

ISLE OF WIGHT AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

SURVEY 1: THREATS AND CHALLENGES REPORT

Introduction:

The first statutory Isle of Wight AONB Management Plan was written following a two year consultation and development process. This was undertaken in line with the guidance published by the Countryside Agency and completed with the Plan being adopted by the Isle of Wight Council in February and formally published in March 2004.

The Management Plan is structured to provide a statement of significance giving details of the special qualities of the AONB; an overall vision for the future of the designated area in 2025; details on the context of its management; within themed chapters, details of the threats and challenges facing its management and associated policies and policy objectives seeking to address these; details on intended approaches to monitoring the condition of the AONB; and finally a five year Action Plan, setting out the detail of activities intended to be undertaken to further the policies and vision in the Plan.

Legislation requires all AONB Management Plans to be reviewed within five years of their publication. The Countryside Agency and latterly Natural England, its successor national body, have published guidance on the review process and the additional requirements of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment.

The AONB Partnership started the required review of the current Isle of Wight AONB Management Plan in September 2007, at our Annual General Meeting and Open Forum. At this event we gave an overview of the approach being taken, a summary of things that have changed since 2004 when the first plan was published, and debate on the AONB Unit's views on what had worked well and less well with the current plan in the last three years. As the current plan has a vision for 2025, much of its content remains relevant just three years later, at the start of the review process.

In order to identify what needs to change, a more detailed assessment of the current plan is being undertaken through a series of workshops and meetings. In line with e-government and in recognition of the time constraints that many of our partners find themselves under, we are also consulting on the current plan through a series of on-line surveys.

This report is based on an assessment of the first workshop held at Northwood House on 29th November 2007, and the results of an associated on-line survey which all AONB Partnership members were invited to complete. The workshop data was manually entered into the on-line survey by the AONB Unit, in order to have one set of data to analyse and present.

Full survey results will be found on the Isle of Wight AONB website by following the link on the home page. Alternatively we can provide a paper copy if you would prefer.

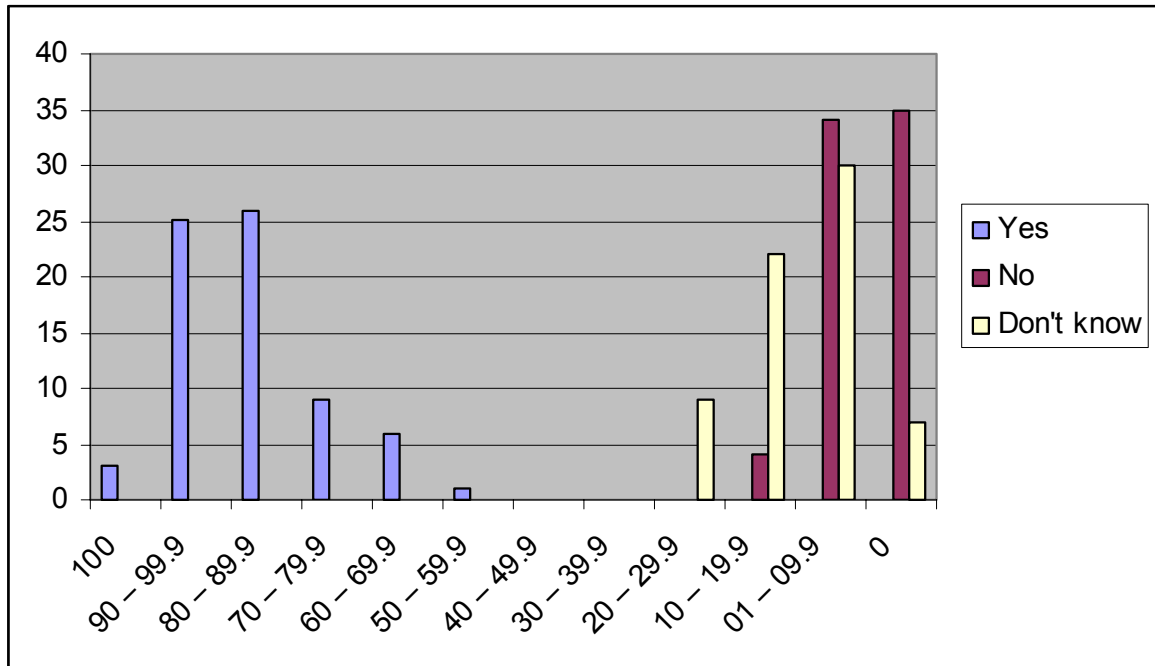
In total we received thirty nine responses to help us with analysing the validity of the 'Threats and Challenges' listed in the Management Plan.

In general, respondents indicated that the issues identified within the themes of the plan still remain relevant to our work to conserve and enhance the area. These are summarised below:

Table 1: Summary of results –

% bands	Out of 73 questions the number within this % band answering 'Yes'	Out of 73 questions the number within this % band answering 'No'	Out of 73 questions the number within this % band answering 'Don't know'
100	3 ¹	0	0
90 - 99.9	25	0	0
80 - 89.9	26	0	0
70 - 79.9	9	0	0
60 - 69.9	6	0	0
50 - 59.9	1 ²	0	1 ³
40 - 49.9	1 ⁴	0	1 ⁵
30 - 39.9	1 ⁶	0	3 ⁷
20 - 29.9	0	0	9
10 - 19.9	0	4	22
01 - 09.9	0	34	30
0	0	35	7

Graph 1: Summary of the results -



The data clearly shows that there is a general agreement that the threats and challenges identified in the current management plan, are still relevant to the objective of conserving and enhancing the AONB. The following sections give an overview of the results and comment by AONB Management Plan theme.

¹ Earth Heritage - Mineral Extraction and Landfill; Wildlife - Awareness and Knowledge; Farming and Forestry - Local Markets, Processing and other Infrastructure

² Living and Working - Rural Crime

³ Visiting and Enjoying - Lack of association of environmental qualities with AONB designation

⁴ Farming and Forestry - Grant Funding and Subsidy

⁵ Farming and Forestry - Grant Funding and Subsidy

⁶ Visiting and Enjoying - Lack of association of environmental qualities with AONB designation

⁷ Landscape Character - Lack of awareness of landscape character as a concept and its assessment

Overview of results and comment by Management Plan Theme

Landscape Character

The majority of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey.

In particular, issues around the effect on landscape character of the following: development pressure from new technologies; rural economy; extreme and noisy sport and leisure activities; customs, culture, dialect and place names; tranquillity and dark night sky are all felt to still be important for the AONB.

There is less consensus and agreement relating to awareness, and promotion of the use of Landscape Character Assessment and other issues.

Key points to be considered:

- It is felt there is a wealth of detailed information and expertise, but that this may not be reflected in an increased level of awareness by the people who live in the area or the public as a whole.
- Still an important area of work for the AONB Partnership.
- Be careful of jargon and terminology used in the LCA process, there is a need to be clear for a public audience.
- Avoid falling into the trap of concentrating on detail rather than the landscape as a whole.
- Change needs to be understood and accommodated including 'new vernacular' design, new technologies associated with climate change mitigation and adaptation, and changing needs of the farming and forestry sectors. Development needs to be appropriate.
- Recognise importance of farming and forestry practice to landscape character in a positive way as well as a threat, and the need for a 'Living' AONB.
- Be positive about renewables where they can be accommodated and/or benefit AONB - for example wood fuels, micro-generation.

Earth Heritage

There is 100% agreement that mineral extraction and land fill pressure remain a threat to the management of the AONB.

There is general agreement that most of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey. In particular, issues around the effect on earth heritage resources of the following: climate change; intervention in natural processes; water management; soil management and farming practice.

There is less consensus and agreement relating to agricultural practices, recreational pressures, and some other issues.

Key points to be considered:

- The farming community is still coming to terms with changes from the de-coupling of funding for food production. There seems to be a general acceptance that it is too early to say how this will impact in the longer term.
- Farming practice on the Isle of Wight is less intensive than other highly productive areas of the UK. It is likely that increased exposure to market forces will influence land use and the arable, livestock and dairy sectors, but that extensive mixed farming will remain the mainstay of activity on the Island.
- Training is important to ensure that soil and water resources are protected.
- Some respondents do not associate soil and water issues with earth heritage.

Wildlife

There is 100% agreement that awareness and knowledge of Wildlife remain challenges to the management of the AONB.

There is general agreement that most of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey. In particular, issues around the effect on wildlife of the following: viability of farming and ongoing farm practices; delivery of the Biodiversity Action Plan; water levels and quality; habitat fragmentation; built development; and climate change.

There is less consensus and agreement relating to agricultural practices, recreational pressures, and some other issues and their effect on Wildlife.

Key points to be considered:

- We need to define what is meant by 'management issues'.
- Importance of climate change impact on all other issues particularly habitat fragmentation and coastal squeeze. Monitoring and evidence of impact of climate change needed.
- Inappropriate recreational activities but more evidence of impact needed.
- Better understanding of changes and likely changes to agricultural practices, and need to promote sustainable approaches for their economic and environmental value.
- New farmers and landowners should be a target for help and advice.
- May need to be more protectionist in relation to wildlife and development, compromise may not be appropriate.

Historic Environment

The majority of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey.

In particular, issues around the effect on the historic environment of the following: development; incomplete records; awareness and understanding and the impact of recreational and farming activities are all felt to still be important for the AONB.

There is less consensus and agreement relating to the impact of the other issues, and their effect on the historic environment in the AONB.

Key points to be considered:

- Change has resulted in the character of the AONB today, and historic environment should guide future change.
- Portable Antiquities scheme is a delivery solution rather than a threat/challenge/opportunity.
- Importance of links with agri-environment schemes and funding for historic environment objectives.
- Need to ensure the public are aware and understand the value of the historic environment basis of the AONB designation. Greater accessibility to the Historic Environment Record is needed.
- Remove reference to funding/resources and concentrate on knowledge/skills.

Living and Working

The majority of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey.

In particular, issues around the effect on living and working of the following: affordable housing; social exclusion; resource use and waste; renewables; decline in local services; development pressure are all felt to still be important for the AONB.

Rural Crime scored 58.1%, one of the lowest in the survey. Comments indicated that this may be a perception issue (fear of crime) rather than a statistically relevant threat.

Key points to be considered:

- In accordance with the purpose of designation there is recognition that these issues are secondary to our primary purpose of conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.
- Employment within land based industries (farming, horticulture, forestry) is particularly relevant to the AONB.
- A balanced considered and appropriate approach to development in the AONB continues to be needed.
- Emphasis on self-sustaining Island for local food, water, waste management etc.
- Appropriate renewables as mentioned before.

Farming and Forestry

There was more of a range of views within this theme in relation to the continued relevance of the 'threats and challenges' identified in the current Management Plan.

100% said 'Yes' to the continued importance of local markets, infrastructure and processing facilities for the viability of the farming and forestry sectors, and to enable new opportunities to be realised.

Recreation and access was seen to be less of an issue, open access has been generally uneventful but proposed coastal access may be more challenging. Trespass and damage are issues as can be obstruction of paths by growth, crops or occasionally deliberate physical barriers. Appropriate use of the countryside in line with the Countryside Code and the law is not seen as a problem.

Yes to grant funding and subsidy as an issue scored a 46.7%, surprisingly low perhaps, although the context as written in the current Management Plan is now outdated. Looking at detailed comments, there is an emphasis on the likely impact of market forces on the farming sector and resulting impact on the landscape. Links to the local market and infrastructure issue outlined above are seen as essential, as is the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme, but it is felt that this is still to realise its potential.

Key points to be considered in addition to the above:

- Market forces and link to intensive agricultural practice needs to be monitored.
- Importance of the viability of the livestock sector to ensure continued extensive grazing for landscape.

Traffic and Transport

The majority of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey, all with a Yes score of 80% or higher.

There were no areas of disagreement. However the following specifics were mentioned:

- AONB should be involved in freight management discussions.
- Unauthorised signage needs regulation and enforcement.
- AONB access linked to bus stops.
- Importance of Rights of Way as AONB access.

Visiting and Enjoying

The majority of the threats and challenges in the Plan for this theme are still deemed to be relevant from the results of the survey.

In particular, the continued relevance of the current reliance on private cars for access; noisy and intrusive sports and leisure activities; illegal use of the countryside; the importance of provision of access for the disabled and less mobile; dealing with gaps in the public rights of way network, and the potential of the promotion of sustainable tourism activities.

There is, however, less consensus and more uncertainty regarding the level of knowledge and data on the impact of visitors to the landscape and environment of the AONB. There is confusion and uncertainty about the 'threat/challenge' which identifies a general lack of association of the environmental qualities of the Isle of Wight with AONB designation. Some did not understand what this meant, some were not sure as to whether we have the data to back this statement and some, whilst recognising the progress the AONB has made, feel that this is still an important area of work for us.

Key points to be considered in addition to the above:

- Importance of continuing to have AONB messages in the work of IW Tourism and Green Island.
- Capacity issues - when does activity become unsustainable?
- Perhaps more about the use of data rather than gathering more data?
- Define who it is we want to target as a visitor.
- Access for all, not just those with disabilities, but also under represented groups.

Other comments

Finally we asked for any other thoughts, and the following were some of those mentioned that are relevant to threats and challenges facing the management of the AONB.

- Continuation of organisations and personnel within organisations, to negate the need to develop new relationships and levels of knowledge.
- Importance of interpretation - physical (signs, gateways).
- Public estate within the AONB acting as an exemplar for management.
- Increased knowledge and data since last Plan was formulated.
- Funding.
- Rank threats and challenges (will be part of the emerging delivery plan).
- On-line survey too long.

JB 08/01/08