



Theme 3 - Vibrant Local Communities

“Village occasions such as the pig race, apple day, Damerham Duck race and Chettle art display are fantastic and must continue”

Damerham, 15th May 2003

Background

The South West Sustainable Development Framework suggests that the region is particularly well placed to make the most of renewable energy, sustainable tourism, organic agriculture and other land-based industries. The current economy of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is characterised both by its traditional attributes and its location in relation to large regional centres, including London and the market towns on its periphery.

As a living, working countryside, the AONB might be expected to encourage sympathetic development to occur in response to local needs, in order to maintain viable, sustainable, communities. Rural regeneration initiatives may involve proposals for redevelopment or change of use. Increasing population growth, particularly at the southern periphery of the AONB, is projected to continue. This brings with it pressure for additional housing and associated employment development, whilst the continual rise in house prices results in an increasing demand for affordable and social housing to meet local needs, in most parts of the AONB.

Community Priority 4:

Support and influence innovative ways of maintaining and providing access to community facilities and services

Community Priority 5:

Conserve and enhance the distinctive character of the built environment within its historic, cultural and landscape setting

Community Priority 6:

Promote the management of the impact of traffic on the AONB

Topics:

- Sustainable Rural Communities
- Planning and Transportation

SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

Overview

The population of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is just over 33,000, based on the 2001 Census. Spread over an area of 981 sq km, this gives a population density of 34 people per square kilometre. This is very low when compared to the average of 129 persons per sq km for rural England. 69% of AONB residents are deemed to live in 'villages' and a further 24% in 'hamlets or dispersed dwellings'. The low population density, the absence of large settlements within the AONB and daily commuting to the larger settlements on the AONB's periphery, all threaten the viability of remaining local services such as post offices, pubs, doctor's surgeries, village shops and village halls.

There has been a steady increase in the population within the AONB, particularly close to its southern perimeter, that has created a high demand for housing. This has led to rising house prices and a reduction in the availability of affordable housing. Young people cannot afford local housing, not least due to the lack of local employment opportunities. 25% of the population is over 60 years old and that figure rises to 32% in the southern half of the AONB¹. The New Earnings Survey indicates that average earnings of local people working in the rural areas of the AONB are below the regional and national average. The West Wiltshire Economic Partnership suggests that there is increasing polarisation between those commuters on high incomes who live in the area and local people on low earnings who are unable to afford housing (Figure 8).

	Gross Weekly Pay (£)
England	392.01
South West	343.19
Salisbury	333.80
West Wiltshire	333.64
New Forest	378.18
East Dorset	336.33
North Dorset	288.21

Figure 8: Social indicators

1. National percentage over 60 years old is 21%.

Service provision and access to services and facilities

The AONB is ranked amongst the most deprived parts of the country in relation to “barriers to housing and services”. The proximity of AONB residents to a number of key services has deteriorated since 2000. These services include primary and secondary schools, banks and building societies, doctor’s surgeries and post offices. There is evidence from the Rural Community Councils that there are isolated and significant pockets of deprivation.

Innovative solutions exist but these are usually time limited due to ongoing lack of funding. For example, between 2003 and 2008 the Sunshine Healthy Living Project worked with communities in the Mere, Barford and Tisbury areas to help to reduce fuel poverty and improve health. This was a successful partnership between voluntary, community groups and other public bodies. Very successful community shops have been established in East Knoyle and Maiden Bradley.

Local governance

Some local people have high levels of engagement in the system of local government though many express a lack of involvement and a sense of isolation from decision makers. Local Authorities have a duty to prepare Community Strategies for their areas. Within the AONB, the seven District Authorities (to become five in 2009) have set up Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). With more communities undertaking Parish Plans, Village Appraisals, Village Design Statements and Community Plans, there are now increased opportunities for local people to influence what happens in their areas.

The establishment of a unitary authority for Wiltshire will create new and different opportunities for local people to be involved in the decision-making processes through the creation of Area Boards and Community Area Partnerships. Where sought, a number of services may be devolved to parish councils supported by appropriate budgets. Funding may also be available for parish and town councils to participate in partnerships and community activities.

Public and community transport

Without a private car, accessing services, such as doctor’s surgeries or hospital, is difficult. Local authority supported buses provide transport on either a daily or weekly basis, particularly to the surrounding market towns. Some are highly valued and appreciated by local people. However, due mainly to cost, frequency or destination, usage rates are low which leads to service withdrawal.

Examples of successful community transport initiatives are becoming more common. The Chalke Valley Link Scheme, Hindon Voluntary Car Scheme, Wilton Community Link Scheme and Tisbus are examples of locally successful schemes. Demand responsive schemes such as Wiltshire County Council’s Connect2Wiltshire and North Dorset Nordcat, are best practice initiatives. More integrated transport options within the AONB could also help promote ‘green tourism’ initiatives as well as improving services for local communities.

Special characteristics

- Dispersed and small population spread over a large area.
- The AONB is characterised by an aging population requiring increased community support.
- Generally, the provision of services and facilities within the AONB does not meet local needs.
- The trend of commuting to higher paid jobs outside the AONB whilst living in the area is resulting in rising house prices.
- There are strong links between the AONB communities and Community Planners, nurtured through local partnership working.
- Community spirit is strong in many settlements, as demonstrated through community plans, participation in “Village of the Year” competitions and community led facility or transport schemes.

Key issues

Accessibility of services and facilities

- Access to local facilities is increasingly important due to low incomes, higher transport and fuel costs for many rural residents.
- Funding/support for rural service provision is scarce. Local shops are under threat as their viability is frequently linked to the provision of Post Office services

which are progressively being withdrawn.

- There are few affordable homes, facilities and services in the AONB aimed at the young or elderly, leading to their isolation.

Awareness of grants and advice

People sometimes do not know where to seek help, advice or support; there is a need for 'one stop shops' for advice and information.

Community spirit/pride

In some communities there is a lack of community spirit or local pride. Most people drive out of the village to schools, the shops and to work, leaving little opportunity to build any sense of community. The lack of facilities, such as a village hall, can exacerbate the situation as can the loss of a local church or village shop.

Lack of involvement

Many local people feel a strong sense of isolation from local authority decision makers. There is a desire for increased consultation on development proposals.

Support is needed for the Community Planning processes as an essential component of the engagement between local authorities and local communities. Village Plans and Village Design Statements enable communities to set out their views.

OBJECTIVES

I	The AONB is home to sustainable, active and cohesive communities who understand, appreciate and celebrate the special qualities of the AONB.
J	Thriving rural communities play an active role in fostering local services and conserving and enhancing the AONB.

POLICIES

I1	Support community initiatives that encourage and maintain the vitality and diversity of rural community life.
I2	Support community based initiatives that promote sustainable lifestyles such as those embracing appropriate renewable energy schemes, energy efficiency, recycling and community transport.
I3	The AONB will work with partners to make housing more affordable in and around the AONB where that is consistent with the primary purposes of AONB designation
J1	Encourage and support local communities and groups in conserving their local environment and enhancing the sense of local pride and ownership.





PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION

Overview

Four County and seven District Local Authorities had responsibility for planning and development issues as the statutory local planning authorities before this reviewed plan was published. There are now a total of nine councils, with the creation of the unitary Wiltshire Council.

National planning policy is set out in Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). They highlight the importance of understanding landscape context and character when considering development. The most relevant guidance for the AONB is in PPS7, which sets out the Government's planning policies for sustainable development in rural areas. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB lies within two regions, the South West and the South East. Regional planning policy is to be set out by the two Regional Development Agencies in Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS)². The emerging RSSs both emphasise the importance of the environment, good design, character and quality. The South West Sustainable Development Framework also stresses the importance of using local materials and skills. National and regional planning policy is applied through Local Development Frameworks (LDFs)

2. PPS7 paragraph 14: '...RSS should recognise the environmental, economic and social value of the countryside that is of national, regional or, where appropriate, sub-regional significance. Policies in RSS and Local Development Documents should seek to maintain and enhance these values, so enabling the countryside to remain an important natural resource, contribute to national and regional prosperity and be enjoyed by all'.

prepared by the local authorities. Until all RSSs and LDFs are in place, saved policies from structure plans and local plans apply. The four County Councils each prepare Minerals and Waste Local Plans. These set out policies in relation to the utilisation of mineral resources and waste management.

The County Councils, as highway authorities, are also responsible for the production of Local Transport Plans (LTPs) which set out the policies and proposals that drive their work programmes. The A303, A30 and A354 are major strategic routes crossing the AONB. The A36 skirts the northern edge, whilst the A350 corridor, linking Poole northwards to the M4, follows the western side before continuing through the AONB from Shaftesbury to Warminster. These main arterial routes carry fast moving traffic and support the daily commuter traffic of the AONB population to the surrounding market towns and beyond.

Access is important to a thriving economy but it can have serious environmental consequences and significant impacts on the landscape character and tranquillity. Car ownership in the AONB is well above the national average, reflecting the difficulties of providing effective and affordable public transport in such a large and relatively sparsely populated area. The South West Regional Assembly estimates that 90% of journeys in the region are made by car with public transport generally not viable in a predominantly rural region. There are two active railway lines through the AONB; the main line from London to the South West which has a well used station at Tisbury and stations just outside the AONB; and the line from Warminster to Salisbury, which no longer stops within the AONB. These rail routes

could provide sustainable transport opportunities for people and goods within, to, and from the AONB. They will, however, need additional and affordable car parking to encourage more effective utilisation.

The responsibility for planning policy, transport policy and development control lies with the local authorities. The AONB Partnership has an important role to play in providing guidance, ensuring consistency in the application of planning policy across the AONB, and acting as a consultee on all development and land use change proposals that may have a significant impact and/or effect on the characteristics, special qualities or setting of the AONB. The constituent local planning authorities have all adopted the AONB Planning Protocol (Appendix 6) that sets out procedures for AONB input to policy establishment and those applications on which the AONB would expect to offer comment. The protocol is reviewed annually and has been seen to work well during the last three years.

The AONB has commissioned the following planning related studies:

- Market Towns Development Proposals
- Light Pollution
- Permitted Development Rights
- Roads and Planning
- Farm Diversification
- Landscape Sensitivity Study

The AONB Partnership has worked with the Dorset AONB and Dorset County Council in their 'Restoring our Rural Roads' initiative, which focuses on the means of removing urban-style highway artefacts, restoring the rural landscape character of the roads and influencing driver behaviour to reduce negative impacts on tranquillity and help protect vulnerable road users. The AONB is part of the Steering Group for the North Dorset and North East Dorset Transportation Study, and links with other Highways initiatives such as those dealing with verge management.

Nearly all the villages and hamlets in the AONB pre-date 1800 and many have Medieval or even Saxon roots. The historic elements of these villages remain highly visible and central to the character of these settlements. As stated previously, there are 2015 Listed Buildings, 63 Conservation Areas, 16 Listed Parks and Gardens and 556 Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the AONB. Their protection, restoration and maintenance are a matter of priority, as they lend distinctive character to the landscape. In addition, the more modest vernacular buildings found throughout the AONB, add to the distinctiveness of local

settlements. Buildings of local historic character are not protected unless incorporated within a Conservation Area, so historic farms and other buildings sited away from settlements are especially vulnerable to change.

Where visible from the AONB, the surrounding landscape, which is often of significant landscape value, is an important element of the AONB's natural beauty. Relevant local planning authorities must have regard for the landscape and visual impact of development adjacent to or within close proximity of the AONB's boundary.³

The principal land use planning role of the AONB is to ensure there are consistent and coherent policies in place to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. If a conflict arises, the AONB Partnership will take the view that 'conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area' takes priority over other matters.

Special characteristics

- A largely rural, open, and undeveloped landscape sensitive to change.
- Distinctive settlement patterns with historic elements readily visible and central to the character of settlements.
- Architectural styles vary considerably throughout the AONB, dependent on availability of building materials.
- The built environment forms an integral part of local character and distinctiveness and adds to the diversity of the AONB landscape as a whole.
- Large historic country houses at the centre of historic parklands and gardens and other characteristic buildings.
- A minor road network that reflects the deeply rural, tranquil character of the AONB, with few realignments and improvements.

3. Planning Inspector's appeal decision November 2008 - Land at part of Waterside Holiday Park, Bowleaze Cove, Weymouth ".....given that the Secretary of State has now published the Proposed Changes to the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), I attach significant weight to RSS Policy ENV3, which requires particular care to be taken to ensure that no development is permitted outside AONBs which would damage their natural beauty, special character and special qualities – in other words to their setting. I conclude that the proposed development would have an adverse effect on the natural beauty of the AONB, either caused by the visibility of the static caravans themselves, or from the introduction of more alien tree planting, or by a combination of both. This would, in my view, conflict with national policy guidance, and in particular PPS7, and with Policy ENV3 in the emerging RSS". (appeal failed)

Key issues

Development pressure

- The need to integrate development proposals with landscape character both within and adjacent to the AONB is not widely understood or appreciated.
- Increased sub-urbanisation, unsympathetic design and inappropriate use of modern materials is diluting local character and leading to a loss of local distinctiveness.
- The importance of integrating infrastructure with the existing landscape character is not yet sufficiently well recognised.
- There is a need for greater, and more obvious, consistency and coherence in the formulation and application of planning policies by the local planning authorities that cover the AONB.
- The application of Community Infrastructure Levies (Developer Contributions) and other planning agreements could assist in achieving AONB Management Plan objectives.
- The cumulative effect of 'permitted development' can lead to a loss of landscape character with the use of non-local building materials and 'off the shelf' designs.
- The 'Buildings at Risk' register of English Heritage is not widely known nor its local relevance appreciated.
- Renewable energy targets, and the operational requirements of telecommunications operators, may lead to increasing pressure for the AONB to accommodate wind turbine and telecommunication mast developments.
- Overhead power and telecommunications lines detract from visual amenity as well as 'urbanising' the landscape
- National and regional predictions for housing requirements are causing the LPAs to consider significant annual numbers of new dwellings in villages within and close to the AONB.
- The scale of proposed new farm buildings.
- Developments in the setting of the AONB can have significant impacts on the AONB and need to be considered in relation to the purposes of AONB designation.

Tranquillity



Please refer to **Map 11** in the accompanying guide

Increasing levels of noise from road traffic and recreational pursuits, such as trail bike riding and vehicular use of Rights of Way, are adding to a perceived loss of rural tranquillity.

Highway improvements, excessive signage, lighting and other road 'furniture' are eroding the rural character of the AONB.

Road use

- Heavy traffic flows, especially daily commuting, cause congestion, pollution, loss of tranquillity and damage to minor roads and buildings.
- Traffic management schemes have not reduced the daily 'rat runs' used by cars avoiding the 'A' road traffic, which add to safety, noise, pollution and disturbance concerns amongst residents.
- The safety of all vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders remains an issue within the AONB.

Public transport versus the car

- Regular public transport is largely limited to the main A-class roads, making personal transport vital to reach many services and jobs. There is no incentive to use public transport.
- Weakness in infrastructure and high costs are a disincentive to use public transport.
- The railways are largely inaccessible and parking is limited and costly.

OBJECTIVES

K	The AONB inputs effectively to national, regional and local strategies, policies and plans
L	Coherent and consistent formulation and implementation of planning policies across the AONB takes full account of the purposes of designation and the character and quality of the area and its setting.
M	Policies and schemes to meet the housing and employment needs of local communities enhance the special qualities and characteristics of the AONB, including its built heritage.
N	Transportation planning and management takes full account of the AONB designation, protects the tranquillity and special qualities of the landscape and reduces transport impacts on the environment of the AONB

POLICIES

K1	Ensure the purposes and objectives of AONB designation are fully recognised in the development and implementation of Regional Spatial Strategies, Local Development Frameworks and other public policies, strategies and programmes.
K2	Encourage coherent and consistent formulation and implementation of planning policies that take full account of the local distinctiveness, character and quality of the AONB and its setting.
K3	Encourage local communities to identify local needs and assist in the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness through the preparation and development of Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and other initiatives.
K4	Encourage local planning authorities to direct Community Infrastructure Levies (Developer Contributions) towards appropriate AONB Management Plan objectives and activities.
L1	Continue the use of the AONB planning protocol by local planning authorities to ensure that the AONB Partnership is consulted on all development and land use change proposals that meet the criteria or may have a significant impact and/or effect on the characteristics, special qualities, or setting of the AONB.
L2	Encourage the adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents and other guidance that reinforce AONB purposes, such as the local character, materials and historic structure and scale of settlements.
L3	Ensure that where new development is permitted it complements the special qualities of the AONB and takes full account of the area's setting and context through the consideration of appropriate Landscape Character Assessments and sensitivity and design studies.
M1	Encourage policies that demonstrate appropriate and adequate use of sustainable technologies, such as solar heating, and provide sufficient space for short term handling of waste and recyclable materials, in both domestic and employment situations.
M2	Support partners and property owners to improve/enhance the management of the built heritage.
M3	Pursue opportunities to underground and remove power and telecommunications lines
N1	Develop a consistent approach to the design, provision and maintenance of highways that is sympathetic to the landscape character of the AONB.
N2	Promote and help develop an integrated system, whereby roads, railways, public transport and Rights of Way networks interconnect, minimising the impact of traffic on the AONB and encouraging a safer and more attractive environment for walking, cycling and horse riding.
N3	Promote the provision of affordable parking facilities to enable and encourage people to leave their cars behind and use public transport.

