

MALVERN HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

26 APRIL 2024

MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

Recommendation

1. **The Committee is recommended to:**
 - a) **Note the background, timetable and work undertaken thus far in reviewing the AONB management plan.**
 - b) **Engage in a workshop/discussion and make its views known with regards to the review.**

Background

2. A letter dated 7th July 2022 received from Defra Minister Lord Benyon outlined formally an option to delay the full review of the AONB Management Plan, allowing completion nationally of new management planning guidance, establishment of the Landscapes Trails & Parks Partnership, a new Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework and other evolving policy for AONBs, and will bring the next Plan for 2025-2030 in line with government programmes such as 30 by 30. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership accepted this invitation to delay via a letter sent to Natural England on 14 December 2022, on behalf of our 5 local authorities.
3. New comprehensive guidance on the management planning process for **all** Protected Landscapes in England (National Parks and National Landscapes) has been produced by Natural England and released in draft form. Finalised guidance is expected at any time.

Overview

4. The statutory Management Plan is the primary document through which the purposes of the Malvern Hills National Landscape can be achieved. It sets out the ambition, strategy and guidance to achieve the purposes of the designation and, where possible in doing so, enhancing people's quality of life.

Legal status

5. Protected Landscape Management Plans are statutory in that National Park Authorities, the Broads Authority, and Local Authorities with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (or Conservation Boards where established) are required by law to produce them, and they are of national importance.

What does the Management Plan do?

6. The Management Plan is the single most important policy document for a Protected Landscape. It is a Plan for the geographic area of the designation and therefore not for a single authority or body. As a strategic over-arching document, it coordinates and integrates other policies, plans and strategies where these relate to the purposes and duties. The Management Plan is, therefore, the principal vehicle for ensuring that the statutory purposes of the Protected Landscape are met.
7. A Management Plan is a document that:
 - Highlights the significant aspects of the designation around which the purposes of designation will be met.
 - Highlights the condition of the landscape and its socio-economic condition and trajectory of change.
 - Describes the drivers for change and issues acting on the landscape.
 - Presents the ambition and strategy to conserve and enhance the Protected Landscape in the light of national, regional, and local priorities.
 - Establishes measures of success and targets upon which progress can be measured and activity evaluated.
 - Identifies and secures commitment from delivery partners.
 - Identifies the mechanisms for delivery, and establishes broad timeframes.
 - Establishes principles to guide decision-making and so furthering the delivery of long-term vision and outcomes.

Management Plan audiences

8. A Management Plan should be prepared with a clear idea of its target audiences. The Plan will be read by a wider audience than those that were involved in its production. Plans are for all who have a stake in the future of the landscape. Preparing the Plan is central to building the collaboration that will be instrumental to delivery.
9. Audiences for a Management Plan are likely to include:
 - Protected Landscapes teams.
 - The Authorities, The Conservancy, or Partnership Boards/ Committees.
 - Local authority members and officers.
 - Government departments and statutory agencies - for example, Natural England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Historic England, the Environment Agency, and the Forestry Commission.
 - Statutory undertakers - for example, Utilities.
 - Other voluntary and third-sector organisations.
 - Parish councils and community leaders.
 - Landowners and land managers.
 - Community and 'Friends of' groups.
 - Residents and visitors.
 - Funding bodies, e.g., National Lottery Heritage Fund.

- Others, including prospective partners who are not yet involved.
10. That said, the primary audience for this guidance is the legal ‘Responsible Authorities’ for Protected Landscapes – in our case that is local authorities with AONBs within their jurisdiction. Primary users of this guidance are the NL teams and AONB Partnership Committees (Joint Advisory Committees and Joint Committees) who drive the review and delivery of Management Plans. In addition, Natural England has specific statutory functions concerning Protected Landscapes and will find this guide helpful in discharging those functions.

A new legal duty

11. Of particular importance to note is the change to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) that was introduced by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023), effective since 26/12/23. This legislative change now requires that all relevant authorities must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs; previously they were only required to have regard to this purpose. AONB Management Plans have been strengthened by this new duty.

New national targets

12. Early in 2024 Defra published ambitious new targets for National Parks and National Landscapes, to reflect how these areas can make a real difference for nature, climate, people and place. These targets have been described as a minimum contribution rather than a limit on a Protected Landscape’s ambition. The Protected Landscape targets are non-statutory and create a shared ambition for all 44 of England’s Protected Landscapes. The targets are for the Protected Landscapes as places (the geographic area covered by the designation) rather than for specific organisations or people within it. These targets – see Appendix II - and the work that will need to be done to meet them - will form a key part of the next management plan.

Summary

Progress with the review to date

13. Following an ‘invitation to quote’ exercise a consultant was appointed in January 2024 to assist with the management plan review over 2023-24 and 2024/25. This is Craggatak Consulting who have helped with this work in the past. As with previous reviews, the intention is that the review will be conducted as a joint exercise between staff in the Team (principally the NL manager) and the consultant, with the NL Steering Group acting as a sounding board and having overall responsibility for the work. Staff in the team will be responsible for key communications and liaising with partners locally (including undertaking local consultation) whilst the consultant will major on delivering the SEA, drafting revised text and ensuring adherence to key national guidance etc.

14. The management plan review has now commenced. Appendix 1 provides a summary of the tasks involved in the review process and who will lead on them. It also outlines timings, including the key deadline of needing to have revised management plan text available for the JAC to approve in November 2024. Tasks shaded out in Appendix 1 have already been completed.

Issues and drivers

15. There are a range of issues and areas of development to consider in the management plan review (note that list is not exhaustive and topics inter-relate and overlap). They include:
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation, including integrating and developing content from local and national strategies and plans for Net Zero.
 - Nature Recovery – linking to the Colchester Declaration, the AONB Nature Recovery Plan and emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
 - Agriculture transition, the development of the Environmental Land Management (ELM).
 - Schemes and support for those forms of farming most compatible with AONB purposes.
 - Priorities set out in the Landscapes Review and government response, and any changes to purposes, duties and targets which result from this.
 - The government's Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (revision to 25 Year Environment Plan).
 - Closer attention to natural capital assets and the ecosystem services they provide.
 - Emerging opportunities for green finance.
 - Local authority policies, including the emerging South Worcestershire Development Plan.

Input from JAC members

16. It would be useful for the Committee to spend some time considering key issues. Members are asked to be ready to input into a broad-based discussion but a few key topics and questions are highlighted below. You can make suggestions at the meeting or email them in advance or after the meeting.

Topic 1 Evidence and influences

1. What are the key sources of evidence and information to support the Plan (e.g. reports, data)?
2. What recent higher-level strategies or policies on relevant topics does the Plan need to take into account?
3. Are there any sources of information you know about on community views on topics related to the Plan?

Topic 2 The current Plan

1. Which sections (policies, guidance, etc) do you think need updating or changing, possibly including why, and what change would you like to see?

2. Which topics currently don't have policies or guidance and perhaps should have?

Topic 3 Actions

1. What key new actions (for any actor) do you think that the Plan needs to include or stimulate?
2. Are there actions where the activity of different partners could be better co-ordinated?
3. What actions can your organisation take forward to support the aims of the National Landscape in the next 5 years?

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Appendix 1 - Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan (2019-24) Review Programme

Task No.	Task	Who	Suggested timetable
Formalities and Notification			
1.	Authorisation from local authorities to undertake review on their behalf	NL Team	Dec 2023
2.	Notify Natural England S90 (1)	NL Team	Jan 2024
3.	Announce requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	NL Team	Jan 2024
4.	Finalise process and timetable of review	NL Steering Group	Jan 2024
Scoping			
5.	Consider strengths and weaknesses of current Plan and new strategic priorities	NL Team with core partners	Jan-Feb 2024
6.	Draft consultation programme	External support	Jan-Feb 2024
7.	Online survey to gather initial comments and views	External support	Feb 2024
8.	Identify main areas requiring update or new work	External support	Mar-Apr 2024
9.	Review and assess other new evidence, law, policies, strategies, plans and issues which are of relevance (including the Outcomes Framework, requirement for climate change adaptation plans etc).	External support	Mar-Apr 2024
10.	Collate community views on issues from existing sources	External support	Mar-Apr 2024
11.	Start SEA Scoping Study, collation of data and evidence of other plans and programmes, seek input from the Environmental bodies.	External support with NL Team	Mar-Apr 2024
12.	Publish State of AONB report	NL Team	March 2024
13.	JAC 'workshop' on current Plan, policies, evidence, positions and new strategic priorities	NL Team	26 April 2024
14.	Undertake targeted consultations/participatory	External support to prepare content.	April-May 2024

	workshops with relevant groups on current Plan, policies, evidence, positions and new strategic priorities	NL team to arrange invites, hall bookings, host events etc	
15.	Identify key issues, aims and objectives	External support – discussion with NL Team/Partnership	May-June 2024
16.	Draft new wording for consultation draft of revised Plan	External support NL Team to approve	May-June 2024
17.	Write SEA report, setting context and objectives, establishing baseline evidence and indicators (Stage A). Assess effects of objectives, policies and actions and for SEA and/or SA (stage B). Collate Environmental Report for SEA/SA (stage C) plus non-technical summary	External support	June-July 2024
18.	Run public consultation on new draft plan and SEA/SA report (Stage D). 12 weeks. Consult on scoping report for SEA	External support with NL Team	July, Aug, Sept 2024
19.	Undertake specific targeted consultations/participatory workshops with relevant groups as required	External support to prepare content. NL team to arrange invites, hall bookings etc NL Team	Summer 2024
20.	Consider comments from consultation and amend plan	External support/ NL Team	Sep-Oct 2024
21.	Report on consultation and suggested amendments	External support	Oct 2024
22.	Draft plan to JAC for approval	NL Team	15 Nov 2024
23.	Send to Natural England for formal observations	NL Team	Nov 2024
24.	Consider comments from formal observations and amend Plan	NL Team	Jan 2025
25.	Get new plan formally approved by Local Authorities and JAC Chair	Local Authorities	Jan-Feb 2025
26.	Design, printing and distribution	NL Team	Feb-Mar 2025
27.	Send approved plan to Secretary of State	NL Team	By end Mar 2025

28.	Publish statement of how SEA taken into account and changes	NL Team	Mar 2025
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Appendix 2 – Defra’s 10 Environmental Improvement Plan Targets

Thriving plants and wildlife targets:

- **Target 1** Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).
- **Target 2** Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.
- **Target 3** For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having ‘actions on track’ to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.
- **Target 4** Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.
- **Target 5** Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.

Mitigating and adapting to climate change targets:

- **Target 6** Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.
- **Target 7** Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.
- **Target 8** Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).

Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment targets:

- **Target 9** Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.
- **Target 10** Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes.