



**Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

FACT SHEETS & GOOD PRACTICE NOTES

Number 2

Good Practice Note

**Policies for the AONB in Local Plans and Local
Development Frameworks**

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are nationally designated areas of especially fine landscape. The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs [CCWWD] AONB has been established under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act to conserve and enhance the outstanding natural beauty of this area which straddles three County, one Unitary and five District councils. It is clear from the Act, subsequent government sponsored reports, and the Countryside and Rights of Way [CRoW] Act 2000 that natural beauty includes wildlife, scientific, and cultural heritage. The 2000 Act reiterates the purpose and designation procedures for AONBs as well as making provision for national funding of the local management of these national resources.

It is also recognised nationally that in relation to their landscape characteristics and quality, **National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are equally important aspects of the nation's heritage and environmental capital.** The AONB Management Plan (2009 – 2014) is a statutory document that has been approved by the Secretary of State and was adopted by the constituent Councils of the AONB early in 2009.

The **National Planning Policy Framework** states (paragraph 109) that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes. It also states (paragraph 115) that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in these areas.

In addition, the **AONB Management Plan** [p47] commits the Local Planning Authorities to have regard for the landscape and visual impact of major development adjacent to or within close proximity of the AONB's boundary. The setting of this AONB has been considered in Position Statement Number 3

[10/12/2008]. The importance of setting has been recognised by the Planning Inspectorate in recent decisions, and weight is given to the national status of AONBs and their statutorily required and adopted Management Plans.

AONBs have a history of special status in planning law and in government planning guidance and policy statements. Until the 2000 CRoW Act the main protection for AONBs was through the operation of restrictive planning policies limiting development within AONBs. It was, therefore, perceived as a negative designation, preventing development. With the passing of the CRoW Act and the provision of 75% national funding for the core activities of AONB teams it has become possible for a more facilitating and pro-active approach to be taken towards conserving and enhancing natural beauty as originally envisaged by the formulators of the 1949 Act.

The CCWWD AONB Partnership is made up of the constituent Local Authorities and some local and national organisations. The CRoW Act 2000 requires a Management Plan to be prepared and reviewed at five yearly intervals.

The **AONB landscape character assessment** [2003] is a particularly important database, analysis, and appraisal project for the AONB Partnership and its Local Planning Authorities in striving to carry out their duties for this AONB. It has been supplemented by the **Historic landscape characterisation and the Historic Environment Action Plans**. Full details of the key landscape characteristics and built character are in the landscape character assessment which can be found in full on our web site, www.ccwwd.aonb.org.uk

The statutory Management Plan for this AONB [2009] was established with extensive public consultation, covers a range of spatial and environmental matters, and has been adopted by all the Local Authorities of the AONB. It includes aims, objectives, and policies related to the Vision for 2025 incorporating the main strands of Communities, Economy, and Environment. The Annual Delivery Plans arising from the Management Plan reflect these topic areas.

As the AONB designation is a national one, identifying landscapes of national importance, it is not unreasonable for the public to anticipate that, in relation to significant AONB matters, the approaches and policies of the Local Planning Authorities [LPAs] should be consistent. The earlier generation of Local Plans, which remain in part though 'saved' policies during the preparation and approval of Local Development Framework Core Strategies, included special policies for AONB matters. However, the situation has been weakened, and a policy vacuum created, by the 'bonfire' of governmental guidance and policy statements in march 2012 along with the imminent demise of regional guidance and strategies.

The preparation of the new Local Development Frameworks [LDFs] should provide an opportunity to achieve that consistency without necessarily constraining the individuality of the separate LPAs. However the initial government guidance to focus on core strategic issues is now somewhat at variance with the 'Local Plan' emphasis in the NPPF [2012]. **This AONB, along with many others, is of the view that the LDF process should include policies to indicate how the nationally designed landscapes of AONBs will be handled differently in policy terms from undesignated countryside in the policies of the constituent Local Planning Authorities.**

The Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty derives much of its beauty from its qualities of tranquillity, remoteness, and cultural heritage. It is also a living and working countryside that is very rural with relatively few householders for such a large area, and with substantial and significant settlements outside its boundary.

The AONB Partnership considers it would be appropriate for all Local Planning Authorities to have special policies that reflect the Management Plan and that seek to conserve and enhance natural beauty. To accord with this aim, the AONB team will provide whatever assistance it can. The AONB Partnership urges the LPAs to include the AONB as a key issue in their Core Strategies. The AONB also recommends all its constituent Local Planning Authorities to prepare and adopt policies and guidance documents that conserve and enhance natural beauty in the AONB and the settings of the AONB.

Therefore:

The Partnership Panel encourages all Local Planning Authorities to work with the AONB team and to include specific and consistent planning policies and documents for AONB matters in their Local Development Frameworks.

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