



4. Towards the Future: A Vision for the Dorset AONB

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Looking across the reedbeds to Wareham.

Developing the Vision

- 4.1 With the new opportunity that this Management Plan brings, we need an understanding of what we are working towards, a long-term vision for the Dorset AONB landscapes and communities. This chapter explores a future direction for the AONB developed through a comprehensive consultation process with local communities, key stakeholders and a wide range of interest groups.
- 4.2 The vision that has emerged encapsulates the unique qualities of the Dorset AONB, its magnificent varied natural beauty, unique coast, a rural charm lost from many other places and the realisation of these assets as a main driver for quality of life and sustainability.
- 4.3 We all have a responsibility to pass on a healthy environment to future generations, so what kind of AONB would we like to see in 20 years time?

A Vision for the Dorset AONB

A living thriving landscape of beauty, health and heritage that all can enjoy. An inspiration for today, an opportunity for tomorrow.

- 4.4 Today, the Dorset AONB has a unique range of special qualities for people to enjoy. The following elements are recognised as being fundamental to a healthy and sustainable future for the Dorset AONB in 20 years time.

Diverse and Distinctive Landscapes

- 4.5 The Dorset AONB is known for some of the most contrasting and recognisable landscapes in the country, valued for its rich natural and cultural heritage. From open heathlands to broad chalk uplands and complex valleys, lush vales to dramatic coast, the Dorset AONB landscape displays a real sense of place and character. Through sensitive management and further appreciation of its benefits, the Dorset AONB is an outstanding example of how natural beauty is sustained through change, an inspiration worthy of its national significance, a landscape of real opportunity for people to treasure. With its huge wealth of archaeological features, the South Dorset Ridgeway is understood as an ancient ceremonial landscape of an importance comparable to Avebury and Stonehenge. Along with the surrounding AONBs and New Forest National Park, the sub-region is famous for landscape quality and overall environmental health, attracting visitors from all over the world.

Rich Wildlife and Habitats

- 4.6 Dorset has a great diversity of habitats and consequently the number of sites designated of national importance is greater than the national or regional average. Through concerted efforts our characteristic grasslands, woodlands, heathlands, rivers, wetlands and coast not only remain unique but are enhanced as a key element of the Nation's biological assets. With fully functioning

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ecosystems, healthy soil, clean air and water, the enrichment of colour and texture of our habitats has further emphasised the contrast and interest of the landscape.



A landscape of healthy and refreshing enjoyment.

Enjoying the AONB Landscape

- 4.7 The AONB offers a wide range of opportunities for people to enjoy the landscape and its many qualities. From some of the finest coastal and inland walks to appreciating the depth of historic and natural heritage, enjoyment for all is one of the AONB's finest assets. Through demonstrating sustainable tourism and recreational management, local communities and visitors benefit from a diverse range of activities that enhance the environment and continue to attract and stimulate economic investment and growth. A landscape of healthy and refreshing enjoyment in an increasingly busy and stressful world.

Peace, Tranquillity and Relaxation

- 4.8 Undeveloped coastline, secluded valleys, long views free from large scale development, dark skies at night and no motorways are some of the qualities of the Dorset AONB that make for a tranquil and relaxing experience. Continued sensitive management of these qualities and forward planning of the AONB ensures these qualities are retained.

Unspoilt Coast

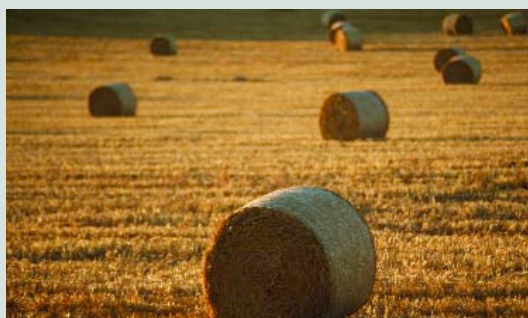
- 4.9 The AONB includes an undeveloped coastline of complex coastal habitats and long reaching views. It is of course a coastline of international significance, forming the greater part of the World Heritage Site - a celebration of 185 million years of earth history. The coast remains a largely undeveloped experience of nature at its best, befitting of its status. Carefully managed informal recreation and tourism opportunities flourish without detriment to this fragile landscape.

Thriving Communities

- 4.10 Influenced by the landscape in which they sit, settlements in the Dorset AONB are small and scattered, dependent on vibrant market towns for their major services and facilities. Shaped by their long heritage, the surrounding landscape is reflected in the use of local materials and architectural styles. Adapting to the increasing pressures on them, community planning helps local people decide their own future and ensures local voice conserves local distinctiveness. Re-use of old buildings, low impact development with a variety of housing options centred around local services helps enhance the quality of life for communities, with good access to larger centres for employment and other facilities.

A Working Landscape

- 4.11 A diverse and thriving farming sector continues to shape the outstanding landscape. In conserving and enhancing the unique qualities of the Dorset AONB, the livestock sector is increasingly important in maintaining the pastoral character of our landscape. Co-operative local processing, distribution and marketing supports the sector, in turn conserving the huge variety of farmland plants and animals. Organic farming, farm demonstration projects and sound environmental management promotes the Dorset AONB as a healthy landscape with quality local foods readily available.



A thriving farming sector continues to shape the landscape.

Rural Enterprise

- 4.12 The use of technology becomes increasingly important in sustaining viable rural communities. The development of diverse rural based industry within the AONB is dependant on utilising technologies for efficient, low impact economies. Inland, tourism is an important income for the agricultural sector along with other forms of farm diversification that benefit the landscapes of the AONB.

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Multi-benefit Woodlands

- 4.13 The Dorset AONB has a variety of woodlands and forests that provide a host of benefits to people and nature. By developing a wide understanding of the role of trees and woodlands, the Dorset AONB is managed for wildlife, recreation, environmental protection, fuel, wood products and a host of other benefits to help secure the beauty of our many woodlands.



Making use of sustainable natural products.

Rural Routes and Networks

- 4.14 Dorset's roads and routeways have evolved from long centuries of human use with great variations in style and character. Recognition of the importance of rural routes, the contribution they make to people's quality of life and their role in the increasingly diverse rural economy is a key factor in the Dorset AONB. Roads are comfortably set within the landscape, complementing natural and cultural heritage. Many provide special habitats for plants and wildlife. With new approaches from practitioners and policymakers and a change in the way people use the route network, it can withstand the pressures put upon it by traffic and non-motorised users and remain a complementary element of the Dorset AONB. With a variety of travel options, the entire network of roads, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways together with safe and convenient public transport provides sustainable access and movement around the AONB.

Achieving the Vision

- 4.15 The policy framework in chapter 5 sets out policies to help deliver the vision and will start to be implemented through the first AONB Action Plan. In achieving the vision the following principles should be embraced by all those with an interest in the AONB's management and enjoyment:

Maximising Benefit

- 4.16 Opportunities to promote and enhance the wider

historical, social, ecological and economic functions as well as conserving natural beauty, will help to deliver maximum benefits. One of the AONB's most significant and defining characteristics is its diversity of landscape character (see chapter 3). The qualities that contribute to this varied character are outlined in chapter 2 - 'Dorset's Special Landscape'. But what underpins these qualities? The *health* and *opportunity* of the AONB landscape is just as important as its visual appearance. Many landscapes look attractive with distinct patterns of trees, woodlands, hedgerows and picturesque villages. However, the *condition* of particular features may actually be poor. For example, hedgerows may be ecologically impoverished due to lack of management or streams may be suffering from low flows. The health of the landscape depends upon clean air, soil and water that in turn enhance the wider benefits of our landscape features.



The *condition* of landscape features needs to be assessed.

Sensitive Change

- 4.17 In managing the AONB, some change is inevitable and necessary. Therefore change needs to be managed positively and actively, with a full understanding of how it will affect the landscape and its associated functions and qualities. Most importantly, we need to understand what the landscape can accommodate without detracting from the qualities central to the natural beauty of the AONB. In essence, we need to keep the best of the past, ensuring that change is sympathetic, whilst creating the best for the future. A further understanding of the forces for change and associated impacts on natural beauty, with proposed responses are identified in the section 5.2 - 'Landscape Policy Framework'.
- 4.18 A crucial part of managing change is the ability to monitor it effectively. The first stage in this process is to establish baseline information on landscape character and condition. Character assessment work has been undertaken at a national and

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county level, but a more locally focused assessment is underway for the AONB. A condition survey has yet to be undertaken but should be a priority. This will allow the identification of condition indicators for the landscape to enable us to monitor impacts and target necessary action.

Living Landscapes



A living landscape.

- 4.19 The Dorset AONB is a living landscape, shaped by human activity over the centuries. The need to support a wide range of activities whilst managing the very assets on which so many of these activities depend requires an integrated approach. This is particularly apparent when the demands on our landscape resources are increasing. These include tourism, agriculture, recreation, transport and many other rural based industries - the social and economic activities that underpin vibrant communities. The aim of a 'multi-functional landscape' approach is to ensure that the

functions of the AONB landscape contribute to the beauty of the AONB and, in turn, the functions benefit from a high quality environment. This requires promoting sensitive activity that enhances the many values and qualities of the AONB. Living landscapes embrace the concept of sustainability as set out at the Rio Summit in 1992, providing an integrated approach to management. Difficult decisions will have to be made to balance the needs of landscape conservation and ensuring continued economic and social benefit.

Tomorrow's Heritage

- 4.20 AONB management aims to ensure that the best from the past is managed into the future and that change can take place without destroying its beauty and associated qualities. Within this, a key principle in the vision for the Dorset AONB is the opportunity to continue to define and develop our heritage. With the many management challenges that face the AONB, opportunities to develop new landscapes and features that further contribute to the beauty and benefits we enjoy should be embraced.

Community and Partnership Working

- 4.21 Community and partnership working has played a key role in the development of the Dorset AONB plan process. It will continue to be the key delivery mechanism for the AONB Vision and associated Action Plan. Through community plans, parish



Livestock farming has shaped much of the AONB landscape.

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plans and village design statements, communities will need to consider and balance difficult decisions regarding their impact on the AONB landscape and environment and the pressures of modern life. Diverse partnerships will work with communities to help deliver their priorities whilst achieving wider management of the AONB. Having responsibility for local decisions will help conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Dorset AONB into the future.



Communities have a key role in conserving the AONB.

Purposes of the AONB

4.22 In delivering the vision, the Dorset AONB Partnership has developed the following purposes to steer a clear direction for the management aims and policies of the Dorset AONB:

- **To conserve and enhance the beauty, heritage and health of the landscape and environment of the Dorset AONB.**



The link between people and the landscape is central to the vision for the AONB.

- **To ensure that the AONB continues to provide opportunities for people and communities.**

A Challenge for the Future

4.23 The vision is centred on conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the Dorset AONB, promoting effective wider environmental management whilst ensuring people are linked to their landscape through social and economic opportunity. The challenge for all of us is to find a balance between enjoying and utilising what the Dorset AONB has to offer, whilst ensuring that we do not damage its outstanding natural beauty, heritage and environmental health.



A landscape of beauty, heritage and health.