

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2023

Report Title	Endorsement of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 – 2025.
Purpose of Report	The Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan is a key mechanism for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) as well as increasing the understanding and enjoyment of the National Landscape's special qualities. The new Management plan and its vision place increased emphasis on the climate and ecological emergencies as well as access to nature and the countryside. The evidence within the Plan and the policies will assist in decision making and the preparation of Council policies and projects.
Decision(s)	The Committee RESOLVES to note the content and aspirations of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023–2025 and recognise its importance in supporting and informing the following: a) part of the evidence base for the Local Plan; b) part of the evidence base for the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans; c) part of the evidence base for the preparation and implementation of relevant Council strategies, policies and projects; d) the determination of planning applications (where compatible with relevant Local Plan and national policy) by acting as a material consideration; and e) the development and delivery of the Council's services and activities.
Consultation and Feedback	The Cotswolds National Landscape Board (Cotswolds Conservation Board) have undertaken extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, including Stroud District Council, in the preparation of the management plan.
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Options	The alternative option is not to note and recognise the importance of the Management Plan. This could be seen as a sign that the Council is not committed to meeting its duty under the CROW Act s.85 to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape (AONB).
Background Papers	None

Appendices	Appendix A – Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	Yes	No	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Cotswolds National Landscape Board adopted the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2023 -2025 in February 2023. The Plan is a statutory plan, under the provisions of section 89(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000¹ (CROW). If the CNL Board (the Board) was not charged with the requirement to produce a Management Plan the local authorities would collectively have to draft, consult and publish a plan.
- 1.2 Although the Board is the body responsible for preparing and publishing the Management Plan and will play an important role in its delivery, the policies of the Management Plan are also intended to guide the work of other stakeholders, such as the Council, in delivering the Management Plan’s vision and outcomes.
- 1.3 The plan runs for two years rather than the usual five. This is because significant national and local policy developments for protected landscapes are anticipated during this period, particularly with reference to climate action and the implementation of the Glover review on protected landscapes.²

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The management plan sets out a clear vision (chapter 2) for the CNL, underpinned by three key issues:
 - the Climate Emergency;
 - nature’s decline and the Ecological Crisis;
 - health and societal change.
- 2.2 From this vision and the three key issues a series of policies have been developed to deliver the desired outcomes. Some of these policies will be delivered by the Board themselves and some are put forward to encourage others to deliver on the vision.
- 2.3 The policies are set out under 3 cross-cutting themes: 1) Climate change – mitigation and adaptation; 2) Natural and Cultural Capital; and 3) Working Together.

And under two other themes:

CONSERVING AND ENHANCING. - Influencing and delivering for landscape, nature and climate. This includes Landscape; Geology; Local Distinctiveness; Tranquillity; Dark Skies; Historic environment and cultural heritage; Biodiversity and nature recovery; Rural land management; and Development and transport.

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING AND ENJOYMENT. Ensuring access, learning and wellbeing opportunities are for everyone. This includes Health and wellbeing; Access and recreation; and Sustainable tourism.

¹ [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

² [DEFRA - Landscapes Review - Final Report 2019 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

- 2.4 A number of the policies are quite aspirational in nature. The Board hopes that these aspirational policies will aid in developing and evidencing future local plan policies in the County. A policy example is management plan Policy CC1 Climate Change, which states that *“All developments, should have a net zero operational carbon balance and 100% energy provided by low carbon sources. Alternatives to fossil fuel energy sources should be used”* The Adopted Stroud District Local Plan (2015) has only a brief reference in Core Policy CP5 to minimising net greenhouse emissions. The current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and accompanying planning policy guidance (2023) however does make reference to climate change. The emerging Stroud District Local Plan DCP1 Delivering Carbon Neutral by 2030 does comply with the aspirations in the Management Plan. This situation means that some of the policies in the 2015 Adopted Local Plan may not appear to be compatible. Officers believe the emerging Local Plan policies are compatible and many compliance aspects have been discussed and agreed at the Local Plan examination which is on-going. Regardless any compliance scenario, the Management Plan is a material consideration in planning decisions and latest National Planning Policy Framework would provide a strong basis to inform decision makers. Another example is Policy CE7 Biodiversity and Nature Recovery in the Management Plan. Again policies in the emerging SDLP are compatible with the Management Plan. Whilst the Management Plan policies would not over-ride those in the existing Adopted Stroud District Local Plan (2015), when determining planning applications the combination of latest NPPF and the advanced stage the emerging Stroud District Local Plan has reached should not result in major policy compliance issues arising. It reflects the position we have reached in timeline terms and should only be temporary.
- 2.5 The previous management plan (2018-2023) was not endorsed by the Council, partly because of its emphasis on the Cotswolds becoming a National Park. The current management plan does not refer to that, however it highlights the need for all stakeholders to work together to ensure that the proposals in the Glover Landscape Review, that were prioritised by the Government³ are delivered – for example nature recovery and access to nature and the countryside. It is also worth noting that In June 2020 the Cotswolds National Landscape Board decided to replace the term Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) with National Landscape. The plan uses the name Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) for the area designated as the Cotswolds AONB. At times it is abbreviated to National Landscape. AONB is still the legal designation and is used within this plan when referring to AONB’s outside of the Cotswolds and the designation nationally.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan provides an important mechanism for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) as well as increasing the understanding and enjoyment of the National Landscape’s special qualities. As The evidence within the Plan and the policies will inform decision making as a material consideration and should assist the preparation of Council policies and projects within the CNL.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-government-response>

There are no direct financial implications within the report as it sets out a key mechanism for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL), supporting decision making and the preparation of Council policies and projects.

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4.2 Legal Implications

The Cotswolds National Landscape Plan is a statutory plan produced by the Cotswolds National Landscape Board pursuant to section 89(1) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The purpose of the Plan is to set out the Management Board's policies and proposals for managing the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Due to its statutory nature the Plan should form part of the evidence base in respect of the preparation of local plans and neighbourhood development plans. The Plan is also of relevance to decision making in respect of Council services and activities, especially those services or activities which directly or indirectly effect the Cotswolds National Landscape.

The policies of the plan, in so far as they are consistent with the development plan, are also a material consideration in respect of development control decision making.

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4.3 Equality Implications

An EIA is not required because there are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category. The Management Plan places considerable emphasis on the climate and ecological emergencies and use of the Plan will assist in addressing these.