

Countryside and Landscape Management

1. Context and Purpose

- 1.1 The South East region is blessed with a diverse and, in many areas, high quality natural environment and countryside, including a particularly high proportion of nationally designated landscapes (covering 35 per cent of the region: higher than any other region). The countryside of the region contributes to the quality of life for those living in the South East, and is a key asset to the region's economy attracting visitors and businesses. At the same time, the very scale and diversity of development in the region brings special pressures. This practical conflict can only be successfully addressed through one of the core themes of this Plan – active and creative management. The specially designated landscapes need special policy protection, but the rest of the region's countryside also needs policy consideration, including measures to help facilitate the social and economic well-being of its communities. Indeed sometimes the problems and the opportunities that require more positive management are more acute in the non-designated areas.
- 1.2 Around two thirds of the region is farmland or farm woodland. Agriculture, horticulture and forestry have essential roles to play in management of landscape and biodiversity, as well as commercial production. The strengthening of these land-based industries, and their ancillary industries, should be encouraged to enable them to effectively undertake these functions and support and maintain incomes and commercial viability. This will be particularly important in the light of changes occurring as a result of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform. The decoupling of payments from direct production to subsidies strongly linked to rural development, environmentally friendly farming systems and more modern farming methods will gradually be phased in during a transition period to 2012. Whilst there is considerable uncertainty as to the effect of these changes on landscape and countryside management in the South East, CAP reform does offer substantial opportunities for the future of agriculture and the protection of the landscape through its new focus on agri-environmental schemes. Farmers will need to make important choices about their crops and production methods, or opportunities to diversify into more non-farming activities such as tourism or recreation, in order to stay competitive. The full effects of CAP reform will take some time to materialise, and particular attention should be given to support commercial viability of agricultural and horticultural enterprises that will also deliver high quality countryside management.
- 1.3 For the purpose of clarification, the Plan's countryside and landscape management policies have therefore been categorised into four groups:
- i) the New Forest National Park;

- ii) the South Downs;
- iii) the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- iv) the remainder of the countryside.

Policy focus is also given to managing public access to the countryside and the rights of way network, which play a key role in maximising the public and economic benefits of the countryside.

- I.4 Specially designated areas for nature conservation or cultural protection (such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs)) are covered in other policy sections. Similarly, the parts of the countryside affected by particular land-use designations, such as Green Belt, and the opportunities afforded by better management of the urban rural fringe, are set out in other policy sections of the Plan.

The New Forest National Park and the South Downs

- I.5 The Countryside Agency designated the New Forest National Park in 2002 and the government formally confirmed the new National Park in March 2005. The New Forest is located between the conurbations of Southampton to the east, and Bournemouth and Poole to the west, the latter being located within the South West region. Most of the National Park lies within Hampshire, with a small area in Wiltshire. A National Park Authority was established in April 2005 with a limited range of statutory powers and functions, and it will become fully operational by 1 April 2006.
- I.6 The Strategy for the New Forest 2003, prepared by the New Forest Committee, has been modelled on a National Park plan with significant stakeholder input. The overall aim is to sustain and enhance the beauty and richness of the New Forest as a living, working landscape, with special recognition of the importance of commoning. It acknowledges that there are issues to be addressed that arise from the proximity of urban development to its boundaries, and its accessibility to visitors. As far as possible the area should therefore become a model for sustainability.
- I.7 The Government recognises that each National Park is different, so although the overarching policy framework needs to uphold generic National Park standards and objectives, these need to be informed by more locally specific issues. There are special circumstances in the New Forest that warrant a tailor-made policy approach, due to the fact that it has the highest proportion of area in international nature conservation designations of any National Park; it is the smallest National Park; and is under intense pressure. There is also a need to protect areas outside the National Park for 'back-up' commoning land to sustain grazing in the open forest. Further work needs to be undertaken (perhaps by the interim New Forest National Park Authority) to provide advice to local planning authorities with regard to protecting the setting of the Park and safeguarding land with a functional relationship to it.

POLICY C1a:

THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

~~The Plan gives the highest~~**High** priority ~~should be given to protecting and conserving~~ **and enhancing** land within the New Forest National Park. The local planning authority and other partners should also develop supportive sustainable land management policies, both inside the National Park and within the zone of 'New Forest commoning activity', including protection of grazing land outside the National Park which is needed to support National Park purposes.

- 1.8 In December 2002, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) approved the designation order for the South Downs National Park, extending from Winchester to Eastbourne. The boundary of the park and its future administration were examined at a public inquiry, which closed in March 2005. The Inspector's report is not expected until the end of 2005, and the Secretary of State's decision on whether there should be a National Park in the South Downs and its precise boundary will follow that. It is unlikely that the National Park will come into being before April 2007.

POLICY C1b: THE SOUTH DOWNS

The Government is considering the designation of a South Downs National Park. Until there is a formal decision on this, Policy C2 dealing with AONBs should be applied to the areas of the South Downs currently designated AONB. Once a decision is taken by Government on the designation, consideration will be given to reviewing policy on this matter in the South East Plan.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 1.9 There are 11 designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the region, an indication of the landscape quality of the region. The AONBs make a significant contribution to the distinctiveness of the South East, as well as helping support and sustain the region's high quality of life and economic success. In planning terms they require the same focus on protection and positive land management as National Parks, and the statutory AONB Management Plans play a key role in identifying priorities and approaches to effective management. The South East's AONBs are shown on map CLMI [unchanged¹].

POLICY C2: AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Priority should be given to~~The~~ conservation and ~~protection~~ **enhancement of**

¹ For any maps or diagrams indicated as 'revised' or 'new' see the Annex to this revised version of the Plan. For any maps or diagrams indicated as 'unchanged' see the Draft South East Plan published in January 2005.

natural beauty of in the region's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) should be given priority, and pp proposals for development should be considered in that context. Positive land management policies should be developed, to sustain the Areas' landscape quality on a sustainable basis. In drafting Local Development Documents Local Planning Authorities should have regard to statutory AONB Management Plans.

In considering proposals for development, the emphasis should be on small-scale proposals that are, ~~which can be~~ sustainably located and designed. Proposals which ~~to~~ support the economies and social well being of the Areas and their communities, including an element of affordable housing schemes, will be encouraged provided that they do not conflict with the aim of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

Landscape and Countryside Management

- 1.10 The Government's overall aim is to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources, and so it may be enjoyed by all (PPS7 Key principles). The potential pressure for change in parts of the South East means that there is need to recognise and celebrate our landscapes, and provide regional direction.
- 1.11 Character, of landscape, towns and other areas, is a recognised component of sustainable development and has become a significant material consideration in planning policy formulation and development control decisions (PPSI). However, taking character seriously is not about staying as we are. Characterisation must be used to help in accommodating necessary change without sacrificing local character. Policy challenges include increasing our understanding of how character is changing, and delivering benefits through land management.
- 1.12 Sustainable land management is the key to enduring local and regional distinctiveness and a vital and vigorous countryside. The commercial and financial viability of land management systems should be encouraged in ways that maintain and enhance that character. Planning policy will need to be responsive to the new agricultural and horticultural infrastructure requirements that are likely to arise from the reforms to Common Agricultural Policy, in order that the countryside may continue to be managed through land management practices. The Government's Rural White Paper (2000) encourages an holistic approach to proposed development and change affecting agricultural land with a view to protecting character, biodiversity and soil quality.

POLICY C3: LANDSCAPE AND COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT

Outside ~~the~~ nationally designated areas/landscapes, active-positive and high quality management of the region's open countryside will-should be encouraged and supported by local authorities and other organisations,

agencies, land managers, the private sector and local communities, through a combination of planning policies, grant aid and other measures, in order to:

- i) protect and enhance its distinctive qualities
- ii) encourage the sustainable management of land and habitats in ways which contribute to landscape conservation and renewal, avoiding fragmentation of landscapes and habitats and encouraging the linking of habitats
- iii) support local economies and social well being of communities through small scale development proposals to meet local needs. promote an integrated approach to landscape management
- iv) promote the use of Landscape Character Assessments should be used to contribute to the framing of development policies and sustainable agri-environment and other land management regimes.

Countryside Access and Rights of Way Management

I.13 The region has a well used public rights of way network, which provide a major opportunity to improve the well-being of individuals through exercise and access to countryside. This should be maintained and enhanced, recognising the need of visitors and local communities, to enable people to visit and enjoy the region's countryside and ensure that it can be enjoyed by all, as well as providing opportunities to reduce car use for shorter journeys within or between settlements. Rights of Way Improvement Plans should be used to establish the needs of an area to access both rural and urban areas. These plans will be integrated into Local Transport Plans by 2010.

POLICY C4: COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS AND RIGHTS OF WAY MANAGEMENT.

Local Authorities, through Rights of Way Improvement Plans and other measures, should encourage access to the countryside, taking full advantage of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, particularly by:

- i) maintaining, enhancing and promoting the Public Rights of Way system, and permissive and longer distance routes, to facilitate access within, to and from the countryside for visitors and all members of the local community;
- ii) identifying opportunities and planning for routes within and between settlements, seeking to reduce car use for shorter journeys.
- iii) where possible, making, new routes multi-functional to allow pedestrians, horses and cyclists to use them.

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