



Natural Beauty and Heritage
Landscape

5. Policy Framework - Landscape

5.2 Landscape

Background

5.2.1 Landscape quality is central to AONB management. The 'natural beauty' of the landscape, in all its component parts, is what the AONB designation sets out to protect. Since landscape is all encompassing, the policy framework outlined in this chapter links strongly to the areas of activity that follow. This chapter describes how an integrated landscape-based approach can be used to guide the management of natural beauty and wider sustainability.



The purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

5.2.2 This focuses on the sense of place provided by the diverse and distinctive landscape character as detailed in chapter 3 'Landscape Character of the Dorset AONB' and how this can be conserved and enhanced by managing change sensitively. Chapters 5.3 to 5.6 focus on particular aspects of the landscape such as biodiversity and the historic environment. These need to be managed in the context of the landscapes within which they sit. Chapters 5.7 to 5.13 focus on the activities and land uses affecting the AONB such as tourism and agriculture and how these can be sustained without destroying the environment that they depend on.

Managing Natural Beauty

5.2.3 As described in 5.1, landscape is about the relationship between people and place in a constantly changing society and environment. This poses some central questions for management of the AONB that need to be addressed within the policy framework and action plan:

- What needs to be done about retaining the character and condition of the landscape?
- Where should resources be targeted to achieve the greatest benefit?
- Where and what change can be accommodated whilst conserving landscape character and condition?



Changes in agricultural policy have altered the landscape.

Our Changing Landscape

5.2.4 The Dorset landscape we see today has been formed over many years by farming, forestry mineral extraction and a host of other activities. For a greater understanding of the historical development of the landscape, see section 5.5.4 in chapter 5.5 'The Historic Environment', whilst in section 3.9 the 'Landscape Character of the Dorset AONB', outlines the evolution of the landscape character.

5.2.5 Although we may not realise it, the natural beauty of the landscape is under pressure. Since the AONB was designated in 1959, the landscape has been subject to a range of pressures, driven by environmental and social change. Changes in agricultural policy have been especially significant, affecting past management decisions and resulting in the landscape character and condition we have inherited today. Changes in the natural environment, particularly through climate change and erosion will continue to shape the landscape.

5.2.6 Increases in car use, a continuing growth in housing development and changes in the farming industry are just a few examples of threats to the special qualities of the AONB. For example, 70% of Dorset's chalk grassland was lost between the years of 1934 and 1972, and since 1930 35% of heathland has been lost due to development, agricultural improvement and more recently changes to heathland vegetation. These are both important habitats, which host some of our most treasured wildlife. Another special feature under threat is tranquillity - a rare commodity in the modern world.

5.2.7 Some change is necessary and inevitable. In managing the AONB, we should not seek to prevent all change, preserving the landscape in aspic. Rather we should aim to manage change within the character of the landscape. To do this, we need to understand why the changes are taking place - what are the drivers and related pressures and how do they impact on the

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condition of the landscape? The consultation process identified a number of key factors influencing landscape change, outlined below. It is within the context of these factors that the policy framework and Action Plan have been developed.

Factors Influencing Landscape Change in the Dorset AONB

5.2.8 These factors have all driven change in the landscape in the AONB:

- **Economic decline in agriculture and forestry** - changes in agricultural markets particularly over the last 10 years have threatened the viability of some sectors within agriculture and forestry, limiting resources for landscape management. During the last 40 years technological advances and intensification of farming methods have changed the traditional character and condition of some landscape features.
- **Common Agricultural Policy** - with the introduction of CAP in the 1970's, agriculture became more production focused with associated loss of some landscape features. Production has become more neutral with diversification, set aside, and environmental stewardship. The proposed CAP reform will potentially change the intensity of farming practices, changing the visual appearance and ecological value of the landscape.
- **Life style changes** - increasing demand for a better quality of life, continued pressures of potential major development and better access to services and technology all place greater pressure on the natural beauty of landscape. Changes in land holdings, particularly the growth of hobby farming and horse culture could change the type and intensity of land use.
- **Increasing development pressure** - with increasing inward migration, housing demand, particularly in picturesque villages, increases house prices with further pressure on 'Greenfield' sites for new build.
- **A growth in traffic and transport infrastructure** - with continued growth in road traffic, there is a demand for new roads and improvements to the existing network. This puts pressure on the surrounding landscape, with direct loss of landscape features, degradation of landscape character, visual intrusion and wider environmental impact.
- **Growing demand for resources** - with increasing demand for resources the management of mineral extraction, waste, water, soil, food and building materials places greater pressure on the natural beauty of the landscape.
- **Increasing visitor and recreation pressure** - Over the last 50 years a growth in tourism and recreation along the coast, particularly at 'honey pot' sites, has led to increasing erosion and congestion.
- **Growth of telecommunications infrastructure** - with advances in communication technology, the demand for masts and associated infrastructure often has a significant visual impact on the landscape.
- **Changes in energy production and supply** - the development of the national grid and associated pylons has had a large visual impact on some sensitive landscapes. The predicted shift to bio-fuel production could potentially have an impact on the character of the landscape with potential large-scale wind farm developments (outside the AONB) posing significant visual impact.
- **Military training** - significant areas of land in Purbeck are used for military training. This has preserved large areas of heathland and coast, preventing significant development pressure, though military training does impact on the landscape at some sites.
- **Natural processes** - processes such as erosion and accretion are constantly changing the physical structure of landscape, particularly along some parts of the coast.
- **Climate change** - predicted increases in temperature in the future could potentially change the types of crops grown with significant changes in landscape appearance. This may also impact on biodiversity, river flows and sea levels altering the functioning of the landscape and associated habitats.

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Key Issues

5.2.9 These drivers for change result in the following landscape issues identified through a detailed consultation process:

- Increased fertiliser use on grasslands has reduced the diversity of colour and texture in the landscape.
- Potential changes in the Common Agricultural Policy may result in changes in land use, with some areas becoming more extensively farmed.
- Predicted shift towards bio-fuels may change landscape character.
- Loss of historic landscape features, such as hedgerows, pollards and parkland trees.
- Lack of management resulting in deterioration of the AONB environment.
- Inappropriate land use and activity degrading the character and quality of the landscape.
- Inappropriate design, siting and scale of development and landscape elements in relation to surrounding character.



Intrusive elements degrade the landscape.

- Intrusive elements (e.g. litter, fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, pylons, telecommunication masts) degrading the visual quality of the landscape.
- Increasing noise and light pollution from transport and development, eroding tranquillity.
- Cumulative effect of many small changes, gradually eroding landscape character and distinctiveness and historic and cultural connections.
- Lack of information on landscape condition and consequent inability to monitor change.
- Lack of connection between people and their landscape heritage.
- Lack of funding for landowners to effectively manage the landscape.

Key Opportunities

Managing Landscape Change

5.2.10 The landscape character and condition assessment already underway provides a major opportunity for the AONB. This work will underpin the development of a decision-making framework based on the sensitivity of the AONB landscapes and their ability to accommodate social and economic activity. This innovative approach will guide planning and management in the AONB, providing a host of practical applications. These include:

- Targeted landscape management guidelines and identification of opportunities for conservation, restoration and enhancement.
- Landscape sensitivity appraisal.
- Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- Design Guidelines.
- Informing funding applications.
- Monitoring changes in the landscape.
- Development control and forward planning.

5.2.11 One of the key elements within the Action Plan is to establish and draw together information to ensure the health, character and heritage of the AONB can be enhanced through a justified and coherent approach.

Joint working – opportunities for working with adjacent AONBs on landscape restoration projects and enhancing the region as a healthy environment.

Land management - landscape character and its application can play a significant role in the targeting of agri-environment schemes and the production of Whole Farm Plans and other management plans. This will help ensure the natural beauty of the landscape becomes a greater consideration in land management.

Funding – opportunities exist to attract a host of funding from local to European sources, as well as partner funding for landscape restoration and enhancement projects.

Community Planning – the emergence of the Dorset Strategic Partnership and Local Area Partnerships provide opportunities to ensure that the landscape becomes a greater consideration within the wider planning agenda of sustainable communities.

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Planning review - the Management Plan has value in helping to inform and support the emerging Local Development Frameworks and Regional Spatial Strategies through raising awareness of the AONB's high quality environment and the importance of natural beauty. Supporting the planning system through detailed landscape assessment and guidance will be a key opportunity as outlined above.

Current activity

5.2.12 Current activity in landscape planning and management is too numerous to detail but is covered within the subsequent chapters. In addition to the farmers and landowners, there is a huge range of organisations such as national agencies through to local interest groups involved in actively managing the features and qualities of the AONB.

- **Landscape Character Assessment.** A detailed local character assessment is currently underway in the AONB. Based on West Dorset 2000, descriptions of North Dorset and Purbeck districts will soon be complete. This work is being led by the AONB Landscape Officer.
- **Land Use Planning.** Local authorities guide and control land use and activity whilst delivering environmental regeneration and countryside management projects.
- **Historic Landscape Characterisation.** A project developing our understanding of the historic landscape for inclusion within a wider landscape assessment.
- **Dorset Biodiversity Strategy.** The implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan will deliver significant benefits in conserving and enhancing the habitats, flora and fauna of the AONB.
- **Agri-environment review.** The present review of agri-environment schemes will alter the way in which funding is delivered to achieve environmental benefits.
- **Tomorrows Heathland Heritage Initiative.** Restoration of key heathland sites with significant landscape and biodiversity gains.

Related Policies and Strategies

5.2.13 In addition to the publication of the Countryside Character Areas (Countryside Agency, 1999), there are a number of regional and local assessments that describe the character, qualities and guidelines for management of the AONB landscapes. These are:

- *'New Landscape Typology'* – a description of national landscape types – (Entec, 1999)
- *'Natural Area Profiles'* - description of the regional natural areas (English Nature, 1996)
- *The Dorset Downs, Heaths and Coast Landscape* - An assessment of the Dorset AONB (Countryside Commission, 1993)
- *'Dorset County Landscape Assessment'* - description of landscape character types/areas (Landscape Design Associates, 1993). This was developed into *'A New View of Dorset'*, - description and management guidance (Burden & Le Pard, 1996)
- *'West Dorset 2000'* - A Survey of the Built and Natural Environment in West Dorset (West Dorset District Council, 2000)

5.2.14 Key documents and policies relating to the management of landscapes and the wider countryside include:

- *'Lyme Bay and South Devon Shoreline Management Plan'* (Posford Duver, 1998)
- *'Portland Bill to Durlston Head Shoreline Management Plan'* (Mouchel, 1998)
- *'The State of the Countryside in the South West, 2003'* (Countryside Agency, 2003)
- *'England Rural Development Programme 2000-2006 (South West Region)'* (MAFF, 2000)
- *'Dorset Biodiversity Strategy'* (Dorset Biodiversity Partnership, 2003)
- *'Bio & geo diversity targets for natural areas'* – (English Nature, 2003)
- *'Planning Policy Guidance 7 - The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development'* (DoE, 1997) soon to be replaced by *'Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 - Sustainable Development in Rural Areas'* (draft, ODPM, 2003)
- *'Our Environment: Our Future – The Regional Strategy for the South West Environment'* (SWRDA, 2003)
- *'A Framework for Action in the Countryside'* (West Dorset District Council, 2002)
- *'Making Purbeck More Special'* (Purbeck Heritage Committee, 2002)

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5.2.15 Dorset AONB Policy Framework - Landscape

Policy Aims

- The conservation of landscape beauty, character and heritage and associated sense of place.
- Ensure that landscape changes do not detract from, but add to, essential character and heritage with a high quality of function, design and overall attractiveness.
- Restore degraded landscapes and features and achieve sustainable management for the future.
- For landscape beauty and character to be recognised as a key element of our heritage and valued as an asset.

Policy Objectives

- L 1. Describe and promote the diverse character and natural beauty of the Dorset AONB landscape.
- L 2. Provide an open and transparent landscape assessment and evaluation process.
- L 3. Develop and promote understanding of the historic character of the AONB.
- L4. Increase awareness of the contribution of designed landscapes to the overall character of the AONB.
- L 5. Ensure that local communities are able to contribute and take part in decision making for the AONB by linking community and land use planning.
- L 6. Guide and encourage the enhancement and creation of new landscapes that contribute to the character and quality of the AONB.
- L 7. Remove eyesores, repair damage and mitigate the effects of intrusive developments and prevent further unsympathetic development.
- L8. Develop integrated land management initiatives to deliver landscape improvements.
- L 9. Secure funding to restore, maintain and enhance the landscape of the Dorset AONB.

- L10. Develop greater understanding and recognition of the value of high quality landscapes and greater empathy between people and landscape.
- L 11. Plan and accommodate for the effects of climate change on the landscape and wider environment to help ensure landscape benefits continue to be provided.
- L 12. Ensure the conservation and restoration of characteristic boundary features.
- L13. Identify and enhance key views and view points.
- L14. Identify opportunities for the conservation of tranquil areas in the AONB.