responsible for authoring new and revised content and general editorial control of all sections of revised Management Plan.

AONB Executive Committee Review Group:

This group will have editorial oversight and power of revision of most sections of the revised Management Plan, except matters of fact, dealt with by the Technical Officers Review Group.

AONB Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee will have an overall editorial veto and the signing-off responsibility over all revisions/amendments of the existing management plan and exercise control over the review process.