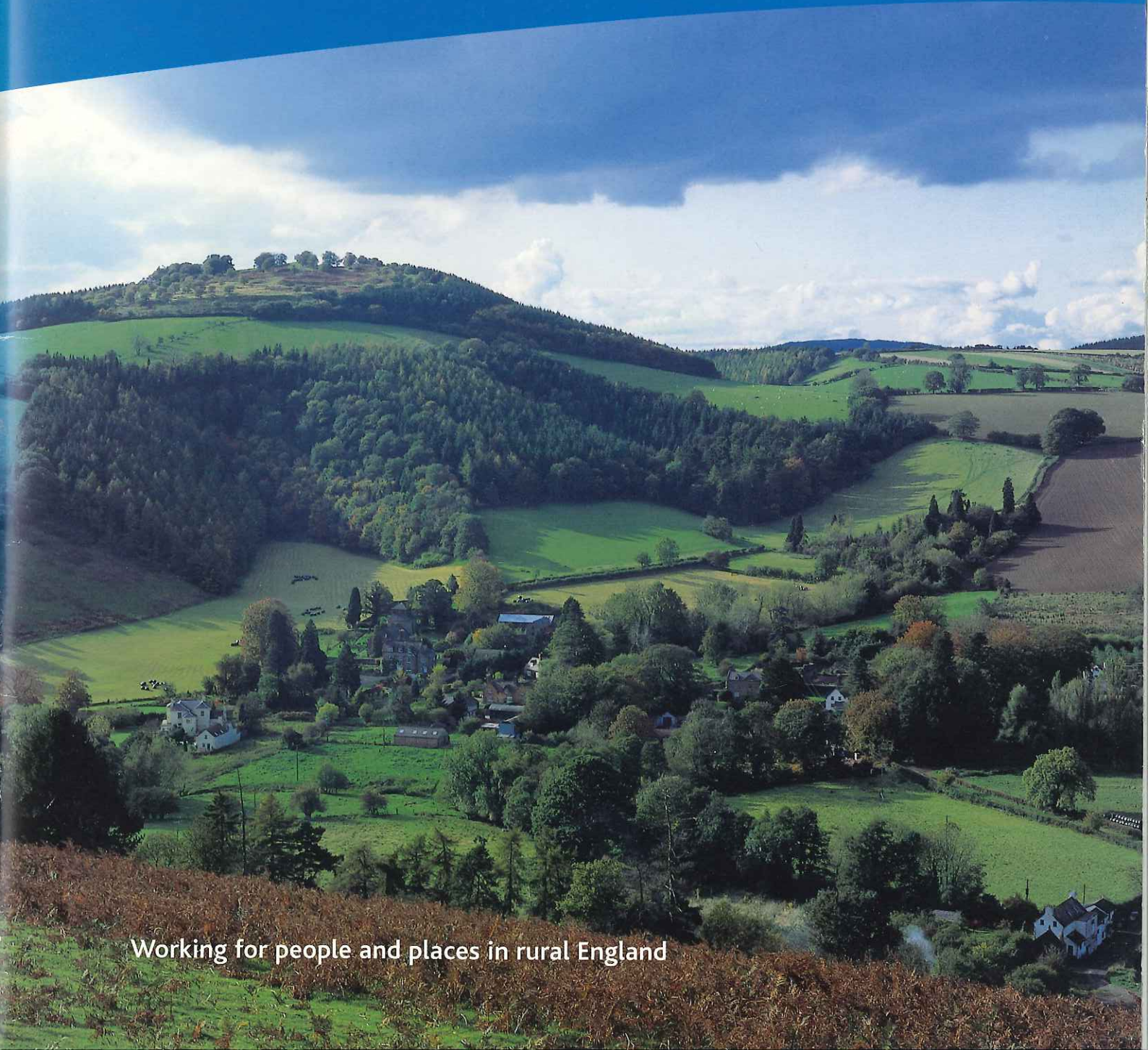


Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

A guide for AONB partnership members



Working for people and places in rural England

The Countryside Agency

The Countryside Agency is the statutory body working:

- to conserve and enhance England's countryside;
- to spread social and economic opportunity for the people who live there;
- to help everyone, wherever they live and whatever their background, to enjoy the countryside and share in this priceless national asset.

The Countryside Agency will work to achieve the very best for the English countryside – its people and places, by:

- influencing those whose decisions affect the countryside through our expertise, our research and by spreading good practice by showing what works;
- implementing specific work programmes reflecting priorities set by Parliament, the Government and the Agency Board.

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A guide for AONB partnership members

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Foreword

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have a special place amongst the protected landscapes of England. Their care has been entrusted to the local authorities, organisations, community groups and the individuals who live and work within them: or who value them. We have relied on them to manage those landscapes for the benefit of the nation as a whole. It has not been easy task but the success is clear in the outstanding quality of the countryside that makes up our AONBs: our finest countryside.

However, since 1957 when the first English AONB was designated, the Quantock Hills, there has been massive change in the English countryside. New legislation, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, provides the basis for a new management framework to reflect the current challenges.

The new management framework recognises and retains, the best of the old system – local care. It allows those local systems and people to further the conservation and enhancement of their AONBs. The setting up of local partnerships, the employment of AONB staff and the production of AONB Management Plans will allow AONBs to flourish. These mechanisms should inspire land managers and others. In that way our finest landscapes will not only be protected, but enhanced for the future. They will offer opportunities for people to enjoy them and benefit from them: environmentally, socially and economically.

This guide has been written to help AONB partnerships come together to meet the challenges of 21st century protected landscape management. It gives an introduction to the purposes of AONB designation, the laws that protect them and the partnership role in ensuring that these landscapes continue to flourish. These are undoubtedly exiting times for AONBs: those of you involved in local AONB partnerships have real opportunities to make a difference to our finest countryside. Most importantly, you have the chance to deliver real outcomes, real work on the ground and a real future for England's finest countryside.



Ewen Cameron
Chairman
The Countryside Agency

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1. Introduction

This is a guide to what an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is and how it should be cared for. It is an update on the 1994 Countryside Commission document '**Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Guide for Members of Joint Advisory Committees**' (CCP 461). It gives background information on the designation and purposes of AONBs and the responsibilities that local authorities and others have for their management. It provides up to date information on the new statutory arrangements for AONBs, brought in as part of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and most importantly, it gives advice on how to achieve action on the ground to conserve and enhance AONBs.

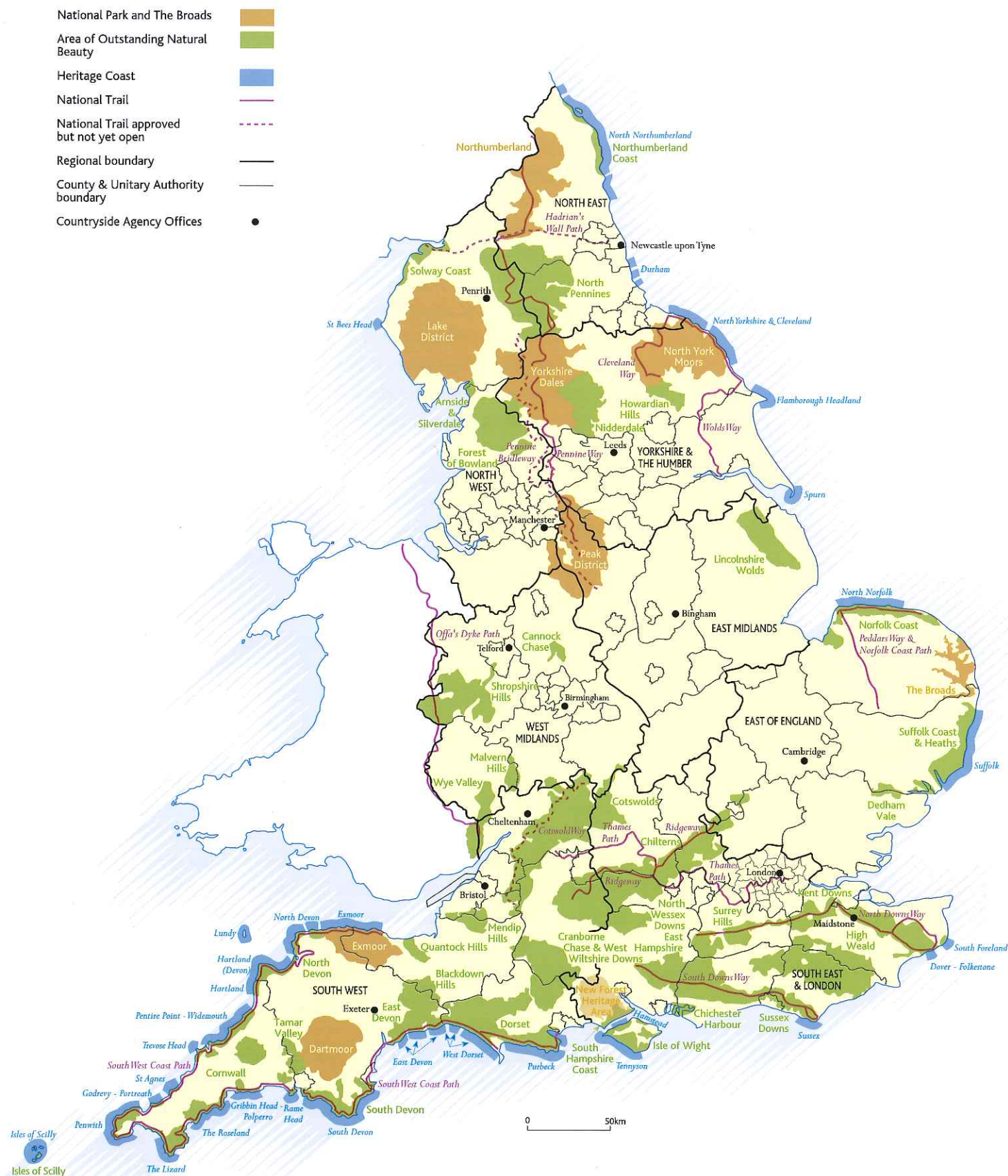
The guide is aimed at all organisations and individuals who have an interest in protected landscapes and who want to do more to manage and enhance these nationally important areas: in particular those who serve on the partnerships which manage each AONB.

The AONBs in England and Wales are our finest landscapes. They are places that have been regarded for generations as treasured areas with special character and are designated, alongside our National Parks, to mark them out for special protection and management. They include the rolling limestone hills of the Cotswolds and chalk downs of North Wessex; the high moorlands of the Forest of Bowland and the North Pennines; the wetlands and heaths of the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts; and the hills and estuaries of South Devon. They are designated as protected landscapes by law, to make sure that the features that make them special are maintained for future generations.

The 41 AONBs cover over 15% of the land area of England and Wales. They are inhabited by thousands of people and visited by many more. The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 significantly raised the profile of AONBs by placing new responsibilities on the local authorities and conservation boards who are responsible for their management, including a statutory duty to produce and regularly review AONB Management Plans for their areas and a duty on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard for AONB purposes.

Given the diverse range of duties and responsibilities, the management of an AONB is a complex activity. Current practice varies widely from authority to authority. The majority of AONBs have published landscape assessments and management plans, and many have formal partnerships and AONB staff units to ensure the plans are implemented. Yet there is very little guidance available on what local authorities and partner organisations have to do to manage them properly. This guide aims to begin to fill that gap. It is complementary to **AONB Management Plans: A guide** (CA23) published by the Countryside Agency. This guide gives technical information of how to prepare and produce a Management Plan for an AONB, the new statutory requirement under the CRoW Act 2000.

Designated and defined interests



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What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

There is a huge variety of scenery and landscapes in England and Wales from flat coasts to craggy mountains. The landscapes considered to be the most valuable are designated as National Parks or AONBs. These are landscapes that are protected and managed by law to maintain their special character for now, and for future generations. A leaflet and map has been produced highlighting the diversity of England's protected landscapes¹.

The Countryside Agency is now responsible for designating AONBs under the CRow Act 2000: designation defines the area to which special measures shall apply. Over 20,000 square kilometres of land in England and Wales are designated, amounting to 15.6% of total land area. The purpose of designation as an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty (which includes wildlife and cultural heritage as well as scenery) of the area. Designation gives a formal statutory recognition to an area's national importance. Local government must formally state its policies towards AONB purposes through a 'Management Plan'; special land use planning and development policies apply; and other public authorities must demonstrate their commitment to AONBs by having regard to AONB purposes.

The designation helps to protect not just the natural features – the trees, fields and open spaces – but also settlements and working environments that are unique characteristics of the countryside. The designation allows for the development of communities and economic activity, including rural businesses, in ways that further enhance the character of the AONB.

The landscapes of the AONBs in England and Wales include mountains and hills, forests, valleys and river estuaries. 'Natural Beauty' is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries. The character of AONB landscapes has been created and maintained by human activity over the last 5000 years. It is crucial therefore to sustain communities within the AONBs, so that this essential stewardship can continue. Their support is also needed when inappropriate development and other pressures threaten the AONBs character. The cooperation of people, especially farmers and land owners and those involved in local industry and commerce, is vital to the protection of the AONBs. Because they are attractive areas they are also popular for leisure and tourism and increasingly need to be managed for recreation as well as conservation.

¹. Our finest countryside: England's protected landscapes, 2001, CA18, The Countryside Agency.

What does AONB designation do?

Designation gives a formal statutory recognition to the importance of these high quality landscapes. Special guidance on planning and development control is given via Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) notes². The designation requires local authorities to devise strategies and plans for AONB management and encourages them to set up mechanisms for action. It also empowers local authorities to carry out management specifically to conserve and enhance the AONB, in line with its purposes. Most AONB management though needs to be done by encouragement and incentive, not by regulation, and by working closely and positively with authorities, organisations and interest groups.

The purpose of designation – to conserve and enhance natural beauty – reflects the need for **integrated** action – helping to conserve the landscape through sustainable forms of environmental, social and economic development. Integrated management can tackle a wide range of issues that impact on the countryside by prioritising action. AONB designation does not mean that the area is to be preserved with no development or change being allowed, but instead requires conservation and enhancement. What is important is to understand what makes an AONB special and develop a vision of how it should be sustained. This means encouraging some activities and minimising others.

Purposes of AONB designation³

- The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- In pursuing the primary purpose account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Who looks after AONBs?

AONBs and National Parks are protected landscapes and need to be protected from inappropriate development. They also need positive and pro-active management to address the many pressures upon them. These pressures include urban development, transport infrastructure and traffic growth, changes farming practices and land management, recreational use and, in the long term, potential climate change. Protected landscapes need effective administrative arrangements and adequate funding to tackle these pressures and to devise management strategies to protect, and allow activities that will enhance the landscape in the longer term.

Land in AONBs, like National Parks, is largely privately owned. Most of the land is used for agriculture and landowners and farmers are generally free to decide how they use the land. However, the

2. Planning Policy Guidance Note Number 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development, 1997, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

3. AONBs: A policy statement, 1991, CCP 356, Countryside Commission.

Countryside Agency and many local authorities have recognised the need to tackle management issues in AONBs and in most areas have established partnerships and staff units to help protect them and use their various powers to deliver action.

The Countryside Agency strategy set out its policies for National Parks and AONBs in 2001. Its principles are as follows:

- England's finest landscapes should be marked out by designations and protected and managed accordingly.
- Our approach in National Parks and AONBs will be different, reflecting the special role of National Parks in providing outstanding recreational opportunities.
- All National Parks and AONBs should have management structures, policies and resources reflecting their particular characteristics. Governance should respect local circumstances but operate in the national interest.
- Finest landscapes cannot be managed in isolation, but should reflect and serve their wider local and regional settings.
- Management should reflect best practice and provide an example of sustainable development for other parts of the countryside; finest landscapes can act as test beds for innovative approaches.

What does legislation say about AONBs?

The **National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949** was the first piece of relevant legislation which provided for the designation of AONBs. This legislation provided for planning protection of AONBs and gave local authorities the power to take action to conserve them. But no statutory duties were placed on local authorities or any other body. Since then, however, the pressures on the landscape of our protected areas have increased dramatically and the provisions of the 1949 Act are now inadequate.

The Environment Act 1995 brought in new measures for the protection of National Parks: The CROW Act 2000 has now done the same for AONBs.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000:

- Consolidates and strengthens earlier legislation concerning AONBs, reaffirming the purposes of designation, and confirming the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of AONBs.
In addition the Act:
- Places a duty on all public bodies and statutory undertakers to 'have regard' to the purposes of AONBs.
- Establishes a process for creating AONB conservation boards.
- Creates a statutory responsibility for local authorities and conservation boards to produce and regularly to review AONB Management Plans.

The new legislation in the CROW Act marks a significant raising of the AONB status and confirm their importance in government policy. The CROW Act has altered the context within which AONBs are managed. Some of the changes, including provisions giving the public access to open country, amendments to legislation on rights of way and greater protection for wildlife and natural features, apply to the

countryside as a whole. Part IV of the Act relates specifically to AONBs.

The CRoW Act reaffirms the purposes of AONB designation and confirms the powers of local authorities to take appropriate action to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of AONBs. It also places a new statutory duty on local authorities to prepare and publish a Management Plan for the AONB which sets out their policies for managing the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it. New Plans must be prepared by April 2004 and then reviewed every five years.

There is another important provision that places a duty on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard for the purposes of conserving and enhancing the AONB: 'relevant authorities' includes any public body (e.g. a government department or agency) and any statutory undertaker (e.g. water companies). This part of the Act opens the door to many people and organisations getting involved in AONB management that the AONBs have not always with engaged before.

The Act also allows for the Secretary of State to establish, after consultation with local authorities, new management arrangements for AONBs in the form of a 'conservation board'. Conservation boards will not be appropriate for all AONBs but may be needed for the larger, more administratively complex AONBs where there is a range of issues which can best be addressed by an independent body with its own executive powers to act directly. Where these independent bodies have been established, they will carry out the duty to prepare Management Plans and will act to manage the AONB.

The opportunity to establish conservation boards, the requirement to produce Management Plans and the duty of public bodies to have regard to AONB purposes all have significant implications for AONB management.

Conservation boards

The CRoW Act enables the Secretary of State to establish conservation boards to manage AONBs. Conservation boards:

- will only be established only if the majority of the local authorities in the AONB agree;
- will be made up of at least 40% local authority members, at least 20% parish council members and 40% Secretary of State appointees: the number of members and range of expertise desirable will be defined for each;
- will take on the responsibility for producing the Management Plan from the local authorities;
- must have regard to two purposes: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and increase public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB, with greater weight on the first if there is a conflict. It must also seek to foster economic and social well being whilst pursuing these two purposes;
- will have general powers to act in pursuit of these purposes. Appropriate powers may also be transferred from, or shared with, local authorities. Planning and development control functions however will remain with local authorities.

National Parks and AONBs

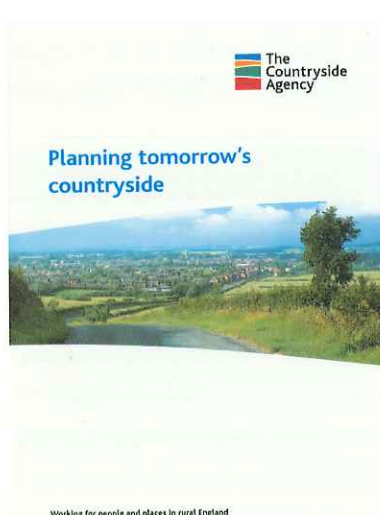
National Parks and AONBs have their origins in the same movements to protect the countryside and were both designated under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Both have equal importance in landscape quality terms; both are designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Both have the same level of protection in planning policy. Also, like National Parks, public bodies etc. must contribute to AONB management by having regard for AONB purposes. However, there is a distinct differences in the purposes and reasons for designation in relation to recreation. National Parks have an additional purpose to promote opportunities for people to understand and enjoy their special qualities.

Management is also different, National Parks have their own National Park Authorities, which are local authorities in their own right and have their own planning, development control functions and other executive powers. They receive funds directly from central government and can precept funds from local authorities. AONBs are largely managed as part of their general duties by local authorities: or in some cases conservation boards.

What about planning and development control?

The town and country planning system has a major role in influencing landscape character and diversity. It plans for the use of land and controls where certain types of development should take place. Planning authorities (county, district and unitary councils) must include policies in development plans that favour the conservation of the natural beauty and character of AONBs. Their development control decisions should follow these policies and provide AONBs with a framework that integrates social, environmental and economic factors to allow for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB in the longer term.

Planning



The Countryside Agency's policy on planning in the countryside⁴ includes the vision: We want to pass on to future generations the sort of development which will help make their livelihoods and landscapes as good as we enjoy; and we want to pass it on with pride. We also seek a countryside which is rich in natural beauty, biodiversity and character.

AONB designation is not about stopping development, but it encourages development to be approached with special care. Poorly designed, or located development can spoil the character of an area, but some development can have great social and economic benefits for the community which can further AONB aims in the long term.

4. Planning tomorrow's countryside, 2000, CA 60, The Countryside Agency.

National government planning policy guidelines on AONBs

The planning policy guidance to local authorities from national government (Planning Policy Guidance 7;⁵ paragraph 4.8) states that:

"In general policies and development control decisions affecting AONBs should favour conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape. In all cases the environmental effects of the new proposals will be a major consideration, though it will also be appropriate to have regard to the economic and social well being of the areas. It would normally be inconsistent with the aims of designation to permit the siting of major industrial or commercial development in these areas. Only proven national interest and lack of alternative sites can justify an exception."

The Guidance is being revised to make it even clearer that AONBs should have the same high level of protection as National Parks. A Ministerial statement said:

"The Government accept that the landscape qualities of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are equivalent. Conserving and enhancing the beauty of the landscape are objectives for both types of designation. The Government therefore believe that the protection given to both types of area by the land use planning system should also be equivalent."⁶

In all AONBs major development should be regarded as inconsistent with the aims of development. Schemes for major roads, motorways, large building developments and mineral workings should be avoided. Authorities should also consider the issue of the impact of a number of developments in the long term, or cumulative impacts, and make policies accordingly. Small-scale developments, particularly if they are essential to the needs of the local community, are normally acceptable and should be within, or close to, existing towns and villages and be in sympathy with the character of the area. Good planning in AONBs should look to add value through development and ensure, for example, good design on all new houses.

Local authority planning policy should not be limited to what is within the AONB boundary. Inappropriate development outside the boundary may have an adverse impact on the landscape within it. Conversely, certain planning controls outside the boundary may expose areas within the boundary to damaging development.

Local authorities are responsible for planning and development control in AONBs; and need to include appropriate policies in their structure and local plans. AONB partnerships should, however, offer advice on planning matters which affect the AONB. They play an important role in ensuring that the proper protection is given to the AONB, and also that planning policies contribute positively to conservation and enhancement of the AONB. They should be a consultee on strategic policies and on planning cases which affect the AONB. They can help ensure common and high standards across the area, where the AONB falls within several local authorities and can offer generic advice on planning matters. For example – they may produce an AONB Design Guide which can be adopted by all local planning authorities as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

5. Planning Policy Guidance Note Number 7: The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development, 1997, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

6. Nick Raynsford's (planning minister) response to a parliamentary question in June, 2000.

From the Wye Valley JAC Members Guide⁷: Development control

A. It is very important that:

- development control policies and decisions are sensitive to AONB objectives;
- policies are coordinated across local authority boundaries.

B. A key task for the JAC is to advise planning authorities in the preparation of their structure, local or unitary development plans to ensure the interests of the AONB are safeguarded.

C. The AONB officer should be consulted by the appropriate planning authority on development proposals likely to have significant impact on the AONB.

D. The aim is to ensure:

- the scale, nature and quality of development is compatible with the AONB Management Plan objectives;
- development contributes to the landscape, rather than detracting from it;
- development reflects local vernacular styles where possible.

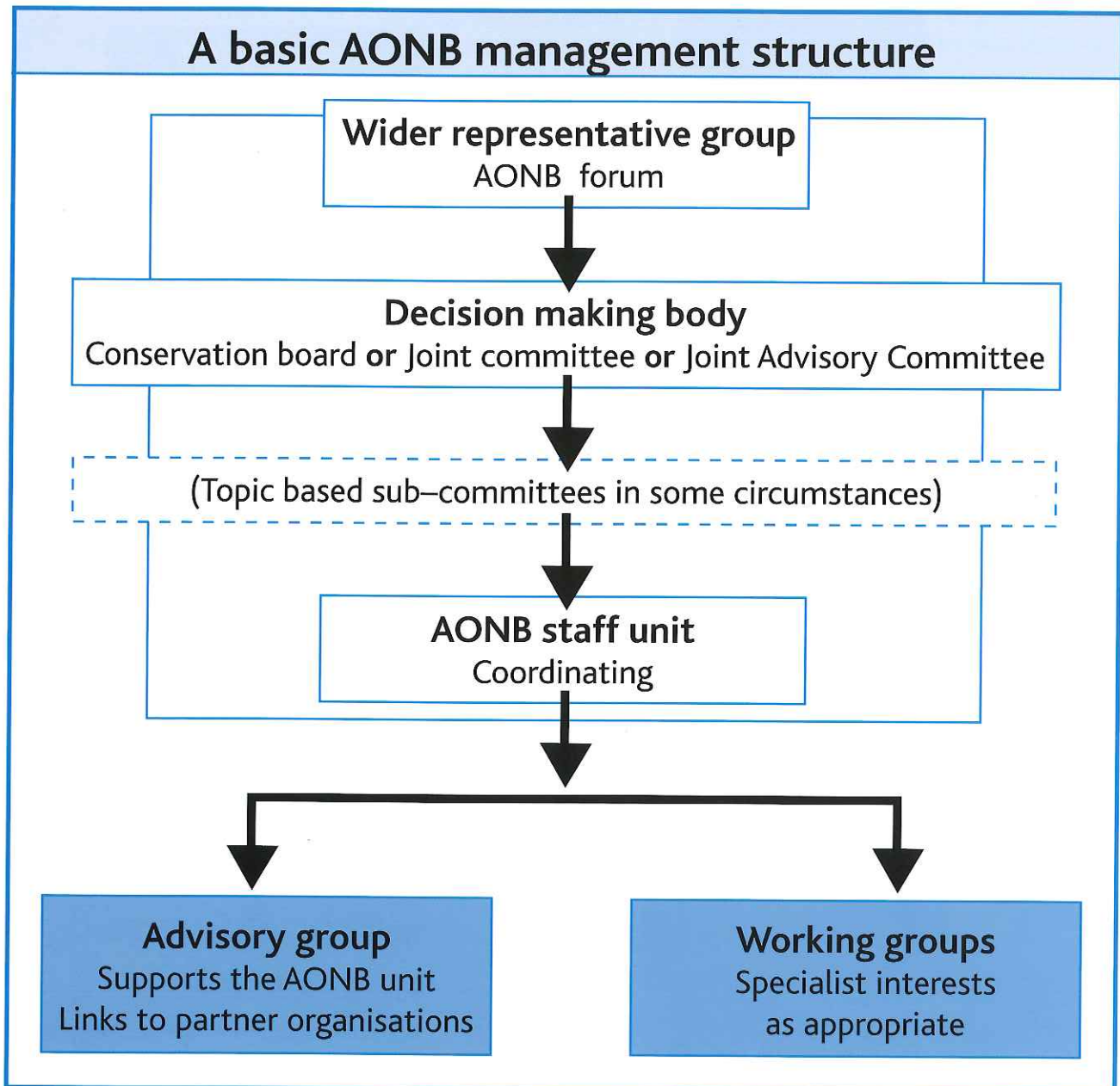
How can AONBs be protected and managed?

Local authorities are responsible for preparing and publishing management plans for AONBs and have powers to carry out necessary management. However, they are not solely responsible for caring for AONBs. Partnerships are a valuable means of coordinating the management of areas of countryside in multiple ownership. They bring together interested parties and encouraging a strong sense of 'ownership' to care for the area. AONB partnerships are often set up as local authority Joint Advisory Committees (JACs), some have been established as a conference, forum, trust or, as a joint local government committee. There can now also be statutory conservation boards since the CRoW Act.

Most AONBs already have a partnership structure in place. Many have also set up a support network of working groups, advisory panels and staff units to allow the partnership to function effectively as an AONB decision making and implementation body. These groups prepare reports and make recommendations to the partnership and take on much of its day-to-day operation.

Action at a local level is most successful if it involves many organisations that have an interest in the area. It should also involve the community – those people who live and work in, or near, the area and who may also depend on the area for their livelihoods. By setting up partnerships that involve local and national government, relevant organisations and interest groups and the community, local authorities can multiply their effect on conservation and enhancement, and help to make sure action is sustainable. AONBs can become exemplars of good practice by demonstrating the benefits of partnership working in both planning and implementation. What is essential is that the partnership should have clear objectives and that partners understand fully their role and responsibilities.

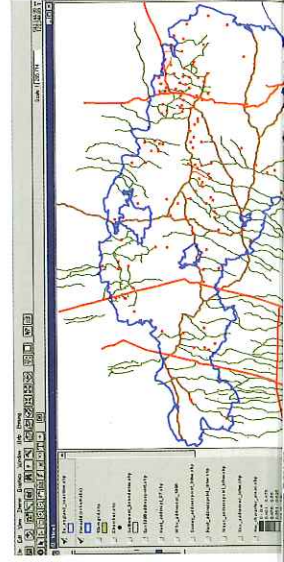
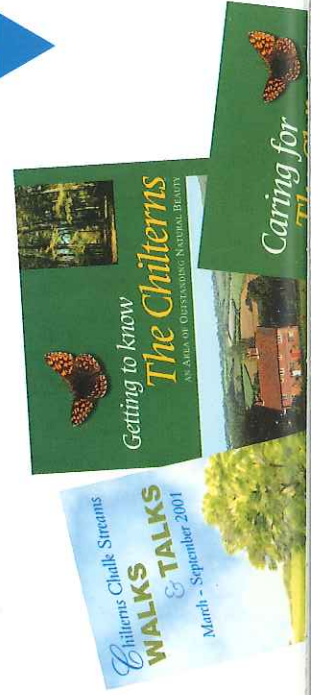
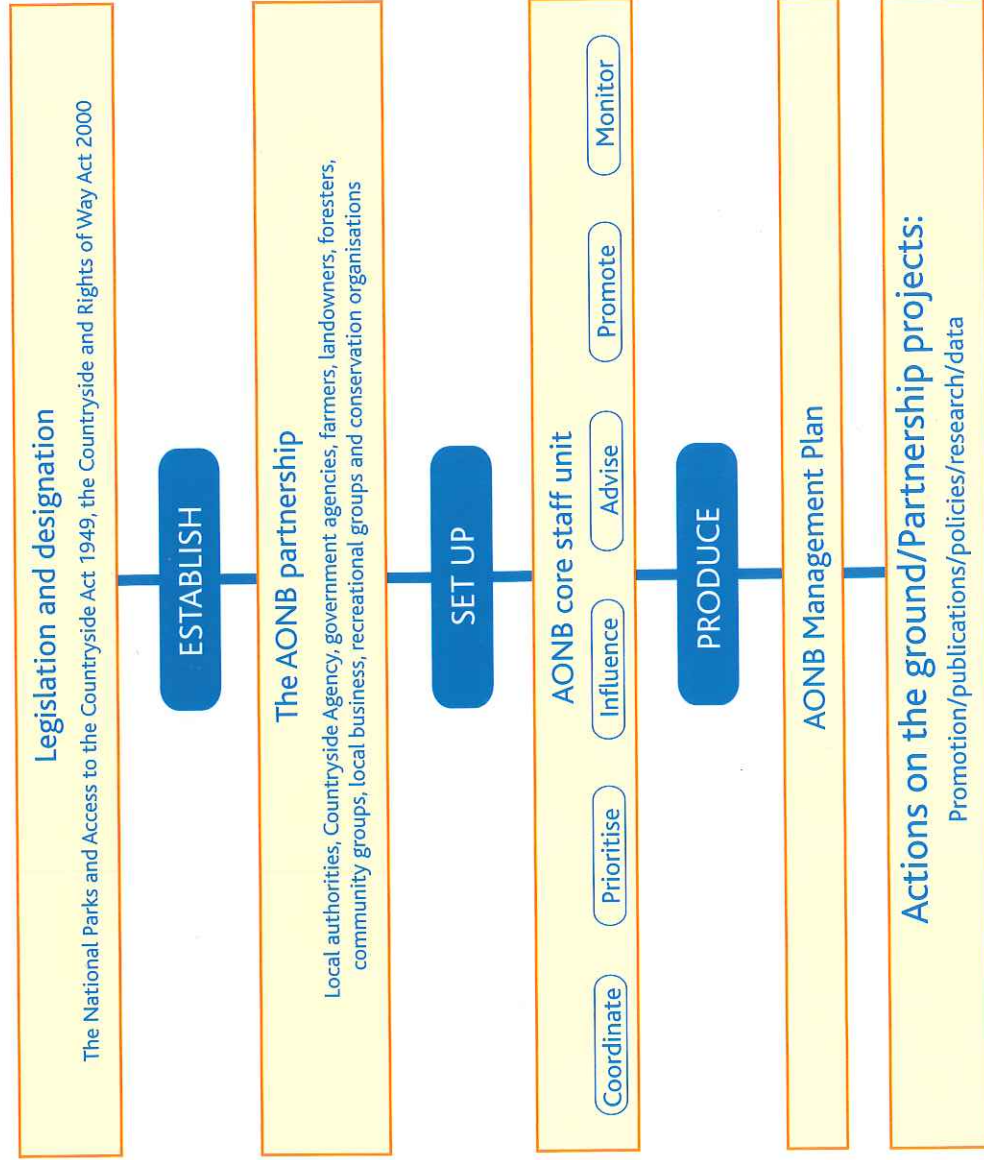
⁷ A Handbook for Members of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee and Supporting Technical Officers, 1998, unpublished.



Partnerships are crucial for helping to manage AONBs because they can:

- coordinate the management of the AONB by the production and implementation of a Management Plan;
- provide an accountable management structure for budget and staff management;
- offer a platform, or forum, for collective decision making engage with a wide range of organisations in seeking consensus on AONB management;
- demonstrate best practice in countryside management;
- raise awareness of the true importance and purpose of AONBs for a range of partners and engage them in management.

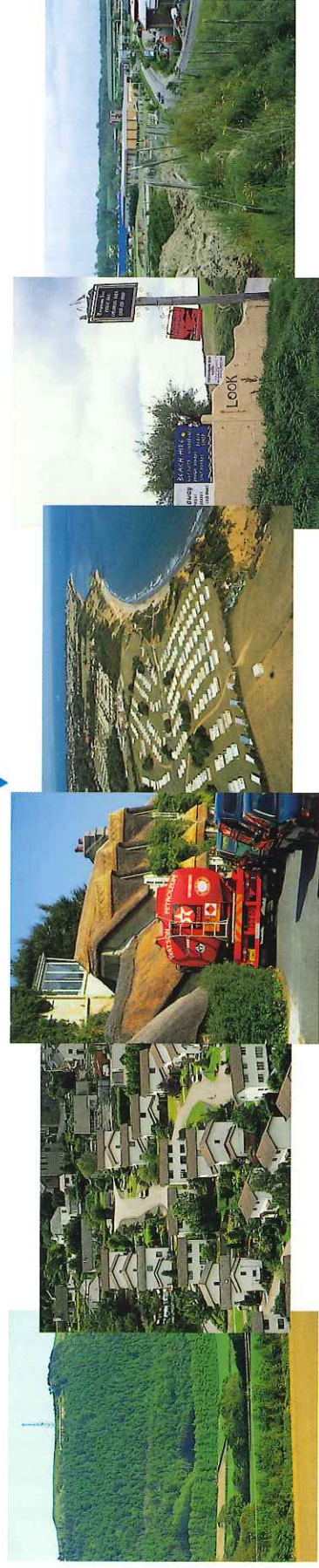
The AONB management process





Challenges and demands on AONBs

Visual impact, transport, bad signage, inappropriate development, etc.



Partnerships vary greatly in their membership according to local conditions, management aims and requirements. They should include as a minimum all local authorities within the AONB and the Countryside Agency, because of their statutory duties towards AONBs and because they are usually the main funding partners. It is also desirable to include representatives of other public bodies with an interest (English Nature, Environment Agency, the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Forestry Commission (FC), the Regional Tourist Board, the Regional Development Agencies), representatives of the local community (parish councils, farming and landowners, local businesses) and interest groups (wildlife trusts, walking and recreation groups).

What should an AONB partnership do?

The main role of an AONB partnership is to plan and implement AONB management via the medium of the AONB Management Plan. This is not a passive role. An AONB partnership should lead and coordinate effective management action in their own organisations. Partnerships should judge how effective they have been at influencing the activities of all local managing authorities, organisations and individuals. Some of the key roles of an AONB partnership are:

- Advise local authorities on the preparation of a statutory AONB Management Plan: or prepare on their behalf for the constituent authorities to adopt.
- Coordinate and demonstrate the protection and management of the AONB according to the purposes of designation.
- Promote the purpose, importance, characteristics and significance of the AONB.
- Advise partners on the level of resources needed for AONB management and act to secure funds from a number of other sources.
- Establish a management structure that is relevant to the objectives of the AONB as specified in its Management Plan.
- Establish and manage a staff unit and carry out internal management reviews.
- Advise relevant planning authorities about appropriate strategic policies and potentially damaging development proposals.
- Advise public bodies, agencies and statutory undertakers about the impact of their activities on the AONB.
- Commission research, special studies and monitoring.
- Establish links with other AONBs, National Parks and protected areas both nationally and internationally.

Case Study: Forest of Bowland

The Forest of Bowland was one of the first AONBs to have a Joint Advisory Committee in place (1986) with shared funding and an effective countryside management service operating throughout the area.

The Joint Advisory Committee is chaired and serviced by Lancashire County Council, that provides nearly half of the funding for the AONB core unit and Management Plan implementation work. The remaining funding is shared between the six district councils and North Yorkshire County Council. An additional contribution comes from North West Water – which is a major landowner in the area and a member of the JAC.

Since the formation of the JAC, Lancashire County Council Countryside Management Service has successfully implemented many projects in the area. In addition, projects have been implemented in partnership with farmers and landowners, parish councils, footpath groups, and others. The countryside service has been very successful in attracting considerable added value to the AONB by securing financial contributions and grants from both the private and public sectors.

Strengths

Identity:

- There is good recognition and ownership of the AONB by the community.
- Local issues are brought up through the JAC.

Funding:

- Partners are able to lever in funding from other sources.

People:

- The partnership is very positive and is a willing participant in activities.
- There is good representation by the community.
- All partners, even peripheral partners, value the partnership.
- There is good commitment to the ethos of the AONB and its work.
- Projects are kept and delivered at a local level. Local partnership and involvement are very much a core philosophy.

Management structure:

- The partnership has evolved over a period of time.

What are the roles of AONB partnership members?

Local authorities are responsible for preparing Management Plans for AONBs and they are usually the main funding bodies for the partnership, along with the Countryside Agency. Local authorities, as planning and highway authorities, have a crucial role to play in providing a strategic overview on land use and management. The 1949 Act empowered them to act as necessary to conserve and enhance AONBs. Local authorities also have specific powers that allow them to act e.g. through specific countryside management services and recreation management, purchase of land, the setting up of management and access agreements or through the introduction of byelaws. Local authority members also provide democratic representation of local people.

Local authority members and officers can provide:

- expertise and experience of land planning and management;
- the ability to influence planning and development control issues in the AONB;
- a powerful integration role of wide ranging experiences both within and outside their authorities;
- powers and resources to act directly in the AONB, including to own and manage land;

- influence on how other land managers manage their land, for example through advice, conservation grants and access agreements;
- an elected voice for local people and views.

The **Countryside Agency** has the statutory duty to designate AONBs, offers guidance, funding and a national perspective to AONBs. As the government's agency and adviser on countryside matters in England it aims to conserve and enhance England's countryside and help everyone to enjoy it, and spread social and economic opportunity for the people who live there. This agency has the lead role in the policy development on AONBs and offers the vital link between work on the ground in AONBs and the development of national government policy towards AONBs.

The Countryside Agency representative can provide:

- a national dimension to the partnership on relevant legislation and government policy;
- guidance on good practice in protected area management;
- experience of other AONBs and relevant initiatives.

Public bodies and agencies, such as English Nature, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Forestry Commission, Regional Development Agencies, Regional Tourist Boards and the Environment Agency have new a duty to have regard for AONB purposes. This can encourage these organisations to take a much more active role in AONB partnerships. Like the local authorities, they have many powers and duties that contribute to AONB management by advise and funding and by direct action.

Representatives of public bodies and agencies can:

- provide information to the partnership on policies and funding opportunities in their organisations;
- inform policy development of their organisations to have regard to AONB purposes;
- develop their own activity and funding streams to deliver action directly in the AONB.

Land owners, land managers and farmers are directly responsible for the raw materials of the AONB landscape. It is the mosaic of past and present land management practices that forms so much of the natural beauty of the AONBs we see today. AONB partnerships should take on board the views of this group in terms of how AONB Management Plan land management policies can be achieved on the ground. In turn, this group will have the opportunity to take advantage of the many new land management initiatives. These initiatives will arise as other AONB partners develop policies that look to build upon the land management practices that have contributed to the formation of these highly valued landscapes. The partnership arena will enable this important group to influence and be influenced by, the land management policy makers.

A representative of the land owners, managers and farmers can:

- provide information to the partnership about issues affecting land management in the AONB;
- advise the partnership on how AONB activities are impacting on land managers;
- advise land owners, land managers and farmers of new opportunities for them take advantage for their own benefit and that of the landscape.

Other **partners** may represent a wide range of interests in the management and use of the AONB. They may include representatives of amenity bodies and conservation groups, recreational organisations, community groups and local businesses, including the tourism industry.

Representatives of local groups can provide:

- expertise from their own specialisms and represent their organisation's viewpoint on AONB management issues;
- a strong sense of credibility for the partnership by involving a wide range of interests;
- links between the AONB partnership with people that live and work there;
- advice on the 'impacts on the ground' of the partnerships work.

The partnership is likely to operate most effectively if **all partners** consider that their role is to:

- bring to the partnership their own personal expertise, experience and that of their organisation;
- guide the direction of the partnership and advocate a collective view on AONB policies rather than campaign for their organisation's policies and objectives;
- take information and decisions on AONB policy and issues back to their organisation to start direct action;
- promote the AONB and its management objectives to others within their organisations and change the way they develop their own policies.

Why is the AONB Management Plan important?

The preparation and publication of AONB Management Plans is now a statutory requirement for all AONBs. Local authorities, or conservation boards where established, must produce plans by April 2004, and reviewed them every five years. Where an AONB is the responsibility of more than one local authority, the local authorities responsible should act jointly. Local authorities are likely to ask an AONB partnership to advise them on the preparation of the Management Plans; or to prepare them on their behalf. This will mean that all local authorities can act together and also that other partners can contribute to the plan.

Management Plans are to set out the policies for managing the AONB; they should also include details of how local authorities (or conservation boards) will act to carry out their functions in the AONB.

They may also include action to be carried out by others. The Countryside Agency has published detailed guidelines on preparing AONB Management Plans in line with legislation⁸.

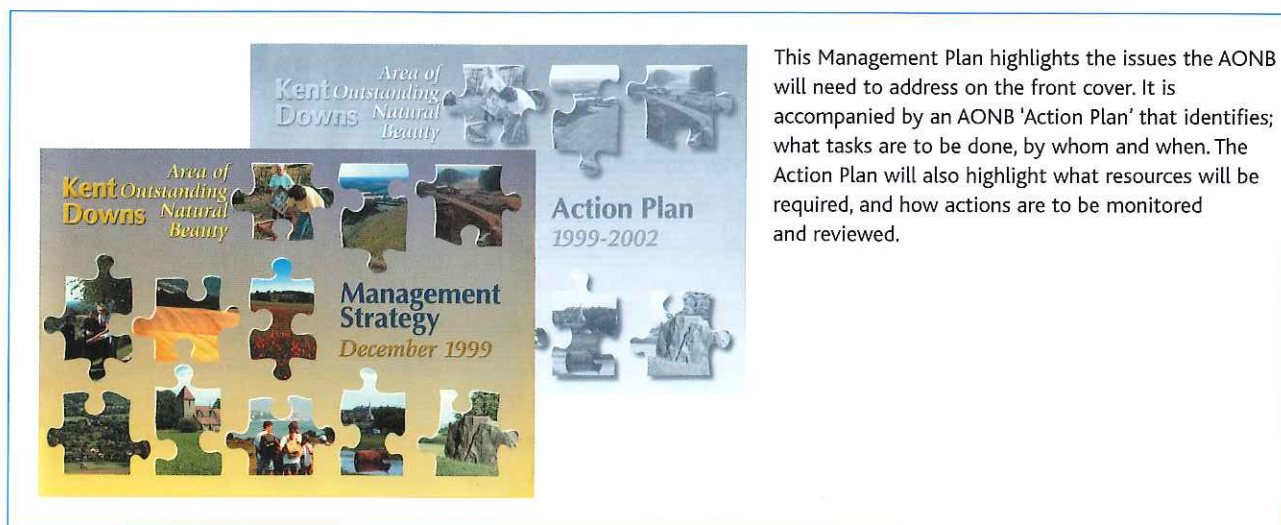
More specifically, the AONB Management Plan is a document which:

- Highlights the special qualities and the enduring significance of the AONB, the importance of its landscape features, and identifies those that are vulnerable to change.
- Presents an integrated vision for the future of the AONB as a whole, in the light of national, regional and local priorities.
- Sets out agreed policies incorporating specific objectives which will help secure that vision.
- Identifies what needs to be done, by whom, and when, in order to achieve these objectives, and in some cases defines resources needed and from where they will be found.
- Identifies the means by which objectives and actions will be reviewed. In terms of **legal status**:
 - AONB Management Plans are statutory in that local authorities (or conservation boards where established) are required by law to produce them.
 - An AONB Management Plan should set out the local authorities' or conservation board's policies for the AONB and also indicate how these will be achieved.
 - The importance and role of AONB Management Plans is underlined by the duty on public bodies, including local authorities, to have regard to the statutory purposes of AONBs in carrying out their functions.
 - AONB Management Plans do not override local development plans but relevant sections of the plan can be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) where appropriate.
 - AONB Management Plans should always seek to link across to other statutory plans, strategies and land management schemes which impinge on their geographical area (e.g. local transport plans, Community Strategies, ESA schemes) in order to both influence and support them.

Although production and review of an AONB Management Plan is a statutory requirement on the local authorities (or conservation board,) this does not mean that the plan should be limited to the local authorities' policies. Neither need it be a dry technical document. The Plan is for the AONB as a whole, not just the partnership. It should be seen as much more than a guide for the activities of an AONB staff unit: rather it should reflect the shared aims and aspirations of all stakeholders and so be accessible to a broad audience by publication.

Land within AONBs is often in multiple ownership and control.

⁸ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A guide, 2001, CA 23, The Countryside Agency.



This Management Plan highlights the issues the AONB will need to address on the front cover. It is accompanied by an AONB 'Action Plan' that identifies; what tasks are to be done, by whom and when. The Action Plan will also highlight what resources will be required, and how actions are to be monitored and reviewed.

AONB Management Plans rely on cooperation and goodwill by many different individuals and organisations if they are to be effective.

The AONB Management Plan can be a powerful inspirational tool, for promoting a shared vision of what the AONB is about now, and what it could be in the future, as well as a vehicle for delivering action 'on the ground'. Its production and review is an opportunity to generate or renew a broad consensus on the AONB's purposes and management needs and to secure the active commitment of key stakeholders to contribute to them. It can also be an educational tool, helping to change attitudes and behaviours.

There are many forces for change in AONBs. AONB partnerships need to **manage** these forces for change so that the outcome is the conservation and enhancement of the AONB. They may at first be perceived as threats, however, many, with the right management, can be turned into opportunities. The Plan can define the ways in which issues are to be addressed to benefit the AONB.

Just as important as the document itself is in the **process** of putting the Plan together. Early comprehensive consultation round will raise issues of concern in the AONB. All sectors of the AONB community, from the people who live there, the farmers and land owners right through to national government agencies can contribute formation of policies that are for the common good of the AONB. The production of the Plan involves the consolidation of views and information and the resolution of possible conflicts. It also defines the relationship between the AONB Management Plan and other regional and local plans and strategies: the AONB Plan can both be influenced by, and have influence on, these other plans and strategies.

The end result will be a Management Plan that is used by everybody. Whenever an individual, organisation or agency does anything that could impact on the landscape of the AONB, there should be a policy somewhere in the AONB Management Plan that relates to it.

2. The management of AONBs

What should an AONB staff unit do?

In the early stages of establishing a partnership an officer from the lead authority may carry out the work of coordinating and facilitating work. As the scale and complexity of management work develops there will be a need to establish a staff unit consisting of dedicated AONB staff. Most AONBs now have an AONB officer and some have additional staff with project development or countryside management roles. Countryside Agency research and experience has established that a dedicated staff unit is the most effective way of ensuring that AONB purposes are met.

Advice to government

In its 1998 advice to the government, the Countryside Commission concluded that:

"...effective management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty requires:

- a permanent unit or special authority, charged with the responsibility of pursuing the statutory purposes of designation through promoting awareness, stimulating action, coordinating the support and activities of other bodies and drawing in resources from other sources".⁹

A staff unit can:

- enable the core functions of an AONB to be achieved;
- coordinate and facilitate the business of the partnership;
- coordinate the preparation and implementation of a Management Plan.

The Countryside Agency has identified a number of core functions applicable to AONBs. The core functions have been identified following a number of research projects and experience in managing AONBs.

9. Protecting our finest countryside: Advice to government, 1998, CCP 532, Countryside Commission.

AONB core functions

- Developing a vision and strategy for AONB management.
- Preparing, with constituent local authorities, a AONB Management Plan as required by the CRow Act.
- In the early stages of AONB development, promoting the vision and strategy to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside.
- Implementing and coordinating implementation by others, the Management Plan.
- Coordinating or advising on local authority services in the AONB, to go beyond the normal level of service in countryside management.
- Monitoring and reporting on progress against Management Plan targets.
- Accessing resources for undertaking management activities, including external financing, project development and proposals, and providing matching funding for special projects.
- Tapping into advice, and liaison with AONBs at a national level.
- Providing an internal management role to coordinate AONB protection.
- Promoting the value of the AONB to the community.
- Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB.
- Providing planning advice and related activities.
- Seeking additional funds to assist with the delivery of management activity.

An AONB staff unit should use the list of core functions as a guideline for its remit and job descriptions, but each partnership should determine the unit's responsibilities according to its own needs and the requirements of its Management Plan. Some of the responsibilities might include:

- Guiding the partnership in developing a vision for the AONB and reviewing it regularly.
- Preparing a Management Plan (as required by the CRoW Act), Business Plan and other relevant guidance for AONB management.
- Identifying, planning and coordinating, and perhaps delivering, management projects that aim to conserve the AONB and demonstrate good practice and raising funds from a variety of sources.
- Promoting the AONB and developing an active and positive working relationship with the community.
- Advising the partnership on AONB management issues and reporting on progress.
- Facilitating monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the partnership and the implementation of management objectives.

How can a staff unit be structured?

All AONBs need a dedicated AONB officer, appointed at a senior level and with skills and experience to operate as a professional manager, and a facilitator on behalf of the AONB partnership. The AONB officer needs to have influence and credibility at a high level within the partner organisations.

The main responsibility of an AONB officer is to implement the core functions (identified in the table on page 22) through mechanisms agreed by the partnership. While undertaking these functions the officer needs to work effectively with landowners, interest groups and the community.

Numbers and responsibilities of other staff appointments will need to be determined by the AONB partnership according to local needs. AONBs are extremely varied in their size, administrative complexity and issues, the staffing of the core unit will reflect these differences. However a Countryside Agency study¹⁰ suggested that there should be a minimum of three full-time professional staff along with dedicated support and budgets. A unit might therefore include:

- One AONB officer.
- Two staff to carry out a key service and coordinate or carry out management activity.
- Administrative support.
- An office, travel and operating budget associated with administering the partnership and providing a core service.
- A projects budget to allow implementation of Management Plan objectives: directly or to fund others.

¹⁰ A system for allocating core funding to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 2000, unpublished report to the Countryside Agency.

Staff can have a variety of functions according to the priorities of the AONB, as identified in the Management Plan. These may include:

- Project manager.
- Fundraiser.
- Planning officer.
- Community liaison officer.
- Interpretation/Information officer.
- Conservation officer.

It will not always be necessary for the partnership to employ all of the necessary functions directly. Some of the core functions may be provided by professional staff in the AONB partnership, or may be brought in by contracts as required. AONBs in close proximity, may share specialist staff.

Case study: High Weald - Review of High Weald AONB Unit

In 1992 a small AONB unit was established in the High Weald AONB. The unit was typical of many present day AONB set ups. Two dedicated and well motivated staff who were achieving a great deal to conserve and enhance the AONB landscape on very limited resources. In 1997 an independent report was commissioned to assess the effectiveness of the unit and to highlight the achievements it had made. At the time, the partners were reviewing the funding of the AONB unit and making value for money considerations.

Not only did the report highlight the tremendous success the unit was having in coordinating action of the partners in achieving work on the ground. It also highlighted how the unit itself was a direct deliverer of AONB Management Plan objectives. It was attracting funds from external sources and was a centre of expertise and information in AONB management matters. The study established that it was doubtful if any other mechanism, other than an AONB unit, could have achieved the same results.

In addition to highlighting the successes of the unit, the study also made recommendations on how, with modest increasing in staffing, the unit could perform to its fullest potential. As a result, the AONB partnership drew up plans to employ further core staff so that it could deal more effectively with planning issues and to address its communication and promotion needs. The study also made recommendations on the employment of dedicated administrative staff to free up core staff from clerical work.

How is AONB management funded?

Central government has recognised that the production of the AONB Management Plan and the implementation of the Plan policies requires funding. Central government funding for AONB management is available through the Countryside Agency. The Countryside Agency has been funding both the management and Management Plan implementation work for many years (historically as the Countryside Commission) and it has built up considerable expertise in the most effective way of managing AONBs.

The priority for Countryside Agency funding is the setting up of AONB partnerships, staff units and the delivery of core functions as outlined in this guidance. Funds for AONB core staff and core functions will be available at up to 75%. The level of funding available for each AONB is dependent on the needs of the area and the actual costs incurred, but is guided by a formula based on the expected management and staffing needs of each area, including the area, the number of local authorities involved. Funding at this level requires AONB partnerships to meet a number of conditions: see box overleaf. Local authorities normally make up the remaining 25% of costs.

Funding conditions

In order to obtain Countryside Agency core funding, AONB partnership need to:

- Carry out a management review and put in place the necessary staffing and partnership structure.
- Set up steering arrangements to monitor, steer and review the work of the core unit.
- Show that they can perform core functions shown above and demonstrate what outcomes as action on the ground will be delivered each year.
- Make a long term commitment to contributing to the costs of management.
- Produce a high quality AONB Management Plan according to the clauses in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- Produce and publish annual reviews of activity and achievements to publicise the work of the AONB core unit.

Grants are also available from the Countryside Agency for work to implement the Management Plan, where projects are in line with Countryside Agency's priorities. Members of the partnership, in particular local authorities, can also make funds available to carry out work in the AONB.

A good Management Plan and a team of AONB staff will allow the partnership to secure funding for projects from a variety of other sources, including the lottery, landfill tax and European funds. AONB partnerships also have an important role in influencing how other bodies funds, for example DEFRA's agri-environment grants to farmers, are spent in the AONB so that these can also help implement the Management Plan.

What will be the outcomes of AONB management: how can its effectiveness be measured?

This guide gives a lot of information about the legislative basis of AONBs, and about how to set up structures and policies to manage them. But it is important to remember that the reason for putting into place a partnership and staff unit is to deliver real and measurable outcomes. That is, action on the ground which means that the AONB is better conserved and enhanced resulting in, for example, a better quality landscape, greater biodiversity and cultural interest, more opportunities for people to enjoy the area, and for local people and business to benefit economically from a high quality countryside.

The actual projects that AONBs deliver are many and varied: some examples are shown in the pictures (as part of the colour centre spread of this guide). They include: marketing of local products (such as furniture from local wood), guided walks, wildlife conservation, including endangered species, traffic management, cycle trails, woodland management, interpretation of historic sites, repair of dry stone walls, public transport schemes, landscape restoration (such as recreation of heath and downland), school visit programmes and many more.

The effectiveness of an AONB partnership must be judged by the achievements like the above which contribute to AONB conservation

and enhancement, judged by looking at evidence of **outcomes** on the ground. The AONB partnership will need to set up monitoring systems that allow the partners to demonstrate how their work is making a difference to the landscape of their AONB. There will be a need to monitor both action and condition.

Monitoring action involves checking whether tasks have been carried out as specified in the plan, by a review against the targets in work programmes. Monitoring of the work carried out by partner bodies can be done by the partner bodies themselves, and then reported through a joint meeting. Monitoring of the work carried out by the AONB unit itself can be integrated with the review of the AONB Management Plan and Business Plan.

Monitoring condition is about assessing changes over time. It may be selective, concentrating on particular features of interest and using indicators selected to provide a meaningful measure of AONB quality. As well as data, the views of 'users' can also play a significant role in monitoring AONB performance, along with the professional judgment and experience of the partnership.

The partnership should publicise the results of its monitoring, for example in an annual review, to demonstrate success and build support for the AONB.

The key test of the AONB partnership is that it makes a difference. AONBs are our finest landscapes and it is up to the AONB partnerships and their staff to influence the way AONBs are used and developed so that they remain our finest landscapes for future generations to enjoy.

3. The wider context

How can the national Association for AONBs help?

Launched in 1998, the Association for AONBs (AAONBs) is a national independent organisation acting on behalf of AONBs. Whilst the majority of its members are local authorities that have AONBs, the membership is open to any organisations or individuals interested in the better management and protection of AONBs.

The Association keeps its members updated of all developments in AONBs through regular newsletters and a bi-annual magazine. The Association also organises training events and holds a conference every year.

The Association has been very successful in bringing AONB matters to the attention of national government and was instrumental in the achievement of AONB clauses in the CROW Act. In 2001, it signed an accord with the Forestry Commission and it is hoped that this will be the first of a number of formal arrangements with a wide range of bodies whose activities affect AONBs. It will be working hard in future years to raise the profile of AONBs to ensure that their conservation and enhancement is kept on the agenda of government and organisations at all levels.

What about the international context?

Over 10% of planet Earth is under some form of protection. AONBs are an important element of international protected landscapes. Countries worldwide are increasingly cooperating in seeking answers to how sustainable development can be achieved in protected areas, including the AONBs of England and Wales.

IUCN, The World's Conservation Body, says "protected areas are an area of land/sea that is dedicated to the protection of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources managed through legal or other effective means". The six IUCN management categories covers all types of protected areas from strict nature reserves (category I) to those most commonly found in Europe – Landscape managed mainly for conservation and recreation (category V). Category V landscapes are areas where the interaction of people and nature, over time, has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value: safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the maintenance and evolution of such an area.

In Europe Category V Protected Landscapes include all AONBs: as well as regional nature parks, regional parks, natural parks, and the UK's National Parks. Perhaps the best way of learning from others as well as sharing the wealth of expertise available in managing the AONBs is through belonging to EUROPARC – **promoting conservation without frontiers.**

The EUROPARC Federation of Nature and National Parks of Europe brings together a wide range of organisations and individuals involved in the policy and practice of managing protected areas. Its members represent well over 300 nationally protected areas in 35 European countries and aims to raise awareness and support for protected areas and to promote good management practices amongst them. The Atlantic Isles section of EUROPARC has a membership of over 60 organisations from the UK, Ireland and Iceland and through meetings, training events, newsletters etc. it enables staff and political representatives to enhance the effectiveness of the management of their respective protected area.

More information on any of the above is available from:
www.iucn.org; www.europarc.org and www.europarc-ai.org