



Chilterns Buildings Design Guide Review 2009



Sustainability Appraisal Report

March 2009

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1. Background

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. The Chilterns Conservation Board has undertaken a review of the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide, which was first published in 1999.
- 1.1.2. The contents of the previously adopted Design Guide were reviewed for their continuing relevance to current and expected circumstances in the AONB and to the Conservation Board's evolving priorities. The range of amendments considered desirable was extensive and these are described in a report that was considered at the Board's Planning Committee in March 2009.
- 1.1.3. The Buildings Design Guide exists to supplement key development policies in the Chilterns AONB Management Plan – The Framework for Action 2008-2013. The Management Plan has been drafted to provide a common vision and agreed agenda of action to guide the efforts of the many local authorities and other bodies who work with the Conservation Board to secure the long term environmental, social and economic wellbeing of this exceptional countryside.
- 1.1.4. In accordance with paragraph 6.3 of *Planning Policy Statement 12 (creating safe and prosperous communities through Local Spatial Planning)* and in order for the reviewed Buildings Design Guide to be afforded a weight commensurate with that of Supplementary Planning Documents in decision making the Board intends that the same disciplines of consultation and sustainability appraisal should be applied. The Board will be directly consulting all the Chilterns AONBs' constituent local planning authorities and as part of the process will ask them to endorse the reviewed Chilterns Buildings Design Guide.

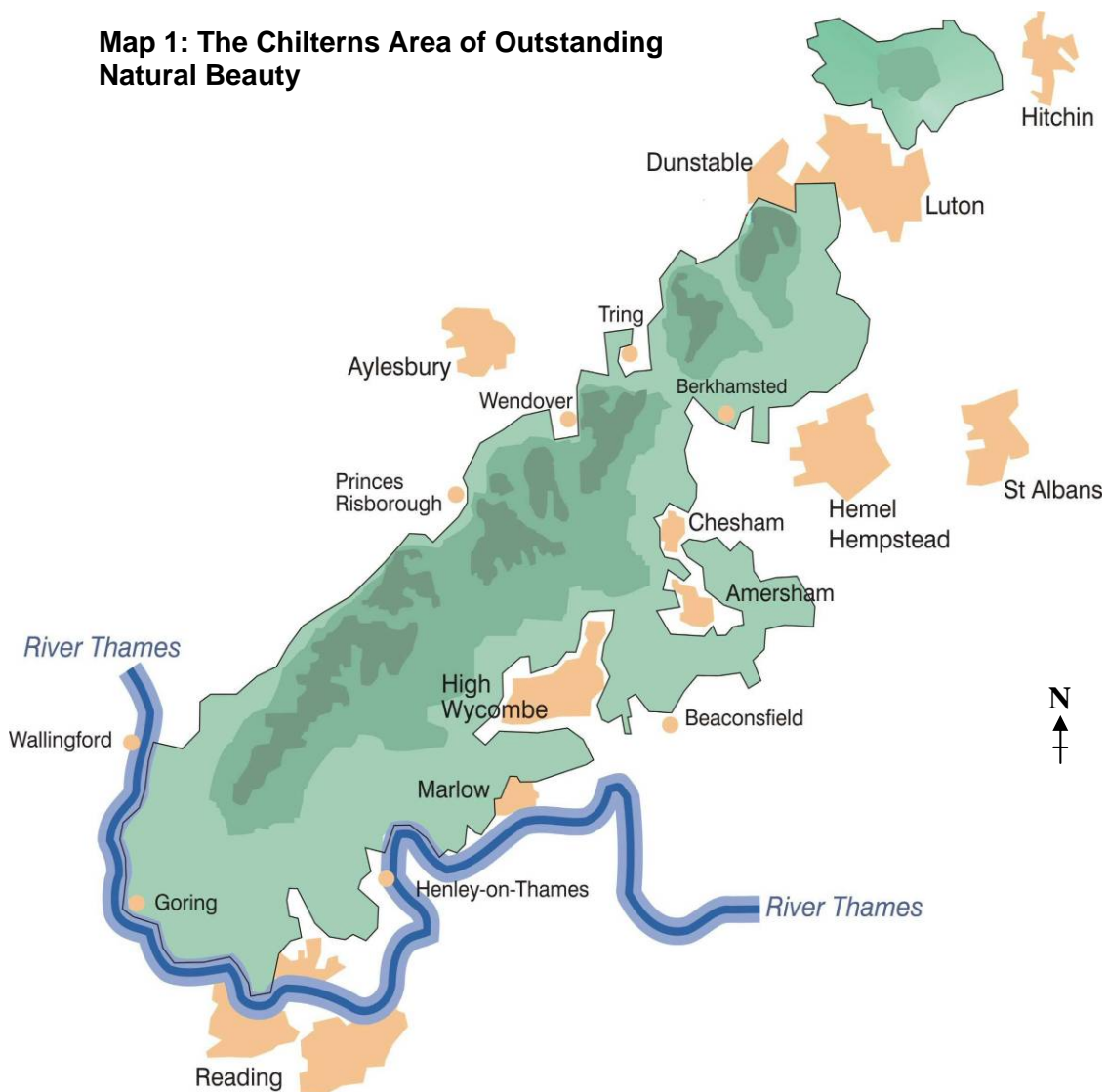
1.2. The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 1.2.1. The Chiltern Hills were designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1965. The hills are formed by an outcrop of chalk, overlain by clay with flints, and comprise a steep scarp slope south and east of Aylesbury and a gradual dip slope falling towards the Thames valley. The AONB extends as a continuous area between Reading, at its southwestern end, and Luton, and as a separate, detached block between Luton and Hitchin at its northeastern extremity. It encompasses the most scenically attractive parts of the chalk escarpment, its rolling foothills and the heavily wooded south-east facing dip slope.
- 1.2.2. The AONB covers an area of 833 sq. kms (324 sq. miles). It extends into two regions – the East of England and South East England – and includes parts of 13 local authority areas – three County Councils, two Unitary Authorities and eight District Councils.
- 1.2.3. The Chilterns were designated as an AONB in order to conserve and enhance those special qualities of the landscape which have long been recognised and appreciated. Of these, the most characteristic elements are:
 - the dramatic chalk escarpment, with its flower-rich downland and panoramic views,

- woodlands, and especially the beech woods that to many people are the epitome of the Chilterns landscape,
- hidden valley systems dividing the plateau with their ‘secret’, unspoilt character,
- the rich diversity of landscape pattern and features which provide a constantly changing scene,
- the network of ancient, often sunken lanes in tunnels of woodland or overgrown hedgerows,
- scattered villages and farmsteads with their vernacular buildings in brick, flint and dark timber,
- the wealth of great houses and designed landscapes,
- elusive chalk streams which make a special contribution to the landscape when flowing and
- the historic environment of hill forts and chalk figures.

1.2.4. These landscape qualities, and the wildlife and cultural heritage which are an intrinsic part of the area’s natural beauty, are subject to intense development and recreational pressures, as well as being threatened by the many profound changes in land management policy and practice over the past century.

Map 1: The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



1.3. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan and Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.3.1. The Review of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan was undertaken in the light of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) prepared in accordance with European Directive 2001/42/EC. The process of SEA was not separate, but an integral part of the review process itself. It should be noted that the Management Plan is now split into four key sections (conserving and enhancing natural beauty, understanding and enjoyment, social and economic well-being and climate change) in order to reflect the Conservation Board's purposes and duties and to ensure that all matters affecting the Chilterns AONB are properly addressed.
- 1.3.2. Therefore the assessment of the Management Plan incorporated social, environmental and economic considerations where appropriate but clearly focussed on environmental matters due to the nature of the document.
- 1.3.3. The Directive requires that information be provided on the likely significant effects on the environment, including issues such as:
- biodiversity,
 - population,
 - human health,
 - fauna,
 - flora,
 - soil,
 - water,
 - air,
 - climatic factors,
 - material assets,
 - cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage,
 - landscape and
 - the interrelationship between the above factors.
- 1.3.4. The SEA of the Management Plan Review was prepared in accordance with national guidance provided by Natural England in *Guidance to English AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards on Strategic Environmental Assessment of AONB Management Plans*, which in turn draws on *A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive* published by ODPM (now DCLG) in September 2005.
- 1.3.5. The Review was also subject to a separate formal assessment under another European Directive (92/43/EEC), usually referred to as the Habitats Directive, to establish that its proposals will not have a significant impact on any Natura 2000 site. This process is Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). The HRA was undertaken to the satisfaction of Natural England and the resultant report concludes that there will be no significant adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites arising from the Management Plan.

1.4. Scoping the Assessment

- 1.4.1. As required by the SEA Regulations, a draft Scoping Report was prepared which set out how the Conservation Board intended to approach the process of

assessment of the Management Plan. The draft Scoping Report was published for consultation with the statutory environmental bodies, Natural England, English Heritage and the Environment Agency, and with the local authorities and a wide range of local stakeholders in December 2007 for a five week period.

1.4.2. The scoping stage of the assessment comprised:

- the identification and analysis of the wide range of policies, plans and programmes already in existence, produced at international, national, regional and local levels, that influence the life and management of the AONB and with which the Management Plan must interact,
- information on environmental conditions in the Chilterns was collected to help identify management issues to be addressed and to provide a baseline against which to assess the effects of the proposed policies,
- the key issues which the Management Plan review should address were identified from the analysis of policies, plans and programmes and the environmental baseline and
- sustainability objectives for the strategic environmental assessment were established and an assessment framework constructed against which the proposed policies would be screened.

1.5. Assessment and the Policy Development Process

1.5.1. The Conservation Board reviewed the Aims and policies of the previous Management Plan to assess their continuing relevance, to determine whether their importance had grown or declined and whether they should be abandoned, amended or replaced.

1.5.2. New Aims for the revised Management Plan were drafted and assessed against the SEA Objectives.

1.5.3. The process of Strategic Environmental Assessment is an iterative one. The policies in the adopted Management Plan were the result of four cycles of assessment.

1.6. The Environmental Report

1.6.1. The Environmental Report was published alongside the revised Management Plan to inform consideration of that document. It describes the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the plan, so far as can be established on the basis of the current understanding of environmental conditions and trends in the Chilterns AONB and the policies and proposals of the revised Management Plan.

1.6.2. The report focuses on the evaluation of the objectives and policies of the plan. It establishes that these are likely to have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the local environment. The process of assessment throughout the policy development process helped to maximise the benefits and minimise any adverse effects.

- 1.6.3. The Environment Report is divided into sections that provide significant detail in connection with the following:
- the scoping report and consultation responses,
 - a review of other policies, plans and programmes to establish the context,
 - the environmental baseline including an understanding of environmental conditions, sources of information, data limitations and a summary of environmental characteristics,
 - key environmental issues,
 - the assessment framework including the SEA objectives and the assessment criteria and indicators,
 - the review and revision of the Management Plan detailing the review process, policy options and policy refinement,
 - assessment of the Management Plan objectives and Policies and
 - annexes detailing the responses to the scoping report consultation, analysis of the relevant policies, plans and programmes, the environmental baseline and a detailed assessment of the proposed policies.
- 1.6.4. The AONB Management Plan, Scoping Report, Environmental Report and Appendices and Habitat Regulations Assessment Report are all available from the Chilterns Conservation Board.

2. The Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and Sustainability Appraisal

2.1. Compliance with Legislation and European Directives

- 2.1.1. Sustainable development is at the heart of the reformed planning system. The purpose of sustainability appraisal is to promote sustainable development through the integration of social, environmental and economic considerations into the preparation of revisions of Regional Spatial Strategies and for new or revised Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs).
- 2.1.2. Sustainability appraisal is required for all SPDs under Section 39(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and this must also incorporate an environmental assessment in accordance with the requirements of *European Directive 2001/42/EC* (the SEA Directive) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.
- 2.1.3. When referring to sustainability appraisal the Government stresses that this incorporates the requirements of the SEA Directive. Articles 3[3] and 3[4] of the Directive require SEA for plans and programmes which 'determine the use of small areas at a local level' or which are 'minor modifications' to plans and programmes but only where they are determined to be likely to have significant environmental effects. The key criterion is whether the plan would be likely to have significant environmental effects and the Board considers this not to be the case for the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide.
- 2.1.4. The Government expects that only in exceptional circumstances will a SPD have no significant environmental effects, but the criteria in Article 3[3] may on occasion apply to SPDs in the form of design guides or issues based documents that supplement policies in the DPD. The Board considers that in connection with the review of the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide that the principles of this Article apply and that the SEA work undertaken for the AONB Management Plan review (and Policy D2 in particular) applies equally to the review of the Design Guide and is sufficient for the purposes of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and SEA Directive.
- 2.1.5. In coming to this conclusion the Board does not consider that the Sustainability Appraisal should be done in any more detail than is useful and also considers that the detail contained in the Environmental Report for the AONB Management Plan suffices. The Board has been particularly mindful of the advice in *Planning Policy Statement 12: creating strong safe and prosperous communities through Local Spatial Planning* published by DCLG in 2008 and *Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents* published by ODPM (now DCLG) in 2005.

2.2. Compliance with the AONB Management Plan

- 2.2.1. The AONB Management Plan has clearly been the subject of very close scrutiny and it fully complies with the relevant legislation and European Directives.
- 2.2.2. The Management Plan includes a policy that is specifically concerned with design. Policy D2 is worded as follows:

- **Promote the highest standards of development which respect vernacular architectural styles and represent high environmental standards in terms of energy and water efficiency.**
- 2.2.3. The text supporting the policy stresses that buildings design guidance can help inform those involved in decision-making as well as helping landowners, developers, designers and local communities to plan for and control change in an appropriate way.
- 2.2.4. The Management Plan Environmental Report states that the Management Plan identifies a range of issues relating to the built environment that are working to change the landscape qualities of the AONB. While control of development is a matter for local planning authorities, not for the Conservation Board, the Board is an influential consultee on planning proposals. The Management Plan therefore sets out clear principles by which the Board will seek to influence the development control process.
- 2.2.5. The set of policies that are included in the Management Plan do this. Emphasis is placed on the conservation of the natural beauty of the AONB, promoting high standards of development and the use of vernacular styles and locally-sourced materials. There is also recognition of the need to minimise Greenfield development, to adapt to climate change and to seek to minimise greenhouse gas emissions arising from built development.
- 2.2.6. The Environment Report records that all the policies score well against a range of sustainability objectives, with no negative impacts recorded. Policy D2 is highlighted as being able to produce particular benefits for local settlement character, resource use and greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Summary and Conclusions

- 3.1 The Chilterns Conservation Board has reviewed the content of the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide and produced a version of the revised document for public consultation.
- 3.2 The reviewed Design Guide supplements Policy D2 in the Adopted Chilterns AONB Management Plan and forms an appendix to the Management Plan.
- 3.3 The AONB Management Plan was subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with the SEA Directive and Habitats Regulations Assessment in accordance with the Habitats Directive to determine the likely effects on the environment. The assessments found that the Management Plan would not harm environmental interests of acknowledged importance and, in connection with Policy D2, would in fact be beneficial.
- 3.4 Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment are inextricably linked and the SEA of the Management Plan is considered to also represent the SA for the reviewed Design Guide.
- 3.5 Therefore, having thoroughly assessed the AONB Management Plan and its constituent policies, and having examined the contents of the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide the Board considers that the reviewed Design Guide fully complies with the adopted Management Plan policies and its implementation would not harm environmental interests of acknowledged importance.