



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2023	<u>Item</u>  <b>3</b>
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## **AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW - SUPPORT FOR ONE YEAR DELAY AND IDENTIFICATION OF NEW/CHANGED ISSUES TO COVER IN REVIEW**

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### **Summary**

This paper seeks the Partnership's support to delay the substantive review of the AONB Management Plan by a year (to be approved by the two local authorities). It also sets out in a draft statement at Appendix 1 an initial list of new or changed issues and drivers which the full Plan review will need to take into account.

### **Recommendation**

The Partnership is recommended to support the proposed delay to the full Plan review, and to comment on the draft statement and any further issues for inclusion in this.

### **Background**

At the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2022 Partnership meeting the possible delay to the full Management Plan review was discussed, and the minister's letter had just been received (this is included at Appendix 2). There are a number of reasons why a delay to the full review of the Management Plan is desirable and why many AONB Partnerships are taking up this option. These include:

- Establishment of the new Landscapes, Parks and Trails Partnership and new strategy for protected landscapes arising from this.
- New guidance commissioned by Natural England and in preparation on protected landscape Management Plans.
- Defra's development of a new outcomes framework for protected landscapes to include new targets and monitoring requirements.
- Alignment with government target to protect 30% of land by 2030 (30 by 30).
- National Landscapes rebranding
- Government's proposed changes to the purposes of AONB designation

This paper proposes that the Partnership supports the one year delay to the full review of the Management Plan, and that our two local authorities approve this, such that the relevant official notification can be made.

The legal requirement is set out in S89 of the Countryside & Right of Way Act 2000:

**S89 Management plans**

*(10) Where a conservation board or relevant local authority review any plan under this section, they shall—*

- (a) determine on that review whether it would be expedient to amend the plan and what (if any) amendments would be appropriate,*
- (b) make any amendments that they consider appropriate, and*
- (c) publish a report on the review specifying any amendments made.*

Our current process is essentially that this 'light touch review' concludes that it is not expedient to amend the existing Management Plan. The statement we will provide does not therefore need to specify amendments (as in b and c above) but will serve to confirm the validity of the current plan until 2025 and also to identify new or changed issues and drivers which the full plan review should address.

Despite this delay to the end of the review process and therefore approval of the new 2025-2030 Management Plan, it is proposed to commence the review process more or less from now, to allow ample time to do this. Appendix 3 gives a proposed timetable and process for the Management Plan review. This is based on that used for the last plan review and may need to be amended as further guidance is received. Some stages or tasks may be started earlier than stated here, working first on areas least affected by pending new guidance, etc.

<b>List of Background Papers</b> AONB Partnership paper & minutes 12 <sup>th</sup> July 2022 item 5 Delay to Management Plan review
<b>Human Rights Act Appraisal</b> The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
<b>Environmental Appraisal</b> The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
<b>Risk Management Appraisal</b> Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
<b>Community / Consultations Appraisal</b> The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
<b>Appendices</b> Appendix 1 Draft Management Plan review statement Appendix 2 Minister's letter of 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2022 Appendix 3 Proposed timetable and process for Management Plan review

## **Appendix 1 Draft Management Plan review statement**

(to be accompanied by a letter from the AONB Partnership Chair on behalf of the two local authorities)

### **Review Statement - Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan, draft at 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

The letter of 7<sup>th</sup> 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 Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership has supported taking up this option to delay, undertaking the suggested 'light touch review' of the current Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24. The two local authorities Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council *have agreed (tbc)* that it is not expedient to make amendments to the Plan at the current time. **This Statement therefore confirms that the 2019-24 Management Plan will stand for a further year until 2025 when the full review leading to a new Plan will be completed.** We will reserve the option to use the full period to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 for the review process but will aim to have the new Plan in place by the end of March 2025. A further progress update and revision of the current Management Plan actions will be produced by March 2024.

The Partnership's light touch review has identified the following issues to address in the full plan review, and as areas for development of new content in the new 2025-30 Management Plan (note that list is not exhaustive and topics inter-relate and overlap):

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation, including integrating and developing content from the Partnership's Climate Change Action Plan, 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) Scheme 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 Shropshire Plan (Shropshire Council)
- New Shropshire Local Plan and review directions for the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan
- Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Rebranding of AONBs as National Landscapes

*(further suggestions of issues and areas to include are welcome from Partnership members)*



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07 July 2022

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to confirm a decision by Defra, effective today, to give you and your partners an option to delay the publication of upcoming Management Plans by up to 1 year from their original planned review date, after new Management Plan guidance and new Protected Landscapes outcomes are published.

I am addressing this letter specifically to those Protected Landscape Management Plan Partnerships (hereafter: "Partnerships") that are required by law to review their next Management Plan in 2023 or 2024. For awareness, I have copied this letter to Protected Landscapes bodies who will not be affected by this option to delay and can proceed with their current review timetable as planned.

Please allow me to explain the rationale for this, and to reassure you that you are under no obligation to delay the publication of your next Management Plan if you would prefer not to and/or if a delay is unsuited to your management planning cycle.

The government committed to strengthen Management Plans in its [response to the Landscapes Review](#). We have already begun work to implement non-legislative change during 2022. For example, we are working with Natural England, National Parks England, and the National Association of AONBs to update the Management Plan guidance for both National Parks and AONBs. We are also working to ensure that new ambitious outcomes are agreed for the role of Protected Landscapes in delivering on the government's goals, aligned with the revised 25 Year Environment Plan and interim environmental targets under the Environment Act 2021 and the Net Zero Strategy.

We recognise the scale and significant implications of these reforms for management planning. We have also listened carefully to those of you who have voiced support for a more flexible and less prescriptive approach to management planning during our consultation on the Landscapes Review Response, which ended on 9 April.

We have therefore decided to grant you an option to delay publication of your next Management Plan. In practice, this option to delay will only apply to Partnerships that are required by law to review their next Management Plan in 2023 or 2024 and will therefore apply to Partnerships who currently find themselves in the middle or nearing the end of their five-year Management Plan cycle. Protected Landscapes that are due to publish their next Management Plan from 2025 onwards will not be affected by the delay and will work to the same timelines as planned.

The purpose of this optional delay is to give Partnerships time to digest new outcome-based targets (due to be published in January 2023), new Management Plan guidance (due to be published in Spring 2023), and new policies outlined in the government's response to the Landscapes Review, and to embed these more easily into their Plans.

Defra considers that that any Partnerships wishing to delay their next Plan would still need to respect their five-year review cycles as stipulated by the Environment Act 1995 (for National Park Management Plans) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (for AONB Management Plans). In order to comply with the law without compromising the integrity of future Management Plans, Defra judges that Partnerships could simply produce a light-touch review in which they commit to produce a new Management Plan after the new guidance is published.

Defra has considered what a light-touch review might look like and advises the following: Partnerships would agree and publish one page of text setting out their intentions for the next Management Plan. This could include a brief vision statement, a summary of how the Management Plan will be structured, and a summary of the Partnerships' objectives over the next five-year review period (carrying forward actions and/or adding new ones for the year affected by the delay). Producing a light-touch review of this nature would allow Partnerships to carry over their existing Plan by demonstrating they have considered the next Plan, in compliance with the law. Partnerships would not need to consult extensively to produce this light-touch review, as we expect it would be pitched as a continuation/extension of the current Plan.

We remain committed, however, to ensuring substantive Management Plan reviews are conducted. We therefore ask all Protected Landscapes electing to delay their next Management Plan to complete a review of that Plan no later than 31 December 2025. We will consider any requests for an additional, exceptional extension on a case-by-case basis. Although we are committed to ensuring the management planning process is more flexible going forwards, we envisage this being a one-off delay in light of the wide-ranging and significant reforms we are proposing to make.

Let me be clear that any Plans that have recently been published will remain valid and effective for their current cycle in full (that is, five years from the date of publication). We recognise the considerable work that has gone into these Plans and want to assure you that any new targets, guidance, or policies can be embedded at a later stage, either during your current cycle or as part of the next five-year review.

Once again, I would like to reassure you that this delay is optional; it is entirely up to you, as Partnerships, whether to exercise it.

I hope that this option to delay can help to ensure a smooth and flexible transition as we roll out reforms to strengthen Management Plans. As we begin this process of longer-term reforms to Management Plans, we would like to explore how we can better harmonise Management Plan cycles so that we can promote partnership working and coordination of plan implementation across the 44 Protected Landscapes, while respecting local circumstances. I look forward to your input as we develop this work.

Management Plans are vital strategic documents and I am grateful for your tireless work to draft, develop and deliver them. My officials and I look forward to continuing to work with you on multiple programmes of work linked to Management Plans, including updating the new Management Plan guidance, setting new targets for Protected Landscapes, and developing the National Landscapes Partnership and the National Landscapes Strategy.

I would be grateful if you could share this letter among your Partnerships and wider networks to ensure they are informed.

I have also copied this letter to Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, Philip Hygate, Chair of the National Association of AONBs, and Andrew McCloy, Chair of National Parks England.

Yours ever,

*Richard Benyon.*

**THE RT HON LORD BENYON**

**Timetable for review of the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan for 2025-30**

Including Sustainability Appraisal (SA), with required Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

<b>TASK</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>EXPECTED TIMETABLE</b>
<b>FORMALITIES AND NOTIFICATION</b>		
Authorisation from local authorities to undertake review on their behalf	AONB Team	Nov 23
Agree process and timetable of review	Partnership	Nov 23
Notify Natural England S90(1) and other stakeholders	AONB Team	Nov 23
Announce requirement for SEA/SA	AONB Team	Nov 23
<b>SCOPING</b>		
Gather information relating to new evidence/ issues, including partner input at Partnership meeting	AONB Team & Partnership	Nov - Dec 23
Discussion of Plan review priorities among Team, Partnership, Transition Board and key partners. Incorporate within planned events where possible	Partnership	Nov 23 – Jan 24
Identify main areas requiring update or new work	AONB Team & Partnership	Nov 23 – Jan 24
List and assess relevance of new strategies/ plans, including in Wales	AONB Team	Nov – Dec 23
Collate community views on issues from existing sources	AONB Team	Nov – Dec 23
Write scoping report for SA/SEA, setting context and objectives, establishing baseline evidence and indicators (stage A)	AONB Team	Nov – Dec 23
Consult on scoping report for SA/SEA	With statutory agencies	Jan 24
Publish update to State of the AONB report	AONB Team	Jan 24
<b>REVIEW</b>		
Undertake specific targeted consultations /participatory workshops with relevant groups	Partnership & wider	Jan – Mar 24
Redraft main issues, aims and objectives and discuss with relevant groups.	AONB Team & Partnership	Jan – Mar 24
Work on topic sections with relevant groups – issues, policies and actions.	AONB Team & Partnership	Jan – Mar 24
Assess effects of objectives, policies & actions and for SA/SEA and develop alternatives. (Stage B) An element of independent review is required.	AONB Team	Feb – Mar 24
Collate new draft plan and Environmental Report for SA/SEA (Stage C) plus non-technical summary.	AONB Team	Mar - April 24
Approve Consultation Draft	Partnership	May 24
<b>CONSULTATION &amp; APPROVAL OF FULL PLAN</b>		
Run public consultation on new draft plan and SA/SEA report (Stage D). 12 week period.	AONB Team/ Partnership	May - July 24
Run consultation events	AONB Team	May - July 24
Consider comments from consultation and amend plan	AONB Team	July - Aug 18
Report on consultation and suggested amendments	Partnership	Aug 24
Send to Natural England for formal observations	AONB Team	Sept 24
Consider comments from formal observations and amend plan	Partnership	Nov - Dec 24
Get new plan formally approved through Cabinet of local authorities	Local authorities	Jan 25 -
Send approved Plan to Secretary of State and disseminate	AONB Team	By March 25
Publish Statement on how SA/SEA was taken into account and changes made.	AONB Team	March 25
Implement and monitor Plan and its effects (SA/SEA Stage E).	Partnership	April 25 on