

## 5. Context for this Partnership Plan

- 5.1. This statutory document is not prepared in isolation. In addition to extensive local consultation, there is a need to consider the wider context. Farmland and woodland dominate the landscapes of the AONB. Changes in these land uses will always have a major influence on the natural beauty of the area.

### External Factors

- 5.2. Four main factors are external to the AONB but will have ongoing effects on it:
- national legislation, strategies, and policies
  - Britain's exit from the European Union
  - climate change
  - economic conditions, fluctuating world demand and prices.
- 5.3. Whilst the Partnership cannot pro-actively influence these four factors, it can help to influence local and national responses to them. It will make every effort to respond to the impacts they have. They are currently facts of everyday life that we need to be aware of, keep up to date with, and act accordingly. They are accepted as strands that run throughout this document.

### National Legislation, Strategies and Policies

- 5.4. National and international legislation and regulations are largely outside the influence of AONB partnerships, even though they may have opportunities to contribute to consultations on changes. These can encompass species protection through to pollution control; and communications and transport through to environmental and animal health regulations. The Partnership operates within the English legislative framework.
- 5.5. Governmental guidance and ministerial statements can lead to changes of direction. Partners need to be light on their feet and responsive in their application to AONB situations. The focus and emphasis of national government can change relatively quickly.
- 5.6. The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan is a welcome example. This sets out action to help the natural world regain and retain good health. It aims to deliver cleaner air and water in our cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. It calls for an approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing that puts the environment first<sup>9</sup>. It also commits to undertaking a review of National Parks and AONBs.
- 5.7. Equally welcome are the Clean Growth Strategy, Industrial Strategy and the expected Environment Bill, each in articulating the interconnections and inter dependencies of environmental protection and enhancements, with the economy and society.
- 5.8. The review of English AONBs and National Parks, led by Julian Glover, will consider whether there is scope for the current network of 34 AONBs and 10 National Parks in England to expand, in either size or number. It will report on the options for improving access to these landscapes, and on the support needed by those who live and work in them. It will also explore the role these designations have in growing the rural economy. DEFRA has made it clear that weakening or undermining existing protections or geographic scope is not be part of the review.

<sup>9</sup> The Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, HMSO, 2018.



- 5.9. The review will report in 2019 (the 70th Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act). This is after the adoption and publication of this Management Plan; there may be a need to reassess our policy positions in the light of the review's findings.
- 5.10. Particularly concerning is the Government's proposal to boost housing supply and, over the long term, create a more efficient housing market whose outcomes more closely match the needs and aspirations of all households; and which supports wider economic prosperity<sup>10</sup>. The drive to build ever more houses is more relevant to the countryside around urban areas but there are implications for the AONB. The context of the planning processes is set out in detail in a separate section of this chapter.

## Britain's Withdrawal from the European Union

- 5.11. The uncertainty of this fundamental change to life in this country is highly likely to impact on this AONB; most probably through the direct and indirect effects of changes to farming and forestry. In turn, there are likely to be impacts on our landscapes.
- 5.12. DEFRA statements and consultation documents are clear that in future 'public money for public goods' will be the basis for financial contributions to farming<sup>11</sup>. Money will be for conservation and environmental gains that benefit the public at large. It will not be simply to support commercial farming activities. These changes will not happen overnight. DEFRA has indicated that there will be an 'agricultural transition period' during which time some funds will be withdrawn from existing support mechanisms in order to fund pilot projects that, for example, restore healthy soils, improve air quality, provide clean water, and enable the countryside to teem with wildlife. The outcomes of the new Agriculture Bill in 2019 are currently awaited.
- 5.13. This AONB sees this transition to 'public money for public goods' as an exciting opportunity for AONBs in general and this AONB in particular. As farming covers 86% of the area<sup>12</sup>, Cranborne Chase AONB is already in discussions about pilot projects. DEFRA wants 'a more dynamic, more self-reliant agriculture industry as we continue to compete internationally, supplying products of the highest standards to the domestic market and increasing exports. But, alongside this, we want a reformed agricultural and land management policy to deliver a better and richer environment in England'<sup>13</sup>.
- 5.14. This AONB is in a strong position to play a positive role in developing new 'agri-environment' schemes. It has an impressive track record of working collaboratively with farmers and landowners in farm clusters, and on other farm conservation projects. It has good linkages with research institutions, universities, commercial sponsors and professional bodies.

10 Department for Communities and Local Government, Fixing our broken housing market, Cm Paper 9352 HMSO, February 2017.

11 See Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit, Cmd paper 9577, HMSO, February 2018.

12 Defra (June 2016): Survey of Agriculture - Land use, livestock and agricultural workforce on commercial holdings.

13 Paragraph 5, DEFRA, Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit, Cmd paper 9577, HMSO, February 2018.



## Climate Change

- 5.15.** A changing global climate, principally caused by the activities of man, is now regarded as an indisputable fact by the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP)<sup>14</sup>, the Government and local authorities. Whilst the rate of change appears to be slowing, this is still a global issue that the AONB itself is unable to greatly influence. There is a broad consensus on the likely changes to the climate of southern England, and therefore the Cranborne Chase AONB, over the next few decades (Appendix 9).
- 5.16.** The evidence of recent years is that:
- summers are becoming warmer and drier
  - winters are becoming milder and wetter
  - extreme weather conditions are becoming more frequent.
- 5.17.** These changes have the potential to affect the landscapes, wildlife and communities of the AONB. The range of crops grown by farmers will change and water flows in rivers and streams could become more erratic. Habitats may expand, contract or shift faster than local species can migrate. New species may enter the area, some bringing disease or pests that will harm 'native' species. Or they may compete with the 'native' species for food and shelter. Tourism pressures could increase as more people decide to holiday in the UK. All of these factors could affect which flora and fauna can flourish in the area<sup>15</sup>.
- 5.18.** Climate change mitigation describes measures or actions aimed at reducing the long-term risk and hazards of climate change. Climate change adaptation describes measures or actions that help individuals, groups and natural systems to prepare for and respond to changes in the climate. Alongside other organisations and individuals, the AONB Partnership will seek to build resilience and will support and promote mitigation and adaptation measures wherever practicable.

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<sup>14</sup> The UKCIP web site as the authoritative source for scientifically sound research and government policy - [www.ukcip.org.uk](http://www.ukcip.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup> 'Natural Solutions to a changing climate on the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase', 2010.



## Economic Conditions, Fluctuating World Demand and Prices

- 5.19.** The UK economy has been in recession with periods of slow, or minimal, growth since 2008. Government and Local Authority budgets have been cut, whilst the demand for services remains. Many charity and volunteer organisations have felt the effects.
- 5.20.** When it comes to financing AONB initiatives and management activities, the competition for grant funding through various programmes is now more intense than ever. This is mainly from a noticeable increase in applications. Competing for scarce grants is a significant drain on team resources. More so in situations where core funds are tightly constrained.
- 5.21.** Reference to tightened economic conditions is made in various sections of the Plan. It is clear, however, that whether it is agriculture, a village shop, numbers of visitors, public transport, or the type of planning applications received, the current austere economic conditions affect every facet of life.
- 5.22.** There are fluctuations in the price for cereals and associated products as well as variable costs of growing those products. This is making it hard to predict future profits from arable farming. Livestock farming is crucial to the management of special habitats, like chalk grassland. It experiences considerable variations in costs and returns. Profits have been in decline for some time.
- 5.23.** The fluctuating market for UK timber has had a pronounced effect on the area's woodlands. Many woodlands no longer produce significant volumes of timber. They are often more valuable for game management, recreation, or conservation than timber products. However, the increasing demand for carbon neutral wood-fuels may support some woodland management.
- 5.24.** Britain's drawn out withdrawal from Europe, and DEFRA's development of new agri-environment schemes in England, each add uncertainty for farming over the period of this AONB Management Plan. The direct effects on farming practices will influence the extent to which farmers undertake conservation work as part of their operations.
- 5.25.** At a global scale, the fluctuating demands for food and timber worldwide have direct impacts on market conditions. It is a very uncertain market. Ever changing demand and prices make planning and developing businesses difficult.



## The Statutory Planning Processes

- 5.26.** This AONB works in parallel with its constituent Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). In particular, at a time when there is a shortage of experienced landscape staff, the AONB team can contribute positively to landscape matters and the statutory role of ‘conserving and enhancing natural beauty’. It does so at both the policy formulation and the development management stages. The AONB does not have an enforcement role.
- 5.27.** The LPAs of the AONB have adopted their Core Strategies / Local Plans and are embarking upon reviews of their housing strategies in response to Government’s concerns about the availability of dwellings. These Core Strategies / Local Plans will be the primary local planning policy documents for the coming 10 - 15 years. Therefore, it is important that these policies address AONB topics clearly and appropriately.



- 5.28.** On 24th July 2018 the Government issued a revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)<sup>16</sup> (Appendix 7). Key elements relating to AONBs having the ‘highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty’ are retained. There is emphasis on seeking social, economic, and environmental improvements in concert through the planning process. The clear implication is that one aspect, for example the economic benefits, does not override the others. The presumption in favour of sustainable development is restricted by policies that relate to AONBs and National Parks (NPPF Para 11, footnote 6). Whilst ‘the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited’, and ‘planning permission should be refused for major development’ the definition of major development is deemed not to apply to AONBs and National Parks. (see Appendix 22).

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government National Planning Policy Framework, HMSO, July 2018.



**5.29.** Within AONBs, more restrictive policies apply, than outside a protected area. There is clear support for the protection of AONBs – ‘which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty’ – and great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty. Furthermore, the guidance is to refuse planning permission for major developments in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances; and where there is a clear demonstration that they are in the public interest.

**5.30.** There is currently concern about the requirement for Local Authorities to identify at least a five year supply of housing land. This can lead to opportunistic, rather than carefully evaluated, development proposals.



*Spring snowdrops, Chettlewood – T Adams*

**5.31.** Most people encounter the planning process through planning applications and development management processes. This seems to be getting more difficult for applicants to deal with, despite statements to the contrary by Government. Although established features of the process, changes to permitted development rights, charging for planning applications and pre-application advice, and making provision for the community infrastructure levy, all serve to suggest that the planning process is increasingly complicated.

**5.32.** The Localism Act 2011 and the NPPF make provision for Neighbourhood Plans (Appendix 8) and Neighbourhood Development Orders at a parish, or group of parishes, level. These plans can increase the amount of development, and speed up the implementation of that development, as long as they are compliant with the relevant Core Strategy / Local Plan. Such neighbourhood plans must be approved by a local referendum. Village Plans and Village Design Statements are separate matters. If appropriately prepared, the planning authority can adopt them as Supplementary Planning Documents.

**5.33.** The AONB team has been involved with a number of Neighbourhood Plan groups. There is a concern that parish councillors may be generally unaware of their statutory ‘duty of regard’ to conserving and enhancing natural beauty in AONBs. They do not always understand the legal significance of AONBs. Nor do they appreciate the limited executive powers of AONBs.



## What the Natural Environment Means to People

- 5.34.** The natural world touches our lives every day. Whether we live in a city, rural village, or in the wider countryside, we rely on natural systems and landscape functions to support us. Our natural environment underpins our health, wealth and happiness and gives us a sense of place, pride and identity.
- 5.35.** An AONB is a particularly special and healthy natural environment where a wide understanding of ‘conserving and enhancing natural beauty’ is especially relevant. A healthy natural environment helps local authorities in their responsibilities to:
- support economic regeneration and social care,
  - improve public health and well-being,
  - improve educational outcomes,
  - reduce crime and antisocial behaviour,
  - help communities adapt to climate change; and
  - improve the quality of life across an entire area.
  - control flooding.
- 5.36.** Land managers have shaped our landscapes and wildlife heritage over thousands of years. Some 96% of the AONB’s land is under agricultural or woodland management<sup>17</sup>. The decisions that farmers and land managers take determine, largely, whether society can achieve its ambitions for clean air and water, abundant wildlife, healthy soil and food production.
- 5.37.** Like other AONB Partnerships, a landscape functions approach is used that values, sustains and promotes the benefits that the natural environment of the AONB provides for society. These include clean air and water, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation’s health and well-being<sup>18</sup>.
- 5.38.** A Natural Capital approach (Appendix 11) considers the relationships between these natural assets, the services they support and the benefits derived from them.
- 5.39.** An appreciation and valuation of our ‘Natural Capital’ makes explicit the link between the health of natural systems and the natural goods and services that support human well-being, as well as Government’s own work on this topic<sup>19</sup>. It seeks to maintain the integrity and functioning of whole natural systems to avoid rapid, undesirable ecological change. The national network of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) has been established to champion the idea of valuing nature. The AONB Partnership will continue to work with relevant LNPs across the four Counties to achieve this end.
- 5.40.** Local Authorities in the AONB either have developed or are developing Green Infrastructure (GI) (Appendix 12) policies for their areas. GI is the physical environment within and between the towns and villages. It is a network of open spaces, including formal parks, gardens and woodlands; the green corridors, waterways, street trees; and countryside. The aim is to deliver multiple benefits to people and wildlife. These include the improvement and linking of habitats for wildlife and increased opportunities for open air recreation, and improved health and well-being for people.

<sup>17</sup> Natural England (2014), Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes, NE 31 March 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Defra and Natural England advice note to AONB Partnerships 2012.

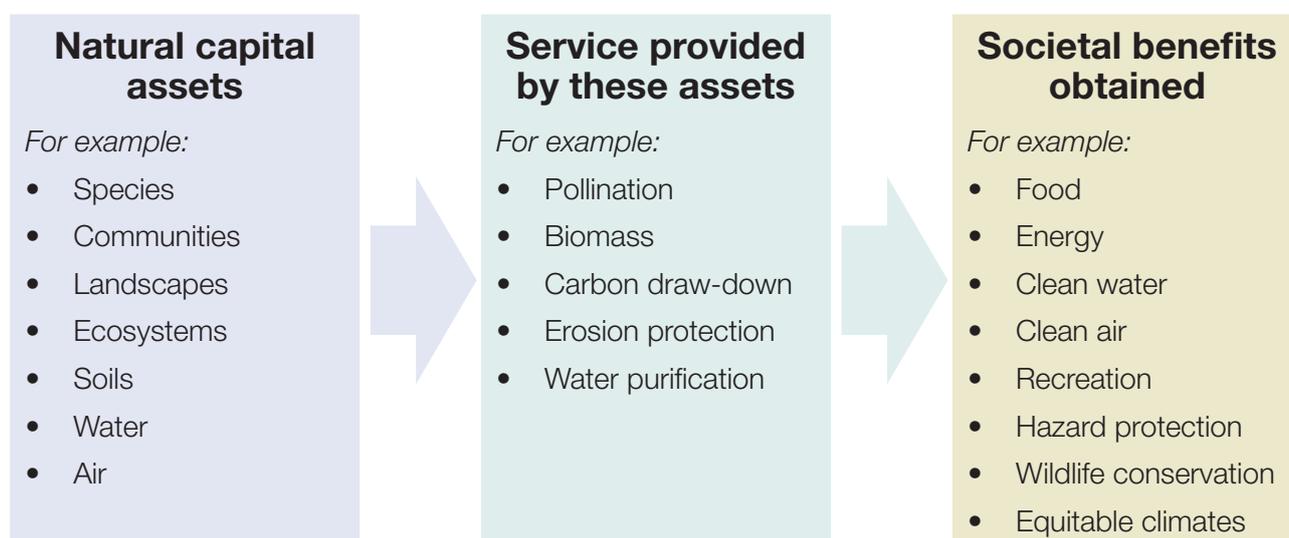
<sup>19</sup> The Government, A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, HMSO, 2018.



## Benefits from the Natural Environment

- 5.41. The Natural Capital Committee (NCC) is an independent body that provides advice to the government on the sustainable use of natural capital (our natural assets). These assets are the **stock** of renewable and non-renewable resources that combine to yield a flow of benefits to people. They include the stock of forests, rivers, land and minerals. The **services** that flow from this stock of resources are known as ecosystem and abiotic services. These give **benefits** that have a value to businesses and society.
- 5.42. The concept of Natural Capital is likely to become increasingly important. At the time of writing this Management Plan, the NCC is working with the Office for National Statistics in developing national natural capital accounts; with the Treasury in refining the Green Book; and with DEFRA in developing the best way to measure long term outcomes.
- 5.43. **Table 1** shows relationship between natural capital assets, the services they provide and the benefits to society.

**Table 1:** Relationship between the stock of natural capital assets, the services they provide and the benefits to society.



*Taken from The Natural Capital Committee, 'How to do it: a natural capital workbook', April 2017.*

- 5.44. In order to maintain natural systems, the value of environmental goods and services needs consideration. There must be an appreciation of the future costs arising from any increase in environmental risks from actions that affect the AONB. This Management Plan aims to sustain the area's natural capital.



## Four Principles on which this Plan is Founded

5.45. The statutory purposes of AONB designation are ‘conserving and enhancing natural beauty’. This Management Plan sets out how the Local Authorities and their partners aim to achieve those purposes. With this in mind, four principles provide a framework for managing change within this AONB. These are:

**1. Partnership Working** – Working together creates ownership of issues and solutions.

Furthermore, the AONB Partnership does not have the resources to undertake all the work set out in this Plan. It is vital that current and new partners work together to achieve its objectives.

**2. Landscape Scale Approach** – An AONB is a nationally important landscape. The focus is on sustaining landscape character and qualities. Sites and projects within the AONB will not be seen in isolation. The landscape-scale approach involves enlarging, improving and joining up areas of land. This will create a connected environmental network across the AONB, for the benefit of the land, wildlife, and people.

**3. Landscape Functions** – or what the landscape provides for us. The landscapes of the AONB provide us with many ‘goods and services’ (see Chart 1); these need sustaining. They range from measurable things, like fresh food, clean water, healthy soils, sustainable energy and clean air; and less easily defined benefits, such as inspiration, awareness, health and well-being. The objectives in this Plan all aim to conserve and enhance these landscape functions. Adopting this balanced approach ensures that natural resources and society as a whole are positioned in the centre of the decision making process, ensuring a more equitable and long-term future is tenable. This approach has three strands:

- i. The natural systems that operate within the AONB are complex and dynamic, and their healthy functioning should not be taken for granted.
- ii. Those that live, work and visit the AONB all benefit from services provided by the natural environment.
- iii. Those that benefit from the services provided within the AONB, and those who are involved in the management of them, should play a central role in making decisions.

**4. Sustainable Development** – ‘Development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’<sup>20</sup>. This means that within this AONB, great weight is given to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Development has to be in the right location, at the right scale and of the right design using the right materials. The principle of sustainable development underpins this Plan (Appendix 15).

20 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission), *Our Common Future*, published by Oxford University Press (1987).

