

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Head of Contract and Asset Management

REPORT NUMBER **G105**

TO: STRATEGY COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 27 September 2007

**SUFFOLK COAST AND HEATHS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
(AONB) DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN (2008-2013)**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Strategy Committee’s views on the consultation draft Management Plan for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the provisions in the draft Management Plan and environmental report be supported.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None apart from the Council’s annual contribution towards the running costs of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, which stands at £17,150 for the current financial year and goes towards a total budget of approximately £305000.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Failure to produce an updated management plan as statutorily required by Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.	Unlikely.	Significant levels of funding provided by Natural England would not be forthcoming if the requirement to produce an updated management plan is not met. This could undermine the Council’s legal obligations set out in the Act, and result in collapse of the partnership working arrangements. Alternative structures would be needed which could work out to be less satisfactory and more expensive.	Regular meetings at officer and member level ensure that progress is made towards the required review and production of the management plan. Natural England provides specific guidance on the steps needed to fulfil the legal obligations.

5. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory duty to produce a management plan for the AONB, and to review it within 5 years. This draft has been prepared by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership, on which the Council is represented, and approved for consultation purposes by the Partnership meeting in July 2007.
- 5.2 The draft Management Plan has been circulated to all stakeholders with an interest in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and project area, including local authorities, government and non-government agencies and local communities. It is intended to run for 5 years from 2008, and will replace the existing management strategy produced in 2003. Although the current strategy is seen as basically sound, it was felt that a new management plan rather than a review of the current document would reinvigorate the Partnership and local communities.
- 5.3 The main purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty, and account should also be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. The promotion of sustainable schemes that conserve and enhance the environment is advocated, while demand for recreation should be met where it is consistent with the above sentiments.
- 5.4 The draft Management Plan seeks to co-ordinate the actions of the Partnership and to provide a framework for any organisation or individual whose activities will have an impact on the landscape of the area. It is also intended to encourage stakeholders to keep the area special.
- 5.5 The special qualities of the AONB are examined, including an analysis of landscape character types. This has helped to draw up a Vision for the AONB up to the year 2030. It covers Landscape, the Coast, Estuaries, River valleys, Heaths and forests, Farming, Communities and people, Economy and Tranquillity. The Vision seeks to retain the special qualities of the area through a sound understanding on the part of all stakeholders, including local communities, and by working in partnership with them.
- 5.6 A wide range of issues likely to cause change in the AONB are considered, including the need for sustainable development policies, landscape, biodiversity, and housing and jobs in the regional and Haven Gateway contexts. From this analysis the management plan puts forward three core Aims:
- To conserve and enhance the special qualities of the landscape,
 - To manage the resources, features and development in a sustainable way,
 - To enable residents and visitors to value and appreciate the AONB.
- 5.7 A detailed Action Plan has been produced to pursue the Aims through specific Outcomes for a period of three years, i.e. 2008-2010. Further information can be obtained from the Countryside Officer (Tel.no: 01473 825869), and a hard copy of the document is available in the Members Room, or see the Suffolk Coast and Heaths website – www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org
- 5.8 An environmental report has been produced alongside the management plan, as required under Directive 2001/42/EC where a Strategic Environmental Assessment has to be made. This has enabled a detailed investigation of the management plan policies to ascertain if there are any adverse impacts on the environment. As the overall objectives of the management plan are to conserve and enhance the environment, the policies that follow should not have any adverse impact. The environmental report assesses the policies using a matrix framework, and concludes that there are no negative impacts.

5.9 A web version is planned that will have a comprehensive level of information, while a shorter, hard copy version will concentrate on the outcomes identified in the management plan. The intention is to make the process easier for all stakeholders, which has been a criticism of the current document.

6. **CONCLUSION**

6.1 This consultation draft has been the result of work carried out since the beginning of the year by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, and officers and members of the Partnership. It has undergone close scrutiny at these levels and it is recommended that the Committee approve the management plan and environmental report.

6.2 Further updating and filling in of detail is still required but this will not alter the main thrust. The Partnership will consider the results of the consultation exercise, which runs until 2 November 2007, at its next meeting in December 2007. The Council will then have the opportunity to endorse the finalised Management Plan early in 2008.

7. **APPENDICES**

None

8. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB draft Management Plan September 2007

Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB draft Management Plan Environmental Report September 2007

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