

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan Adoption

Director: Martin Woods, Director of Service Delivery
Manager / Lead Specialist: Tim Cook, Locality Manager
Lead Officer: Adrian Moore, Locality Officer
Contact Details: adrian.moore@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462409

Purpose of the Report

To ensure that statutory obligations are met by SSDC by jointly producing a management plan for the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Councillors are asked to adopt the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24 on behalf of SSDC.

Public Interest

This report provides a summary of the activities and projects to be carried out from 2019-2024 by the Blackdown Hills AONB partnership for the benefit of the residents of South Somerset and the wider area.

Recommendation

That members adopt the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024 (Appendix A – circulated as a separate document).

Background

Councillors are reminded that in December 2018 a report was brought to Area West Committee and it was agreed to pay £6,000 as SSDC's contribution towards the Blackdown Hills AONB for 2019/20. This contribution helps to meet SSDC's statutory obligation regarding the writing and delivery of a Management Plan.

The purpose of AONB designation

AONBs are designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

The purposes of the AONB designation were updated and confirmed by the Countryside Commission in 1991 as follows:

- The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 confirmed the significance of AONBs and created improved arrangements for their management. There are two key sections of the Act for AONBs:

- Section 85 places a statutory duty on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when exercising or performing any function affecting land in AONBs.
- Section 89 places a statutory duty on local authorities to prepare and review a Management Plan for each AONB in their administrative area.

Benefit of continued engagement

- Proven partnership delivering AONB Management Plan and Duty of Regard for SSDC under Sec 85 & 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- Excellent multiplier of SSDC's £6,000 – 1:34 (with £201,882 from Defra and other LA funding)
- Provides specialist planning advice to SSDC Planning Officers
- Helps deliver SSDC Plans and Strategies including the Local Plan
- Continuation of partnership working with key public and private sector partners
- Ability to access additional funding for local projects
- Strong cross-sector and community engagement and support
- Key partnership targeting rural economy, farming and forestry
- Policy development benefits e.g. Landscape Character Assessment
- Ambassador for SSDC

Achievements from 2018/19

- Statutory Blackdown Hills 2019-24 AONB Management Plan produced by the AONB staff unit (through the AONB Partnership) on behalf of SSDC
- Nature & Wellbeing work to bring out groups (e.g. WATCH groups) to local farms such as Folly Farm (Dommett) and work with the Memory Café in Chard
- Farm Facilitation Funding (from Defra) has been secured with Butterfly Conservation for the Blackdown Hills Farming & Woodland Group (58 farmer members) and has enabled 14 events and demonstrations on topics including wood fuel / woodland management, orchard management and hedgerow management
- The AONB Volunteer Co-Ordinator has recruited volunteers from across the area and engaged them in activities including biological surveying and practical tasks
- Three events Guides produced per year promoting events organised by the AONB and partners

Highlights over the coming year relevant to SSDC - taken from the full management plan

Forward Plans for 2019/20

- An application is being submitted to *Reaching Communities* (Lottery) for a joint Somerset AONB's and Somerset Wildlife Trust bid for nature & wellbeing work linked to green spaces, to include Chard and work with communities and partners in SSDC
- Target the Woods for Water project (led by the AONB) at areas of the Axe catchment in the SSDC area- to improve water quality & biodiversity
- A Visitor Guide for the AONB will include sites in the SSDC part of the AONB, including local walks
- There will be interactive sessions undertaken with the primary schools in the AONB / in parishes that are part of the AONB

Financial implications

None from this report

Council Plan Implications

Working in partnership with the Blackdown Hills AONB helps address Focus 2 of the SSDC Council Plan:

- The environment - the work of the AONB helps make South Somerset an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

The Blackdown Hills AONB website is a useful resource for homeowners seeking information on renewable energy and light pollution.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The Blackdown Hills AONB works to ensure that people with limited mobility can enjoy the countryside easily by promoting easy access trails.

Background Papers

- Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB December 2018
 - Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB December 2017
 - Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB December 2016
 - Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB December 2015
 - Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB December 2014
 - Area West Committee – Natural Futures February 2014
 - Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB October 2013
 - Area West Committee – Blackdown Hills AONB October 2012
-