



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

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Environmental Report

Non-technical Summary

April 2014

The Chilterns Conservation Board
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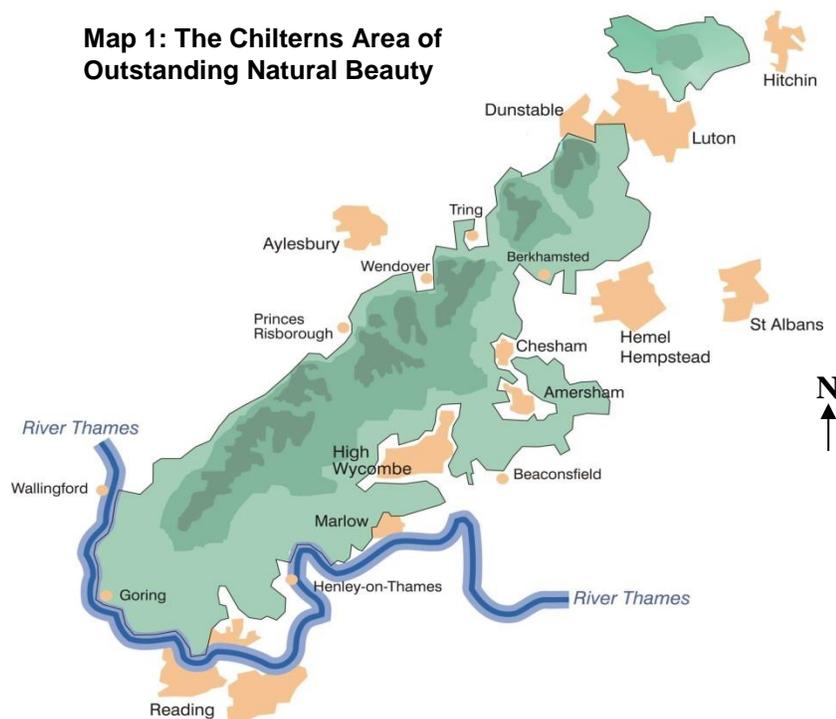
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1. INTRODUCTION

- i). This is a non-technical summary of the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2014 – 2019. Readers wishing fuller background information and analysis should read the main report, which is available at the Chilterns Conservation Board website at <http://www.chilternsaonb.org/conservation-board/management-plan.html>
- ii). The aim of this report is to summarise the likely significant environmental effects of implementation of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019 and to put forward recommendations for reducing any significant adverse effects and enhancing any significant positive effects identified during the appraisal process.

1.1. The Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019

- 1.1.1. The Chilterns is of national importance as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONBs are designated by the Government solely for their landscape qualities for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty (which includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries).
- 1.1.2. The AONB Management Plan exists 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 Chilterns Conservation Board to secure the long term environmental, social and economic wellbeing of this exceptional countryside. The Conservation Board has published the Management Plan to replace the one that had been in operation since 2008. The Management Plan was subject to an extensive public consultation exercise which resulted in numerous changes.



The Strategic Environmental Assessment Process

- 1.2.1. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a statutory process under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations (the SEA Regulations, SI 1633, 2004) which require formal strategic environmental assessment of new plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. The AONB Management Plan is such a plan.
- 1.2.2. The objective of SEA is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.2.3. The Regulations and national guidance on their application establish a widely used process for undertaking SEA. This five-stage process is summarised below:

SEA stages	
A	Setting the context and objectives, establishing the Environmental Baseline and deciding on the scope of the assessment.
B	Developing and refining alternatives and assessing the effects of draft policies.
C	Preparing the Environmental Report.
D	Consulting on the draft Plan and the Environmental Report and making subsequent changes. Adopting the final Plan.
E	Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan on the environment.

- 1.2.4. A more detailed methodology is presented in the full Environmental Report.

1.3. Scoping the Assessment

- 1.3.1. 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. 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 May 2013 for a six week period.
- 1.3.2. The scoping stage of the assessment comprised:
- the identification and analysis of the wide range of plans and policies 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;
 - sustainability objectives for the strategic environmental assessment were established and an assessment (SEA) framework constructed against which the proposed policies would be screened.

- 1.3.3. Further details of the scoping stage, the consultation process and the changes made as a result of consultation responses are given in Chapter 2 of the full report.

1.4. **Assessment and the Plan Development Process**

- 1.4.1. The SEA process is an essential part of the process of plan preparation, and not a stand-alone exercise. The process is an iterative one. Policies are assessed and suggestions made for improvements to reduce adverse impacts or strengthen positive effects. These are incorporated in redrafted policies, which are assessed again, and so the process continues. The policies in the draft Management Plan which was published for consultation were the result of three key cycles of assessment.
- 1.4.2. As a first step, the Conservation Board reviewed the aims and policies of the existing Management Plan to assess their continuing relevance; to determine whether their importance had grown or declined in the face of the passage of time and whether they should be abandoned, amended or replaced.
- 1.4.3. New aims for the revised Management Plan were drafted and assessed against the SEA framework, as described in Chapter 8 of the full report.
- 1.4.4. A first set of policies was produced in early summer 2013 and were subjected to assessment against the SEA framework. The results were discussed with Conservation Board staff and a revised set of policies were developed. These were considered by the Conservation Board for inclusion in the Consultation Draft of the revised Management Plan.
- 1.4.5. Further amendments were made as a result of the Board's considerations and the resulting policies were again assessed in late summer 2013 and the results again discussed with Conservation Board staff. As a consequence a number of important refinements to policies were made for the Consultation Draft Management Plan published in September 2013. The draft Environmental Report published to accompany it noted these changes in reviewing the resultant set of policies.
- 1.4.6. The response received from the public consultation on the Scoping Report was very positive, and no significant further changes were made to the Management Plan policies.

1.5. **The Draft Environmental Report**

- 1.5.1. The Environment Report presents the findings of the SEA. As a formal requirement of the Regulations it must identify and assess the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Management Plan and any reasonable alternatives considered. The environment is defined in terms of landscape, biodiversity, fauna, flora, population, human health, material assets, cultural heritage, climatic factors, soil, water, air (the "SEA topics") and the interrelationship between these factors.
- 1.5.2. The Environment Report also includes the analysis of the policy context within which the Plan will operate, baseline information on the environmental characteristics of the Chilterns and how it might evolve, and a summary of the key environmental issues and problems affecting the AONB. It describes how the SEA framework was developed to assess the Plan aims and policies. As well as assessing the likely significant effects of the Plan it also suggests measures to prevent or mitigate any significant adverse effects. Finally, the Environment

Report should describe the measures recommended to monitor the effects of implementing the Plan.

- 1.5.3. The final Environment Report has been published following adoption of the revised Management Plan by the Conservation Board and includes an account of how environmental considerations have been integrated into the plan and how the SEA process has been taken into account.

2. CONTEXT, BASELINE AND SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

2.1. The Policy Context

2.1.2. Life in the Chilterns is influenced by a very wide range of laws, regulations, policies, priorities and funding programmes originating from many different bodies operating at European, national, regional and local levels and directed at a range of environmental, social and economic objectives. The challenge for the Management Plan is to bring cohesion to these influences, to resolve any conflicts where possible and optimize their collective outcome for the AONB.

2.1.3. The analysis of relevant policies, plans and programmes is set out in full in Annex B to the full report. The key messages that can be drawn from this analysis for the Review as they relate to the SEA topics are summarised in Chapter 3 of the report.

2.2. The Environmental Baseline

2.2.2. Reliable, up to date information is needed to understand the nature of the AONB environment and the attributes which make the area special, how the environment is changing and the forces of change at work before an assessment of the potential impact of the policies and proposals contained in the Management Plan Review can be made.

2.2.3. Annex C of the full report contains an overview of the baseline information collected under the SEA topic headings, together with trend information where available and data sources. The key characteristics of the Chilterns AONB as they relate to the SEA topics are outlined in Chapter 4.

2.3. Key Environmental Issues for the Management Plan

2.3.3. Examination of the policy context within which the Management Plan is to be prepared and implemented and of environmental conditions in the Chilterns leads to the identification of the environmental problems and issues that the Plan needs to address and the constraints within which it must operate. This process has also been informed by the Conservation Board's experience of implementing the current Management Plan.

2.3.4. The table below summarises the key environmental issues identified, by SEA topic:

Key Issues / Opportunities / Problems
Landscape
Fragmentation of landscape - especially around towns – harder to buffer agricultural habitats.
Effects of climate change – changing cropping patterns, species distribution, and increasing variability and extremes of weather will present challenges and opportunities for the natural beauty of the AONB.

Lack of management of landscape features, due to changes in land ownership, decline in availability of skills and availability of funding.
Local distinctiveness – the need to consider impacts of new development on wider landscape (especially major growth), increased use of local materials.
Biodiversity, flora, fauna
Habitat fragmentation , isolated sites and need for more management at a landscape scale.
Decline in availability of advice for land managers e.g. private owners of local wildlife sites.
Declining livestock industry making small isolated sites increasingly difficult to manage as part of farm business. Shift from graziers paying to being paid on conservation sites.
Management of access - high visitor numbers and lack of public awareness making site management difficult in some areas e.g. deer control.
Pests and diseases – impacts of non-native invasive species, as well as other pests and diseases on native species.
Effects of climate change – implications for site management for example the need for increased grazing on grassland sites in response to longer growing season and increased rate of vegetation growth. Changes in species distribution e.g. less Beech on scarp.
Population
Generic issues – increased partnership working, increasing reliance on volunteers; public perceptions e.g. huge confusion re climate change – need for more education/awareness raising.
Green Infrastructure/housing growth – will be increase in area of urban fringe, increased interface between people and farming community.
Ageing population will have implications for recreation and visitor management.
Traffic movements – need to consider wider implications of traffic, especially related to HS2, growth agenda, overflying and airport expansion.
Human health
Increasing obesity of the population will have implications for recreation and visitor management.
Material assets
Changes in farming community – future impacts of new farming systems and agri-environment schemes unknown – some opportunities for new habitat creation and linkages.
Farming – overall decrease in number of holdings, increase in larger holdings. More contractors – traditional farms selling up to non-traditional landowners. Land bought as setting for house.
Reduction in livestock numbers
Loss of agricultural infrastructure – livestock markets, labour/skills, abattoirs etc.
High demand for grain leading to high prices - threats to farmland habitats created/restored through agri-environment schemes, especially buffer strips. Reduction in set aside.
Increasing non-food crops such as borage and opium.
Increasing focus on local food and more traditional breeds to graze conservation grasslands.

<p>Woodland management – pest control still a major issue; Habitat Regulations and Health and Safety issues likely to have an increasing impact on woodland management; lack of public understanding of woodland management; decline in contractor /skills base; weather extremes likely to make management more difficult.</p>
<p>Trees – decay fungi working for longer could reduce life of veteran trees, leading to more problems with tree safety.</p>
<p>Woodland – increase in lotting; wood fuel could be an economic driver but at present marginal.</p>
<p>Pests and diseases – impacts of non-native invasive species, as well as other pests and diseases on landscape as well as native flora and fauna.</p>
<p>Tranquillity – impacts of increased noise and light pollution arising from greater levels of development and urban intrusion within, and in the setting of, the AONB.</p>
<p>Waste – need to consider waste minimisation rather than disposal, and increased re-use and recycling.</p>
<p>Cultural heritage, including the historic environment, architectural and archaeological heritage</p>
<p>Commons – cultural/economic change – lack of economic relevance affecting their management. Commons not generally owned by people with agricultural interest, so more problems re-introducing grazing.</p>
<p>Historic Environment – lack of data about the condition of heritage assets, lack of knowledge including identification of sites, need for appropriate management, shortage of relevant skills.</p>
<p>Built environment – need for up to date design advice, to address general issues as well as impacts of permitted development and isolated buildings for example.</p>
<p>Increased population – may lead to increased levels of development within the AONB and its setting.</p>
<p>Climatic factors</p>
<p>Increased variability in climate (e.g. temperature and rainfall), changes in growing season, increased incidences of extreme weather events will have significant implications for biodiversity, woodland, agriculture, landscape management and the built environment.</p>
<p>The need for increasing energy production from renewable sources may present challenges in terms of landscape impact.</p>
<p>Sustainable construction – increased use of local building materials as carbon reduction/offset.</p>
<p>Land use conflicts – pressure to introduce new crops or management practices may conflict with conservation of landscape character.</p>
<p>Water</p>
<p>Increasingly stressed water resources as a result of a changing climate and due to more abstractions arising from increased population.</p>
<p>Chalk Streams – low flows, variability of flows, lack of designation, spread of invasive non-native species e.g. Japanese Knotweed, impact of flooding and need for sustainable drainage systems.</p>
<p>Air</p>
<p>Atmospheric deposition causes nutrient enrichment of habitats.</p>

2.4. The SEA Objectives

- 2.4.1. Although the Regulations do not specifically require the use of objectives or indicators in the SEA process, they are a recognised and useful way in which environmental effects can be described, analysed and compared at key stages of the Management Plan's development.
- 2.4.2. The SEA framework consists of environmental objectives covering each of the defined SEA topics and assessment criteria against which judgements can be made. The identification of the SEA objectives was an iterative process, based on the review of relevant plans and programmes, the evolving environmental baseline, the developing understanding of key environmental issues and responses received to the Scoping Report consultation.
- 2.4.3. The set of SEA Objectives used for the appraisal is set out below.

1.	To conserve and enhance landscape character and scenic quality.
2.	To conserve and enhance biodiversity.
3.	To conserve and enhance the historic and cultural environment.
4.	To conserve and enhance the built environment and promote sustainable construction methods.
5.	To improve quality of life for those living and working in the AONB.
6.	To encourage healthy lifestyles.
7.	To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage sustainable forms of energy production.
8.	To secure sustainable use of natural resources.
9.	To secure sustainable water resource management including the conservation and improvement of water quality.
10.	To conserve and improve soil quality.
11.	To reduce waste and promote high rates of re-use and re-cycling.
12.	To increase awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the environment.

- 2.4.4. For each of the SEA objectives, more detailed decision-making criteria were developed. The decision-making criteria assist in addressing specific issues within each objective and aid the assessment of potential impacts of any policy option or choice. The assessed impacts of each policy were recorded by allocating a simple score for the adjudged significance of the positive or negative effect against the criterion and notes explaining how the conclusion has been reached.

3. ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS, AIMS AND POLICIES

3.1. Assessment of Options

- 3.1.1. For the purposes of this review of the AONB Management Plan that is currently in operation, the policy options considered were:
- Delete the current policy
 - Continue with the current policy
 - Revise the policy
- 3.1.2. In no substantial policy area was it proposed that policy coverage should be deleted. The few instances where a deletion was agreed, the policy concerned essentially administrative processes or had been achieved.
- 3.1.3. Thus the alternative courses of action actively considered for the Review were to continue with the current policy or to develop a new policy.
- 3.1.4. For the purposes of assessment, implementation of the current Management Plan is one of the assumptions built into the environmental baseline - which is what would happen in the absence of the Review policies which are being assessed. Comparison of the effectiveness of the old and new policy approaches is thus implicit in the assessment of the Review policies.
- 3.1.5. Alternative 'revisions' of current policies were not produced for assessment, as this was thought unnecessary. Rather, the intention was to draft the most effective new policy from the outset and to refine its focus and wording through the iterative process of policy assessment.

3.2. Assessment of Management Plan Aims

- 3.2.1. In this part of the assessment process, a high level assessment of the Management Plan Aims against the SEA Objectives was made to identify if there are any fundamental inconsistencies between what the Management Plan is trying to do and what is required for the conservation of the AONB environment as defined for the purposes of the SEA Regulations. Perhaps more relevantly, this assessment can also identify synergies between the two sets of aims/objectives and provides a valuable context for the more detailed assessment of the policies themselves.
- 3.2.2. The assessment found that there was a large element of compatibility between the Management Plan Aims and the SEA Objectives or, in a significant number of cases, no direct relationship. The analysis was particularly useful in identifying areas where the likely effects on an SEA Objective of pursuing a Management Plan Aim were uncertain or even potentially negative, thus highlighting the need for particularly careful assessment of relevant policies. The results of the assessment are presented in Chapter 8 of the full Report.

3.3. **Assessment of Policies**

- 3.3.1. The policies of the draft Management Plan score very well against the SEA objectives and the Plan will be good for the environment of the Chilterns AONB.
- 3.3.2. In the great majority of cases where likely impacts are recorded against the SEA criteria, the impacts are positive, or very positive. The range of assessment criteria is wide and can be difficult to satisfy totally in every policy area. The number of cases where a potentially negative impact is recorded against an assessment criterion is very small and in every case the policies concerned deliver positive impacts against other sustainability criteria.
- 3.3.3. Several basic themes which run through the Management Plan are very good for a range of sustainability criteria:
- the emphasis on conserving local character and distinctiveness;
 - improving the management of sites and holdings to deliver multiple benefits wherever appropriate;
 - addressing the challenges of climate change;
 - support for local enterprises that will contribute to the conservation and enjoyment of the AONB;
 - encouraging even greater cooperation among agencies and individuals responsible for the management of the area;
 - promoting awareness-raising of the qualities of the area and of management issues amongst the general public with a view to encouraging engagement.
- 3.3.4. The Management Plan confirms that the Sandford principle will apply. This means that conservation will have priority in case of any conflict between policy objectives.
- 3.3.5. The iterative process of drafting and assessment has strengthened the performance of many of the policies in terms of moving towards more sustainable development.
- 3.3.6. Although the powers available to the Conservation Board to deliver the aims of the Management Plan are considerable, in many important areas, such as the control of development or the provision of affordable housing, the relevant powers rest with partner organisations. The Management Plan recognises this and many key policies are supportive of the initiatives of other bodies to deliver the desired results. In these cases, the environmental impact of the policies will depend to a large extent on how those other bodies implement their own policies. In a number of cases the Conservation Board wisely specifies the environmental parameters within which policies seeking to achieve outcomes that would be good for socio-economic objectives should operate within the AONB.
- 3.3.7. In other areas the Conservation Board and its partners must operate within a context established by world markets and international and national policies over which it has no control. It will be important for the Management Plan to make proper provision for monitoring conditions and trends within the AONB (some policies are directed to this end) but also to maintain a capacity for forward-looking review of emerging conditions and legislative proposals on the wider

stage so that the Board is well placed to anticipate the implications of changing contexts and modify its actions accordingly.

3.3.8. A welcome feature of the draft revised Management Plan is the emphasis on the health benefits of countryside recreation and widening the traditional AONB “customer base” through encouraging the less mobile, young, urban based and ethnic minorities to visit the countryside.

3.3.9. The key findings in each policy area are summarised:

Landscape

Overall Comments

3.3.10. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty, so the policies of the Management Plan for landscape conservation will have a particular significance. The baseline highlights the range of factors bringing about changes to the Chilterns landscape, particularly the effects of development and the changes in agriculture, and it follows that there will be policies throughout the Plan, not just in the Landscape chapter, that seek to deliver landscape conservation and enhancement.

3.3.11. The policies in this chapter provide the basic framework for the more sectorally focussed policies elsewhere in the Management Plan. They highlight the importance of conserving landscape character and local distinctiveness and the multidimensional nature of landscape, as a place for living, not simply a visual backdrop.

3.3.12. All the policies score well against the assessment criteria, although some recommendations for improving their effectiveness were made.

Strengths

- Emphasis throughout on the importance of conserving landscape character and local distinctiveness.
- Policies seek to promote awareness of the important components of local landscape character and instill pride in local distinctiveness and sense of place.
- The importance of addressing the challenges of climate change is recognised.
- The policies seek to deliver landscape management that delivers a range of benefits, e.g. increased recreational capacity close to residential areas, and not simply visual enhancement.

Concerns

- The success of Policies L5 and L7 will depend on their endorsement by local planning authorities; the incorporation of appropriate policies in their development plans and sensitive development control decision-making. The Conservation Board will seek to influence this process, but it will be important that LPAs do engage fully with their statutory duty in this area.

Recommendations

- Policy L3 is a helpful policy, but in promoting its message the Board should be careful to acknowledge that “conservation” encompasses the need for

positive evolution in the local environment, otherwise there is a danger of encouraging unreasonable resistance to change.

- Policy L5 is expressed in negative terms – *To resist developments.....* While inappropriate development must of course be resisted, it will be important for the Conservation Board to be seen to be taking a positive approach to encouraging high design quality for the development that is necessary to the continued social and economic welfare of the Chilterns communities. As the supporting text makes clear, information and advice, such as the Chilterns Building Design Guide is available and an action to promote the Guide is included in the Delivery Plan.
- With Policy L6, aimed at the enhancement of degraded landscapes, care must still be taken that visual gains are not won at the cost of losses in biodiversity.

Farming and Forestry and other land management

Overall Comments

3.3.13. Since farming and forestry are the predominant land uses in the AONB, accounting for the day to day management of almost all its surface area, the management regimes in place are critically important to the conservation and enjoyment of the natural beauty of the AONB. The baseline illustrates this importance and identifies a number of key issues for future management of the AONB arising from current trends and uncertainties in these industries. Most of these uncertainties over the future structure of the industries and future agricultural cropping patterns are outside the direct influence of the Conservation Board and are caused by international markets and European and national policies. However, the Board does have an important role in helping to resolve some key management issues, such as those relating to access management, and in working with the industries to support adaptation to new circumstances and new markets.

3.3.14. The policies set out in this chapter describe how the Board intends to work with farmers and woodland owners and managers to ensure that the natural beauty of the AONB is sustained by viable forestry and farming enterprises and to improve public understanding of management issues so as to facilitate the resolution of those issues. Rewording of some of the policies as a result of the appraisal process has removed some ambiguities and clarified intentions. All of the policies now score well against the appraisal criteria, in many cases strongly supporting the SEA objectives. No potentially negative effects were identified.

Strengths

- Policy FF2 sets out an unequivocal statement of intent to work with farmers and landowners to achieve AONB objectives - a very important policy that will deliver significant benefits.
- Policy FF3 sets out the recognition of the need to provide support to the industries in addressing the challenges of climate change.
- Policy FF4 promoting sustainable management of woodland and farmland to provide multiple benefits is an important policy that will deliver significant benefits against a number of SEA objectives

- Policies promote cooperative approaches to management of small and fragmented sites, and encourage new forms of diversification and business ventures that will benefit the purposes of designation.
- Support is pledged for the marketing of produce resulting from environmentally sensitive production methods with consequent benefits for landscape and biodiversity and potentially the health of the local population.
- The direct effects of Policy FF14 will be to raise public awareness – valuable in itself. This should lead to more profound, longer term, secondary benefits as improved public understanding makes agricultural and woodland management easier through reducing disturbance etc. and increasing support for management activities.
- Policies to resist the potentially damaging fragmentation of farm holdings and the conversion of farmland to equestrian uses are potentially important.

Recommendations

- In support of Policy FF10, concerned with diversification and new businesses that will contribute to the conservation etc. of the AONB, it will be helpful to provide guidance on what sort new enterprises would make significant contributions and how they might be delivered, so that encouragement of local enterprise can be focused to maximum effect.

Biodiversity

Overall Comments

- 3.3.15. The baseline clearly illustrates how rich the AONB is in habitats and wildlife, with a substantial number of sites designated as being of European or national importance and an impressive range of UK BAP Priority Habitats. The baseline also shows that this resource is under stress in key areas. About two thirds of the area of SSSI in the AONB is in Favourable Condition according to Natural England and a number of difficulties in managing wildlife sites of all descriptions are identified, including difficulties in securing appropriate grazing, managing access and addressing the challenges of climate change.
- 3.3.16. The policies proposed in this chapter comprise a suite of initiatives to promote and support improved management of wildlife sites, whether designated or not, to improve the information base on which management decisions are based and to raise public awareness and involvement in wildlife conservation. These policies will work in conjunction with other policies in the Plan, especially those for Farming and Forestry such as Policy FF4 which is directed at managing farmland and woodland for multiple benefits, including wildlife conservation.
- 3.3.17. Unsurprisingly, the policies all score well against the SEA objectives, with no potential negative effects identified. In two cases, recommendations are made for actions to accompany the policies to widen the range of benefits delivered and to strengthen implementation.

Strengths

- A number of policies aimed at improving management for biodiversity should also deliver important benefits for landscape and for the historic environment.
- In particular, the emphasis in Policy B7 on developing landscape scale initiatives to link fragmented sites should produce significant benefits for

biodiversity conservation and probably important benefits to the conservation of landscape and the historic environment.

- Greater awareness of the issues by the public (which includes farmers and landowners and individuals working for regulatory and funding agencies) can only be helpful in delivering better management and use of sites, with benefits for biodiversity.
- Welcome emphasis on the need to improve and share the evidence base.

Recommendations

- There is a need to ensure that the landscape-scale approach to nature conservation promoted by Policy B7 helps to achieve other environmental objectives, such as conservation of the landscape, historic environment and improving access to and enjoyment of the countryside. It will also be important to ensure that adaptation to climate change is built into the landscape-scale approach.

Water Environment

Overall Comments

3.3.18. Water resources in the Chilterns are restricted to groundwater sources and are limited, with a history of over-extraction. The baseline highlights the particular issue of the resultant low flows in the chalk streams of the dip slope and the remedial actions that have been taken to address this problem.

3.3.19. The policies in this chapter comprise a comprehensive package of initiatives to conserve the water environment of the Chilterns by promoting the sustainable management of water resources, managing flood risk, safeguarding the nature conservation value of wetland habitats and raising public awareness of water-related issues for the AONB. The policies all score well against the SEA objectives, with no potentially negative impacts.

Strengths

- The key issues identified in the baseline are addressed.
- Most of the policies score well against multiple SEA objectives.
- Policy WE1 scores well against objectives of sustainable water management, and for landscape and biodiversity.
- Policy WE6 will benefit landscape and wildlife management, water quality and flood risk management.
- Policy WE8 scores well in terms of the reduction in flood risk and the maintenance of water quality, but it also offers potential benefits in terms of biodiversity and recreation.
- Policy WE9 will bring significant benefits to biodiversity and water resource management, and add to the quality of life of residents and visitors.
- Policy WE10 scores well against objectives of sustainable water management, and for landscape and biodiversity.
- Policy WE12 will increase environmental awareness and understanding of the implications of climate change water consumption.

Recommendations

- To be truly effective, policies WE1 and WE10 will need to operate in conjunction.

Historic Environment

Overall Comments

3.3.20. The Chilterns has a demonstrably rich historic environment, both in terms of the buried archaeological heritage and in the fabric of landscapes, settlements and buildings within which everyday life is conducted. The baseline highlights some current shortcomings in data availability, some of which should be rectified shortly, but also that some important aspects of the historic resource remain neglected.

3.3.21. The suite of policies for the historic environment aims to raise awareness of, and promote good practice in conserving, the area's assets. The policies generally score well against relevant SEA objectives and have no potentially negative effects. The policies have been more explicitly expressed than previously and it is also helpful that the Actions specified provide extra focus on addressing some of the particular issues identified in the baseline. Earlier recommendations about combining a number of the policies have been acted upon.

Strengths

- Several policies aim for improved understanding of the historic environment and related issues, which is a vital foundation for improved management.
- Policy HE1 seeks to achieve coverage of all appropriate historic areas and sites with conservation plans, which would provide an ideal framework for management.
- Policy HE2 encompasses actions to adapt to the impact of climate change on individual properties and to mitigate climate change generally. As such it is an important policy that should significantly help conserve the historic legacy of the AONB for the long term.
- Policy HE3 should ensure the retention of nationally designated and locally important historic assets and their settings.
- Policy HE8 should deliver both improved social inclusion and better conservation of the historic environment.
- Policy HE11 will support economic and social activity and secure appropriate management of the historic environment.

Recommendations

- Policy HE3 is a negative one – about stopping things happening. While it will be essential to prevent damage to important historic assets, the policy should be seen as providing an ultimate sanction. Wider benefits will be achieved by the Conservation Board putting principal emphasis on Policies HE4, HE5 and HE11 which promote good practice.

Development

Overall Comments

3.3.22. The current Management Plan identifies a range of issues relating to the built environment 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

and it is important that the Management Plan sets out clear principles by which the Board will seek to influence the development management process.

3.3.23. The set of policies proposed 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 green field development; to adapt to climate change and to seek to minimise greenhouse gas emissions arising from built development. The baseline records that current mineral working activity within the AONB is limited, but that restoration of disused pits remains an issue and the proposed policies reflect this.

3.3.24. All the policies score well against a range of sustainability objectives, with no negative impacts recorded.

Strengths

- Policy D1 is a useful overarching policy that will bring benefits to settlement character and to the wider landscape character. It may also encourage use of recycled and locally sourced building materials
- Policy D2 should produce particular benefits for local settlement character, resource use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Policy D3 will have very positive effects for local settlement character and will be helpful in conserving landscape and historic landscape character. Promotion of the use of traditional materials will benefit local producers and recycling and reduce transport.
- Policy D4 will bring significant benefit for conservation of the built environment and landscape character and will help local enterprise. Benefits in terms of energy use and greenhouse gas emissions are not clear without more detailed analysis.
- The promotion of green infrastructure under Policy D8 will bring significant benefits to the quality of life of residents and visitors, will enhance landscape and offers potential benefits to biodiversity.
- Policy D11 should result in the removal of eyesores and the restoration of derelict sites and the overall enhancement of landscape character.
- Policy D16 relating to workings adjacent to the AONB will deliver benefits for the landscape and quality of life in the AONB, although the number of workings concerned is small.
- Policy D17 promotes sensitive restoration of redundant mineral workings and scores well against landscape, biodiversity and historic objectives.
- Policy D18 seeks to promote the reduction of waste and will have wide benefits for the AONB, beyond the obvious target objectives.

Concerns

- It is possible that Policy D16, in reducing the impact of traffic through the AONB associated with workings adjacent to the AONB, might necessitate longer journeys adding to energy use, greenhouse gas emissions and disturbance elsewhere.

Recommendations

- In implementing Policy D11 it will be important to recognise that some 'visually intrusive development' may have other value and that visual gains will not be won at the cost of losses in (e.g.) biodiversity.

Understanding and Enjoyment

Overall Comments

- 3.3.25. This chapter proposes policies to make high quality recreational opportunities available to all sections of the community; to promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation and to increase understanding and appreciation of the special qualities of the AONB. It is thus particularly pertinent to the purposes of AONB designation and to the duties of the Conservation Board and to three of the cross-cutting themes established by the Board for this Review;
- encouraging lifelong learning;
 - encouraging social inclusion;
 - promoting health and well-being.
- 3.3.26. The Chilterns is extremely popular as a place to visit, as the baseline information demonstrates. Visits to popular sites are almost entirely by car, and the number of visitors to sites with facilities has been at least maintained. The baseline also records emerging problems caused by increasing numbers of visitors for the management of the biodiversity interest of some sites. Visitor pressures are likely to increase as a result of the proximity of growth points such as Luton, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Aylesbury in particular.
- 3.3.27. Many issues raised in the assessment of earlier drafts of the policies in this section have been successfully addressed in this final draft.
- 3.3.28. Overall, the policies score well against the assessment criteria.

Strengths

- The policies should lead to improved access opportunities for, and increased enjoyment of the countryside by, currently under-represented groups and, potentially healthier lifestyles through increased exercise.
- The need for high quality countryside management and the coordination of the range of organizations involved in its delivery is recognized.
- Encouragement is given to accessing the countryside by non-car modes of transport, through development of opportunities and networks for walking, cycling and riding, whose health benefits are promoted.
- Emphasis is placed on the importance of tranquility in the AONB.
- Policies seek to improve visitors' understanding of the special qualities of the area so as to improve their enjoyment of it and engender a sense of shared responsibility for its conservation.
- Policies UE1, UE6 and UE18 propose measures to resolve some of the potential conflicts between increasing access opportunities and managing the environmental resource.

Concerns

- A small concern remains, in connection with Policies UE4 and UE10, over the encouragement for people to make more use of the countryside without complementary measures being put in place to increase public transport provision and its use.

Recommendations

- Policy UE4 should be explicitly linked to relevant policies to improve provision of non-car access to services and the wider countryside, e.g. Policy SE1.

Social and Economic Wellbeing

Overall Comments

- 3.3.29. The baseline shows that the area enjoys high average household incomes and a low index of multiple deprivation. House prices are high, not least because of the quality of the local environment, and while no evidence specific to the AONB is available, there is a strong demand for affordable housing in the general area. Car ownership rates are also very high, implying high usage, but a significant minority of households has access to just one car, suggesting that a need for alternative transport provision exists.
- 3.3.30. Policies in this chapter seek to address these issues and to promote the diversification of rural enterprise and a sustainable tourism industry and the engagement of local communities in caring, healthy lifestyles. Generally, they will bring significant benefits and will have few adverse effects on any of the SEA objectives.
- 3.3.31. Given the scope of the duties of the Conservation Board, many of the policies are not executive, but supportive of the initiatives of other bodies – such as local authorities and registered social landlords in the case of provision of affordable housing – and, as such, their environmental impact will depend to a large extent on how those other bodies implement their policies. Policies now reflect earlier advice that it would be wise for the Conservation Board to specify the environmental parameters within which policies seeking to achieve outcomes that would be good for socio-economic objectives are to operate within the AONB.
- 3.3.32. One of the key concerns relates to the potential roll out of high speed broadband. Though this is welcome in its own right, it is recognised that to achieve greater coverage there may be instances where overhead wires, poles and ground mounted equipment are sought.

Strengths

- Virtually all the policies will significantly improve aspects of the quality of life of sections of the resident population and/or visitors and will have beneficial effects for the local economy.
- Policy SE1 will be especially helpful for the 40% of households which do not have access to a second car, and could have wider environmental benefits if it succeeds in achieving a reduction in car use in favour of public transport.
- Policy SE5 will have positive effects on local economies and will help to strengthen the role of market towns as service centres. It should also help with the conservation of settlement character.
- Policy SE7 will bring benefits in encouraging healthier lifestyles. Increased engagement in volunteer work will help countryside management with benefits for landscape and biodiversity.

Recommendations

- Clarify that Policy SE5, to develop the visitor appeal of local settlements, is to work in conjunction with Policy SE4 promoting sustainable tourism.
- Ensure, in connection with Policy SE10, that full account is taken of the purpose of the AONB in connection with development proposals that bring about the roll out of high speed broadband.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Mitigation of impacts

- 4.1.4. It is apparent that the Management Plan will bring significant environmental benefits for the AONB. The wording of many policies has been improved significantly through the repeated process of drafting and appraisal. Notwithstanding the substantial beneficial impacts of the proposed policies on the range of environmental, economic and social criteria included in the assessment framework, the effect of some of the policies could be improved still further.
- 4.1.5. A small number of detailed recommendations are made to this end in Chapter 9 of the full Report, most often with a view to clarifying meaning, ensuring that positive impacts against certain assessment criteria are not won at the expense of unwanted impacts against other criteria and in strengthening and widening the range of potential benefits from a policy.
- 4.1.6. One group of recommendations concern the benefits of clarifying the wording of a small number of policies. While the overall intentions are clear, uncertainties remain in a few policies about how the objective of the policy is to be achieved. For instance, in Policy FF10, concerned with diversification and new businesses that will contribute to the conservation etc. of the AONB, it would be helpful to provide guidance on what sort of new enterprises would make significant contributions and how these might be delivered, so that encouragement of local enterprise can be focused to maximum effect.
- 4.1.7. A second group of recommendations relate to issues around the implementation of policies. A number of policies, encouragingly, seek to deliver multiple benefits – for landscape, biodiversity, recreation etc. Policies L9 and D5 are examples where this is explicit and there are other policies where multiple benefits can be captured. It would be helpful to outline how the range of these benefits is to be delivered in a harmonious fashion and potential conflicts of interest reconciled. The Sandford principle helps in clarifying priorities, but achieving multiple benefits is not always a straightforward process. In some other policies (e.g. L2, B8, HE2) more emphasis might be placed on securing desirable practical effects from the improved understanding, awareness or plan coverage that is to be achieved.
- 4.1.8. The overwhelming majority of policies in the Management Plan propose positive measures. A very small number are expressed in negative terms – to stop unacceptable things happening. It is essential that the qualities of the AONB are protected in this way, but it will be important for the Board to continue to be seen to be promoting the right way to do things rather than simply seeking to stop bad practice. Thus Policy L5, concerned to resist inappropriate development, should be viewed as the back-stop to efforts to promote a high quality of design for the development that is necessary to the continued social and economic welfare of the Chilterns communities through initiatives such as the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide.

- 4.1.9. The policies of the plan must be read as a package and not a set of individual policies, of course. It would be helpful for the Conservation Board to emphasise this when adopting the Management Plan. This could be done by a clear statement at the outset and would obviate any need for explicit cross-referencing between policies. Again, the statement in the Plan that the Sandford principle applies is very helpful, but does not cover every eventuality. For instance, the potential for a number of policies which encourage recreational access and an increase in numbers of visitors to the area to increase the number of car journeys made, and thus greenhouse gas emissions, must be considered. Policy UE4 encourages visits to the countryside and local villages without travelling by car and more prominence might be given to this important policy.
- 4.1.10. The Management Plan policies place much emphasis on the conservation of local character and distinctiveness, and this is a great strength. Character cannot be a static concept but must evolve in the face of climate change and human activity. Other policies (e.g. L13) stress the need for management to adapt to climate change. It will be important to develop a long-term vision to guide this process of adaptation.
- 4.1.11. Finally, the assessment has highlighted how important will be the role of the statutory development plans in delivering, or contributing to, many of the Aims of the Management Plan. The Management Plan policies generally now specify the environmental parameters within which Local Plan policies should operate in the AONB and it will be very important to ensure that these messages are incorporated in Local Plans and acted upon by local authority partners.

4.2. **Monitoring**

- 4.2.1. The Conservation Board will wish to monitor progress in implementing the actions set out in the Engagement Plan contained in the Revised Management Plan. It will also seek to monitor the state of the AONB and the way it changes over time so as to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions in conserving and enhancing the AONB. These two processes can be referred to as “performance monitoring” and “condition monitoring”.
- 4.2.2. The framework for performance monitoring is provided by the Engagement Plan itself, which defines desired outcomes for each of the specified actions. Such monitoring will inform the annual review and roll-forward of the Engagement Plan. The Conservation Board will lead on this monitoring process, but for many actions will rely on contributions from the identified lead partner organisations.
- 4.2.3. Monitoring the evolving condition of the Chilterns AONB will be carried out over a longer reporting period, principally aimed at informing the quinquennial reviews of the Management Plan. It will be structured around the suite of headline condition indicators that are proposed in Section 6 of the Management Plan and derived from the environmental baseline derived for this assessment, set out in Annex C to the full Environmental Report. A phased programme will be developed, spreading the burden of data collection and analysis over a number of years. Again, the Conservation Board will take the lead in coordinating this work, although partner organisations will often be best placed to collect the data required.

- 4.2.4. Natural England is proposing to develop a set of headline condition indicators for use in all AONBs. The Chilterns suite of indicators should incorporate this national set when it becomes available.