

The Cotswolds Conservation Board

Overseeing the Cotswolds Area of
Outstanding Natural Beauty



www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk



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Who are we?

The Cotswolds Conservation Board is an independent statutory organisation that exists to oversee the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a 2,038 square kilometre (790 sq mile) protected landscape. The Cotswolds is the largest of 40 AONBs in England and Wales and shares the same status of protection in landscape terms as a National Park.

The board acts on a strategic level looking at the AONB as a whole and is made up of 40 board members, who are appointed from three key backgrounds to ensure that the board represents a wide range of interests, with members nominated by local authorities, parish councils and Government. Board members have a responsibility to consider the widest possible interests of the AONB and are not representatives of any particular organisation. A small team of officers is based at the board's offices in Northleach, Gloucestershire and the board is supported by over 340 Voluntary Wardens.

The Conservation Board was established by order of the Secretary of State, with the approval of both houses of parliament.

Why do we exist?

In 2000 the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act allowed for the establishment of conservation boards to oversee very large AONBs with complex administrative arrangements, the idea being, to create organisations that would represent the full cross-section of interests in large AONBs, particularly those with a high number of local authorities and a wide range of interest groups. After



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extensive research and consultation, the Cotswolds and the Chilterns Conservation Boards were established in 2004 and are the only conservation boards that exist at present. Other AONBs are run by partnerships made up of local authorities and key stakeholders and in most cases are hosted by one of the local authorities in the area.

What are our aims?

The Conservation Board has two statutory purposes. To:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB
- To increase the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB, ensuring that these complement the conservation and enhancement of the area

In fulfilling these roles the board seeks to foster the social and economic well-being of the people living in the AONB.

The board has set out its detailed policies and actions in a management plan for the AONB (2008-13). It also produces position statements on key issues affecting the area, such as the development of transport networks, the provision of affordable housing, and road verge management.

Our Management Plan

The board has a statutory duty to prepare and review a management plan at five-yearly intervals and that plan must set out the board's view of how it will deliver its aims and purposes.

The Cotswolds AONB Management Plan (2008-13) was created after a thorough consultation process and is designed as a guide for local authorities, statutory agencies and other bodies such as businesses and individuals working within the AONB.



The plan covers the wide range of issues that affect the Cotswolds such as; development and transport, rural land management, natural resources, biodiversity and the historic environment. There are also three key issues that influence the whole plan; climate change, globalisation on land use and pressures from development, changing lifestyles and transportation.

The plan not only sets out the board's objectives, policies and actions for the next five years but also provides a vision for the future of the AONB over the next 25 years. It is not just a plan prepared by the board for itself but a plan for all those who value the area and have an interest in it.

The management plan is increasingly being endorsed by local authorities within the AONB as supplementary guidance for planning purposes.

The plan can be found along with all of the board's other publications on the AONB website: www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

How do we operate?

The board works very closely with all those who have the interests of the AONB at heart. In particular it:

- Looks ahead and plans for the future. The board has published a five-year management plan for the AONB (2008-2013)
- Focuses its efforts on looking at the AONB as a whole; however, it also develops projects on the ground, trying out new ideas to care for the Cotswolds
- Builds partnerships and makes the most of working with others
- Encourages all those whose activities impact on the AONB to achieve the highest standards of care and management of the area



- Makes the most of its consultative and advisory role, particularly in relation to planning, land use and the promotion of best practice
- Monitors change within the AONB, frequently responding to consultations from many organisations.

The board works closely with the local authorities and over 290 parish councils that sit within the AONB, particularly in the area of planning and development. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 ensured that all public bodies and statutory undertakers have a duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing AONBs when carrying out their operations. This means that there is a commitment, that is not discretionary, to have regard to the impact of all their activities on the management of the AONB.

A particular clause in the act¹ placed this duty on all local authorities from county to parish councils, the electric, gas, water companies and anyone holding public office. The act also confirmed that local authorities have the power to take any action they consider appropriate to conserve and enhance the AONB.

The board is not the planning authority for the AONB but acts as an adviser to the local authorities, other agencies within the area and relevant government departments. We act as a ‘watchdog’ ensuring that we are aware of any proposed changes that may affect the area and respond to development and transport consultations that significantly affect the AONB or may set a precedent. We also provide key decision makers in the planning process with important information about the Cotswolds AONB landscape and the forces for change that may affect it.²

1 Section 85. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act. 2000. (A booklet ‘England’s statutory landscape designations: a practical guide to your duty of regard’ is available from Natural England).

2 The board has produced 19 Landscape Strategies and Guidelines for the AONB based on a Landscape Character Assessment. Both can be found on the board’s website at www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk



What do we do?

The board carries out a broad range of work within the AONB. Such as:

- Securing major funding for conservation projects in the Cotswolds – like £1.4 million from the heritage lottery fund for the ‘Caring for the Cotswolds’ project, which was successfully completed in 2007 and gave grants to landowners and local communities
- Administering the Sustainable Development Fund, which distributes grants to projects that help to secure a more environmentally sustainable way of life within the AONB
- Running the Cotswolds Green Tourism project in the West Oxfordshire part of the AONB. A project that seeks to develop and encourage more environmentally sustainable practice within the tourism sector and raise awareness about the significance of the AONB landscape.
- Working with farming groups and giving advice to local landowners about environmentally appropriate land management practices within the AONB
- Encouraging people to enjoy and appreciate the AONB by offering well publicised advice on things to do and places to go
- Running over 300 guided walks a year
- Working on public transport projects to help promote the use of buses and trains
- Encouraging people to explore the Cotswolds and take part in walking and cycling activities
- Running competitions and training courses in traditional skills like drystone walling and hedgelaying.



How are we funded?

The board is funded in a number of ways with a significant annual grant coming from Natural England. The remaining annual budget is made up of proportional contributions from the local authorities within the AONB and the board seeks to secure additional investment from external funding bodies, such as regional development agencies, lottery bodies and charitable trusts.

The Cotswold Way National Trail

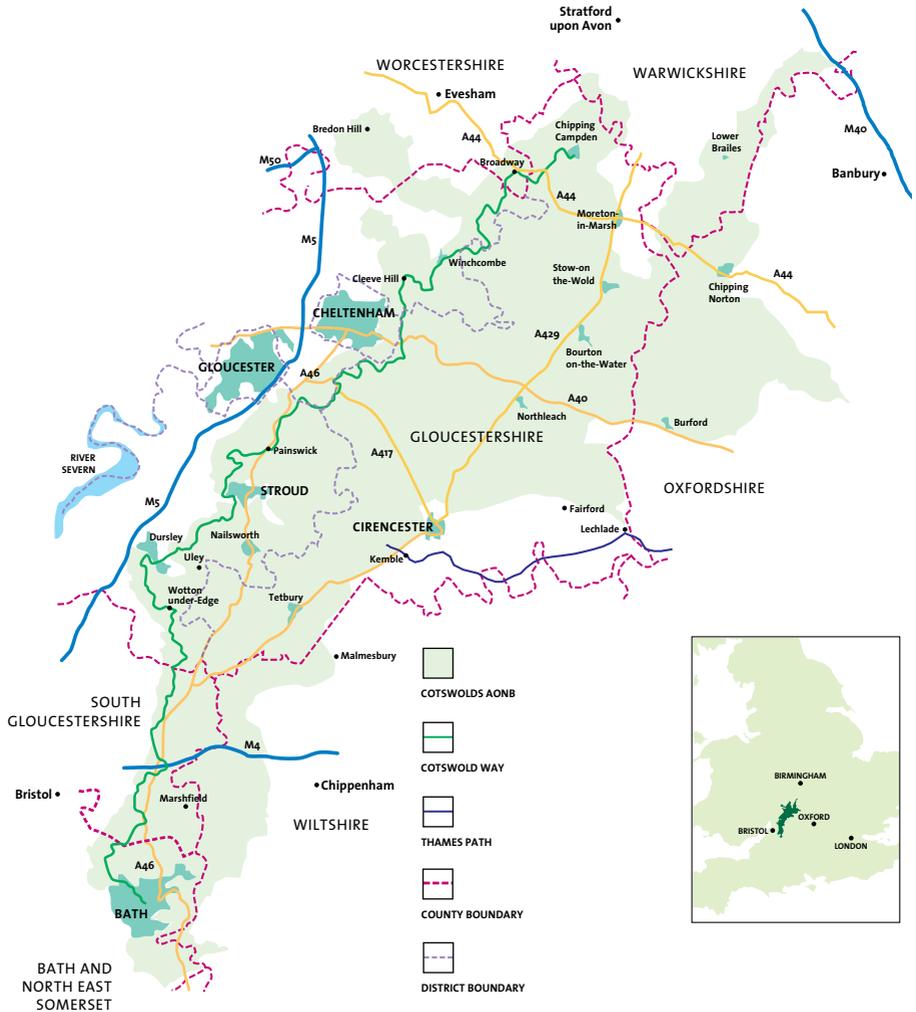
In 2008, following a request from Natural England, the board took on the responsibility of hosting the Cotswold Way National Trail team. The team have been in-house and operating from the board's headquarters in Northleach since April 2008 and this arrangement is set to continue until at least 2011.

Further information

The AONB website contains a section dedicated to the board, where you can find additional information such as; dates for board meetings, information about board members and position statements. www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk

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