

## **CORPORATE STRATEGY**

### **North Wessex Downs AONB Corporate Strategy**

May 2018

#### **The North Wessex Downs AONB**

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding National Beauty is a nationally protected landscape, internationally recognised by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in the stewardship of a locally accountable partnership. Its national participants include Government through DEFRA, which contributes to the core costs of the AONB Partnership, and Natural England, the Government's agency for landscape and nature conservation. The nine county, district and unitary authorities in whose areas the AONB lies are the core local partners.

The North Wessex Downs AONB was designated in 1972 under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949*. Section IV of the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* ('the CRoW Act') significantly reinforced its status through a number of further provisions:

#### Section 85: Duty of Regard

The *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000* imposes a Duty of Regard on all relevant authorities. This means that Government ministers, public bodies, statutory undertakers and anyone else holding public office all have an unavoidable statutory obligation to help conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

#### Section 89: AONB Management Plan

The Act also requires that every five years a joint committee of the constituent local authorities of an AONB publish a single Management Plan for the area. This should formulate "their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it".

#### **The Community of the North Wessex Downs AONB**

The Council of Partners is the governing body of the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership and was established in response to the provisions of the Act.

The stakeholder community of the North Wessex Downs is not just the local authorities and other organisations who sit on its formal Council of Partners. On the contrary it includes everyone – from farmers and businesses to local residents and visitors from afar – who has an interest in ensuring that this special landscape a sustainable future.

The AONB Unit was created by the AONB Partnership to co-ordinate AONB activity on its behalf. The statutory elements of the Unit's work are to produce, review and administer the AONB Management Plan; to advise the local authorities and other relevant bodies on the implications of their policies, proposals and activities for the protected landscape; and to help them to fulfil their s.85 Duty of Regard.

The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust is an independent charity whose objective is to support the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It does this by developing relationships with corporate, charitable and philanthropic supporters and donors with the aim of securing

streams of funding or other forms of support in kind so as to undertake relevant projects, programmes and activities.

### **Pressures for Change**

The North Wessex Downs AONB faces constant pressure from internal and external sources of change. Some of these are benign but others could prove harmful to its natural beauty and tranquillity:

- uncertainty for farmers arising from the end of the Common Agricultural Policy that has supported UK agriculture for more than 40 years;
- economic growth and development, particularly housing and infrastructure such as roads, rail electrification, telecommunications masts and reservoirs;
- shrinking local and national government funding and the consequent need to secure more resources from commercial and charitable sources;
- climate change and extreme weather events, which are already starting to have an impact on farming, wildlife, water supplies and people.

### **Corporate Strategy**

This **Corporate Strategy** provides a framework for the development and activities of the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership in its widest sense – in summary, what it is for and how it will achieve its aims.

The Strategy stands alongside the two other principal building blocks of the AONB Partnership:

- the statutory **AONB Management Plan**, which describes the significance of the protected landscape, why it is valued and by whom, and how changes to it need to be managed to ensure that its natural beauty is conserved and enhanced;
- the annually updated **AONB Unit Work Programme**, which sets out the priorities for the AONB Unit's work as agreed by the Council of Partners.

Two overarching strategic objectives guide the Unit's activities:

- preventing harm to the special qualities and natural beauty for which the AONB was designated;
- enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape, including its heritage and ecology, for the benefit of everyone.

### **Resources**

To fulfil our potential we need to harness energy and resources well beyond the statutory obligations and public funds of our partners. Instead we need to become a 'mixed economy' of public, voluntary, commercial and community forces. We expect the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust will play a central role in this.

Our success will also depend on engaging the active support of five other groups of local stakeholders:

- the farmers, foresters and land managers who are responsible for the management and conservation of the natural beauty for which the area is designated;
- the local businesses that bring prosperity to the AONB, especially those relating to food and drink, tourism, and recreation;
- the parish councils and community groups who represent the interests and wellbeing of the people of the AONB;
- the wildlife groups and amenity societies who care for the natural and cultural environment of the AONB;
- the public agencies and voluntary bodies determined to maximise the benefits of the countryside and outdoor activity for people's health and wellbeing;
- Local Enterprise Partnerships and the North Wessex Downs LEADER Local Action Group that has secured more than €2m to invest in local enterprises and heritage between 2015 and 2020.

### **Principal Areas for Development**

The AONB Partnership has identified four principal strands of work that need to be carried out in support of this strategy:

- Products and Services – to identify what it is the AONB can offer that is of value to others, and to present this in the form of a Prospectus.
- Resources Group – to agree and spearhead a broad-based Funding and Resources Strategy that uses the Prospectus as its revenue-generating starting point.
- Farming and Land Management – to investigate how we can develop more effective partnerships with those managing land in the North Wessex Downs
- The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust (NWDLT) – to use its external connections and influence to tap new sources of revenue and support for the AONB.

Activity on these is led by groups of volunteers under the aegis of the Council of Partners and with the support of the AONB Unit, in parallel with implementation of the AONB Management Plan.

### North Wessex Downs AONB: Partnership roles and relationships

