



KENT DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

MANAGEMENT PLAN

FIRST REVISION 2009 – 2014

Paper to Swale Rural Forum 9th March 2010.

This paper is intended to alert the Swale Rural Forum to the revised Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, its status and purpose and provide an opportunity for questions and comments.

Background

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty -

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is exactly what it says it is: a precious landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them.

The government has recognised this importance and has provided a legal framework to protect conserve and enhance the nation's AONBs. The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally protected landscape afforded the same planning protection and landscape quality as the National Parks.

Areas of Outstanding National Beauty are part of a family of protected areas recognised and classified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) throughout the world. AONBs, National Parks and Heritage Coasts in England and Wales fall into Category V – Protected Landscapes.

The Kent Downs AONB

In Kent, the Kent Downs AONB covers around a quarter of the county and is home to some of the most enchanting landscapes of southern Britain. The Kent Downs include the North Downs in Kent, part of the Lympne escarpment and Greensand Ridge. Approximately 23% (8600Ha) of the area of Swale BC is in the Kent Downs AONB. The AONB provides a considerable resource to Swale Borough.

The Purpose of the AONB...

...is simple, it is primarily to conserve and enhance natural beauty, in doing so the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities must be taken into account. In particular we need to support

sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.

The demand for recreation should be met in a way which supports the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

A Management Plan for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

To achieve the purposes of the AONB it is now a legal requirement (under Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) that Local Authorities with the AONB in their jurisdiction prepare, publish and subsequently review a management plan.

It is a statutory requirement that the management plan formulates the Local Authority policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.

The Management Plan sets a vision for the AONB for 2029;

The vision for the Kent Downs AONB is that 'the qualities and distinctive features of the Kent Downs AONB, the dramatic south-facing scarp, secluded dry valleys, network of tiny lanes, isolated farmsteads, churches and oasts, orchards, dramatic cliffs, the ancient woodlands and delicate chalk grassland along with the ancient, remote and tranquil qualities, remain valued, secure and strengthened.

The Kent Downs has become a landscape where change supports the distinctive features of the AONB and responses to pressure for development and climate change have enhanced landscape character. The Kent Downs landscape is enjoyed and cherished and its future conservation and enhancement is a certainty.

Positive partnerships, local people and land managers act together to conserve, enhance and promote a nationally recognised and valued landscape.'

What the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan includes:

The plan is split into several sections, including:

1 Setting the scene. An introduction to the AONB, the need for management planning, a statement of the special components of natural beauty of the AONB and the main issues and threats relating to them.

2 The 20 Year Vision for the AONB. An aspirational and inspirational portrayal of the Kent Downs AONB in 2029. Developed from the understanding of the special characteristics and threats. The Management Plan then sets out how the vision can become reality.

3 The Management of the AONB. A description of the main management arrangements for the Kent Downs.

4 The components of Natural Beauty. While Natural Beauty seems a simple concept there are a series of components of natural beauty which have been identified in the Kent Downs. A separate description for each sets out the special characteristics, the main issues and threats identified through consultation and intelligence gathering, the vision aims and policies are defined for each component.

The ‘Components of Natural Beauty’ of the Kent Downs AONB are:

Landform and landscape character
Biodiversity
Farmed landscape
Woodland and trees
Historic and cultural heritage
Geology and natural resources

We have also identified **Quality of life components** for the Kent Downs

Vibrant communities
Sustainable development and travel
Access, enjoyment and understanding

5 Finally the plan considers implementation, monitoring and review. This section describes how the plans ambitions can be achieved, how we will know whether we have achieved them and how we should review what we do

The Role of Policies

To help achieve the aims of the management plan a series of policies have been agreed and adopted by the Local Authorities.

A policy is the means by which to achieve the objectives of the plan 'this is how we will get things done'. Primarily policies are there as plans of action which help define what will be encouraged, promoted, supported and pursued; policies are also needed to help stop negative impacts on Kent Downs.

Who is the plan for?

First and foremost, the Management Plan and its policies are for the local authorities of the AONB.

Second, this Management Plan is for all the government agencies, statutory undertakers, utilities and public bodies which have a statutory ‘duty of regard’ for the purposes of the AONB designation in their functions and operations

Finally, and importantly, this is a plan for everyone who cares for and manages the AONB, for those who live, work or play in the Kent Downs. The impact and difference that can be made by farmers and land managers, individuals, countryside management organisations, community and voluntary organisations, when viewed as a whole is critical to the future of the Kent Downs.

An Action Plan

In the end the management plan for the Kent Downs will not be much use unless there are clear actions and responsibilities to deliver them. The Action plan sets out an ambitious programme of work for the five years life of the management plan. Actions range from encouraging the planting of new hedges, to opposing proposals which will harm the landscape, from bidding for funding to enhance the landscape to making sure the landscape is resilient to climate change and from encouraging sustainable forms of farming to promoting artistic and children’s activities to enjoy the countryside.

Find out more

If you would like to find out more about the Kent Downs AONB management plan or the AONB partnership, please contact us.