

Cotswolds AONB

Management Plan 2013-2018

Summary



Cotswolds AONB – a special landscape

The national importance of the Cotswolds landscape was recognised by its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1966.

Its quiet beauty, its warm stone, its sheltered valleys and the long views out over the vale bring delight to all who live, work or visit here. The Cotswolds have been lived in for thousands of years, loved and cherished for generations. We have inherited something very special, something very precious.

The area was originally designated in 1966 and extended to be the country's largest AONB in 1990. Public bodies were given a duty in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to "have regard to" the purpose of designation of the AONB when undertaking their functions.

The Cotswolds Conservation Board seeks to work with partner organisations and individuals over the next five years to:

- stimulate sustainable economic growth;
- contribute to people's health and well-being;
- provide landscape-scale nature conservation initiatives;
- showcase the food, water, flood management, aesthetic, cultural and wildlife benefits provided by the area;
- contribute towards addressing climate change issues; and
- provide havens of tranquillity of value to residents and surrounding urban populations.

Many of these goals will be shared by other organisations and individuals working in the Cotswolds AONB.



What's special about the Cotswolds AONB?

The AONB contains a rich mosaic of historical, social, economic, cultural, geological, and ecological features.

Associated with these features, the area has many significant qualities, including:

- The high wolds – a large open elevated landscape with commons, 'big' skies and long distance views;
- Internationally important flower-rich limestone grasslands;
- Internationally important ancient broadleaved woodland;
- The tranquillity of the area and its dark skies.
- The Cotswold escarpment, and
- Historic field patterns defined by dry stone walls and hedges.

Two particular natural resources – the high-quality building stone and the water supply from deep limestone aquifers – are distinctive to the AONB.

The AONB has been shaped by more than 5,000 years of human activity and contains a wealth of archaeological sites and historic buildings set within a distinctive landscape.

The area contains many sites designated for their biodiversity and retains, to a significant degree, important habitats and species which are in decline elsewhere.

The Cotswolds is one of the largest and most popular rural areas in England for outdoor recreation and enjoyment, particularly walking, cycling and horse riding. It remains a popular destination for both overseas and domestic visitors, attracting some 23 million leisure visits every year which makes tourism the number one industry in the Cotswolds AONB, valued at more than £1 billion to the local economy.



Main threats facing the Cotswolds AONB

There are **several pressures** on the AONB that need effective management in order to prevent them, cumulatively, having an adverse effect on the landscape character, biodiversity, tranquillity and economy of the area. These include:

- population increase and the development required for an expanding and ageing population in rural areas;
- traffic congestion and increasing demand for more reliable journey times to be achieved through road widening and other 'improvement' schemes;
- changes in farming patterns linked to changes in the economics of particular crops or traditional farming practices;
- unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, for example by aggregate quarrying.

Climate change projections predict that the Cotswolds is likely to see an increase in extreme weather events within a longer term pattern of increasingly warmer, drier summers and milder wetter winters. This will affect soils and water and will potentially impact on all aspects of the Cotswolds AONB.

Intensification of agriculture: As commodity prices rise worldwide, there will be increasing pressure to intensify food production in the UK. The impact of such intensification on the character of the Cotswolds could be negative unless managed with the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the area in mind. Intensification can lead to loss of biodiversity, historic environment and landscape features.

Biodiversity: Characteristic habitats and some species are in decline or have been lost because of a range of factors including changes in farming and forestry practices, climate change influences, lack of or inappropriate management, together with development pressures, including brownfield site development.

Threats to local communities include lack of affordable housing (which impacts on those who manage the rural landscape e.g. dry stone wallers), loss of local facilities and services leading to social isolation and dependence on inadequate public/community transport.

Other concerns relate to the tranquillity of the AONB, which is under pressure from increasing noise, light and traffic; and the loss of traditional skills, which is a significant issue for the future management of the landscape.

What can a well-managed AONB deliver?

Conserving and enhancing the characteristic Cotswolds environment and advancing its understanding and enjoyment provides a wide range of benefits for society that are of ever greater importance as the surrounding urban population grows and impacts of change in the wider world accelerate.





These **benefits include:**

Access to an internationally renowned, scenically beautiful, large-scale landscape.

Economic and social well-being: by fostering this, the AONB can secure the resilience of the Cotswolds economy and the quality of life in the light of demographic changes and economic conditions. The high-quality environment is a strong factor in attracting inward investment and tourism to create employment opportunities both locally and in surrounding towns and cities. The AONB is an attractive location to entrepreneurs and associated workforces.

High-quality food and products produced close to local markets.

Climate change: As the largest designated landscape in southern England, the Cotswolds AONB can play a part in the national response to climate change. This is particularly the case with the provision of water supplies and control of flooding, soil management, species and habitat adaptation, tourism provision and renewable energy generation.

Conserving natural resources: The AONB can demonstrate the principle of conserving natural resources within the Cotswolds AONB, using them in the most sustainable way, and enhancing their contribution to the needs of society.

Biodiversity: Providing access to areas that are rich in biodiversity adds to the quality of experience for those living in and visiting the Cotswolds.

Sustainable Tourism: The Cotswolds is one of England's 'world famous and exceptional destinations' with the ability to attract overseas visitors to England.

Health and well-being: Management of the AONB is responding to increasing national and local action to promote contact with the natural environment and informal recreation to improve the quality of life.

Tranquillity: Contributes to the health and well-being of the wider population, with distinct restorative benefits, sense of place, and opportunities for relaxation and escape in natural surroundings.

Cotswolds Conservation Board

The Conservation Board aims to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB. In fulfilling these roles it seeks to foster the social and economic well-being of local communities within the AONB. The Board is the author of the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan 2013-18.



What is the purpose of the Management Plan?

The Plan sets out objectives for the management of the AONB agreed through consultation. The achievement of these objectives and their associated policies requires the support and involvement of many other organisations and individuals who have key parts to play in the future of the area. They include central government, local authorities, and other public bodies as well as residents, visitors, conservation organisations and landowners.

The Plan identifies policies, delivery mechanisms and monitoring indicators by which the objectives may be realised.

Engagement

The Engagement section of the Plan sets out actions the Board wishes organisations and individuals to consider taking, either alone or in partnership with others including the Board, in order to:

- deliver the purpose of designation of the AONB;
- assist the Board to better accomplish its own purposes; and
- achieve the objectives of this Management Plan.

We hope that everyone active in the Cotswolds will read the plan and engage with it in the ways suggested. We have inherited a great treasure; let us use it intelligently, secure its many benefits, and pass it on to our successors so that they in turn will be able to enjoy it as much as we do.



For further information regarding how to contribute to the management of the Cotswolds AONB, please contact



Cotswolds Conservation Board

Fosse Way
Northleach
Gloucestershire GL54 3JH

Tel: 01451 862000

Fax: 01451 862001

Website: www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/managementplan