

South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Management Plan 2019-2024

Our vision is of an inspirational landscape that is valued, recognised and treasured forever for its nationally important natural beauty and distinctive character.

The South Devon AONB is one of Britain's finest protected landscapes - loved for its significant and irreplaceable landscape features including rugged cliffs, sandy coves, peaceful countryside, picturesque villages, rolling hills, wooded valleys, colourful hedge banks, and secretive estuaries. It is an ancient countryside with strong links to the sea and generations of human activity etched into the landscape. The AONB is a centre for active and creative community life, a thriving and dynamic work place and a popular visitor destination.

The South Devon AONB Partnership, April 2019

Ten special qualities define the unique "natural beauty" for which the South Devon AONB is designated as a nationally important protected landscape.

- Fine, undeveloped, wild and rugged coastline
- Ria estuaries (drowned river valleys), steep combes and a network of associated watercourses
- Deeply rural rolling patchwork agricultural landscape
- Deeply incised landscape that is intimate, hidden and secretive away from the plateau tops
- Iconic wide, unspoilt and expansive panoramic views
- A landscape with a rich time depth and a wealth of historic features and cultural associations
- A breadth and depth of significant habitats, species and associated natural events
- An ancient and intricate network of winding lanes, paths and recreational routes
- Areas of high tranquillity, natural nightscapes, distinctive natural soundscapes and visible movement
- A variety in the setting to the AONB formed by the marine environment, Plymouth City, Torbay, market and coastal towns, rural South Hams and southern Dartmoor

Ministerial Foreword

I am fortunate that England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit.

This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover - the first of its kind for generations - will make recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people - farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff - for the beautiful places they live and work. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value South Devon. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.

Lord Gardiner of Kimble
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and
Biosecurity

photo, signature and Defra logo to be included here

Orientation Maps (National, Regional and Local)

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Contents TBC

The South Devon AONB Management Plan

This statutory document seeks to ensure that the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is conserved, managed and enhanced to support and benefit present and future generations. It also serves the purpose of a plan for the South Devon Heritage Coast which shares many of its special qualities.

The AONB Management Plan is composed of this strategy, a delivery plan and annexes. They respond to the opportunities and current pressures in the South Devon AONB and its setting, providing detail on strategy, policy, special qualities and the actions of others who influence or make decisions affecting the area.

The plan formulates local authority policy and action in relation to the management of the South Devon AONB as required under Part IV, Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It provides guidance and support to statutory undertakers and any public body or person holding public office to fulfil the Section 85, 'duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB'.

All policies relate to the statutory purpose of AONB designation whilst recognising that the natural world underpins the prosperity and wellbeing of the area and its communities. The ambition of this cross cutting strategy is to achieve environmental net gain, reduce potential harm and provide a framework for identifying actions that may enhance South Devon's natural, built and cultural assets.

The South Devon AONB Partnership Committee is committed to the delivery of the plan and will work with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the area is conserved and enhanced for future generations. Implementing the plan is beyond the resources or remit of any single agency and will require continued support and involvement of many organisations and partners.

The plan is grouped into 3 sections: **Place, People and Partnership** and 14 themes cover the issues relevant to the whole South Devon AONB area and its setting.

The policies support partners by driving sustainable development whilst conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB. The plan has been built on work with consultees, local authorities, the State of the AONB report and previous iterations of the plan.

What makes South Devon AONB special

The South Devon AONB has a complex and varied landscape. Its landscape character has been analysed and described at a range of levels in different assessments. The high level, over-arching term natural beauty includes landscape and scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity, natural heritage features and cultural heritage, that come together to make an area distinctive.

Ten special qualities define the unique natural beauty for which the South Devon AONB is designated as a nationally important protected landscape. The special qualities have been developed from a wide range of assessments identifying the key attributes that make the area special and worthy of designation as an AONB.

Distinctive characteristics are those components that define what it is that gives South Devon its sense of place and generally apply to areas smaller than the AONB as a whole. Key features are specific and include detailed locations, places, landmarks, occurrences, events etc. that are of particular significance to South Devon and help illustrate how or where the special qualities, distinctive characteristics and natural beauty can be seen.

Each component of natural beauty identifies what is special about the landscape and should be afforded 'great weight' in planning decisions. This plan, its policies and the area's special qualities set criteria against which policy and actions can be assessed for compliance with Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000. See *Understanding the special qualities of the South Devon AONB* (Annex 4).

South Devon Heritage Coast

Heritage Coasts are the finest stretches of undeveloped coastline in England and Wales. Their natural beauty and their enjoyment by the public give them a special claim for both protection and sensitive management. Since 1973, 45 stretches have been defined, covering more than one-third of the coastline of England and Wales.

The South Devon Heritage Coast is a non-statutory designation, defined by the Countryside Commission in 1984. It covers the 75 kilometres (49 miles) of coastline between Wembury Beach in the west of the area and Sharkham Point in the east, its boundary extending 2km out to sea. Around the Yealm and Erme estuaries the boundary reaches over 5km inland, whilst in other areas the boundary is just 300m inland.

The inshore waters and wider marine component of the designation is considered as one of the special qualities that define the unique "natural beauty" for which the South Devon AONB is designated as a nationally important protected landscape.

The main objectives for Heritage Coasts are:

- To conserve, protect and enhance the natural beauty of the coasts, including their terrestrial, littoral and marine flora and fauna, and their heritage features of architectural, historical and archaeological interest;
- To facilitate and enhance their enjoyment, understanding and appreciation by the public by improving and extending opportunities for recreational, educational, sporting and tourist activities that draw on, and are consistent with, the conservation of their natural beauty and the protection of their heritage features;
- To maintain, and improve (where necessary) the environmental health of inshore waters affecting Heritage Coasts and their beaches through appropriate works and management measures;
- To take account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and fishing, and of the economic and social needs of the small communities on these coasts, by promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development, which in themselves conserve and enhance natural beauty and heritage features.

The AONB Boundary

The boundary to the South Devon AONB has remained unchanged since its original designation in 1960. In common with other AONBs, no recorded statement or citation was issued at the time setting out a clear rationale for the designation. This Management Plan and *Understanding the special qualities of the South Devon AONB* (Annex 4), identifies what it is that makes the area worthy of designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The desire to extend the AONB boundary to include areas of high landscape quality adjoining the 1960 defined boundary have been expressed over time by various communities, groups and individuals. The Review of AONBs and National Parks carried out under the 25 Year Environment Plan is due to report in 2019 and is considering the boundary review process. Though not formally included within the protected landscape of the AONB, many adjacent areas of high quality landscape and seascape make a significant contribution to the designation itself.

Strategic and Policy context

International

At an international level, the AONB is classified as a 'Category V protected landscape' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature recognising it as a 'cultural landscape' managed mainly for landscape and seascape protection and for recreation. International designations such as the UNESCO Global Geopark status also have a bearing on the area.

A protected area is defined by the IUCN as 'A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values'

At a European level, the plan was prepared during the negotiations for the UK to leave the European Union. The consequent political and policy decisions may have a significant impact and their implications will be considered in the production of the annual delivery plans.

National

Our finest landscapes have been conserved through designation as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. AONBs were brought into being by the same legislation as National Parks, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949, and have consistently been confirmed by parliament as having equal importance for landscape and scenic beauty.

Regional

The richness and diversity of the South West environment makes it attractive as a place to live and work. It is a rural region with some 80% of the land in agricultural use and higher than average numbers of people in agricultural employment. Devon's natural and historic environment is particularly notable for its high quality. Over 50% of the county is designated for its environmental quality, encompassing 5 AONBs.

The protected landscapes in the South West include:

- 12 AONBs and parts of 2 others cover around 30% of the region
- 638 km of defined Heritage Coast
- 60% of England's undeveloped coastline
- 2 National Parks
- The South West Coast Path National Trail
- 4 World Heritage Sites
- 2 Community Forests
- 1 Biosphere reserve and a Global Geopark

Policy framework

The AONB Management Plan has been reviewed and updated to take account of current policy and strategies ranging from International, European and national scale down to local development plans, local authority corporate strategies, neighbourhood plans and site plans. Some of the most significant of these include the following: see *Appendix1, SEA and SA (Annex 5)*.

National policy and strategy

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (DEFRA, 2018)

Biodiversity 2020 (DEFRA, 2011)

Clean Air Strategy (DEFRA, 2019)

Environment: developing environmental principles and accountability (DEFRA 2018)

European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000)

Government Forestry Policy Statement (DEFRA, 2013)

Government response to the Making Space for Nature review (DEFRA, 2011)

Health and Harmony; The future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit (DEFRA 2018)

Natural England Framework Document (2017)

South Marine Plan and South West Marine Plan (MMO)

The National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, 2018)

Water Framework Directive (EU, 2000)

Regional and Local policy and strategy

DCC's Strategic Plan- 'Better Together'

Devon Minerals Plan 2011–2031

Emerging Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Document

Harbour management plans and associated documents

Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership plans

HoTSW Strategic Economic Plan (2014 – 2030)

HoTSW Productivity Strategy (2018)

Local authority cultural strategies and local transport plans

Local Nature Partnership plans

Shoreline Management Plan (SMP16)

Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Tourism Strategies

Torbay Local Plan (2012 – 2030)

The established positive 'brand' associated with the South Devon AONB protected landscape is being used to add value to local businesses and organisations whilst creating further support for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB's special qualities.

All AONBs are subject to external policy influences, constantly changing positive and negative impacts some of which provide new opportunities whilst others threaten to erode the character, special qualities and purpose of designation. Global and local environmental concerns such as climate change, biodiversity loss, development pressure and the tide of plastic in the sea are forces for change that are largely out of the control of the Partnership and are only broadly considered as part of this plan.

Strategic Planning and Development Management

Strategic planning and decision making on development applications within or in the setting of the South Devon AONB are undertaken by the local planning authorities - South Hams District Council, Torbay Council, Plymouth City Council, Devon County Council and the Marine Management Organisation. This plan is a material consideration in the plan making and decision taking process. It provides further detail in support of planning policies specific to the South Devon AONB. See *South Devon AONB Planning Guidance* (Annex 1).

Place: To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

Theme 1: Landscape Character

Strong links to the sea and generations of human activity are etched into the very fabric of the landscape. However, the AONB is changing in response to a host of social, economic and environmental pressures. Activities such as land use, development and the changing climate, all have an influence on its character and condition.

The cumulative impact of small changes is being felt at a landscape scale across the area. Respecting distinctive local character is increasingly needed to avoid further damaging cumulative impacts. Levels of tranquillity, particularly around urban fringes are being reduced due to the pressures of development and growth in car usage.

Key policy objective: To improve coordination and influence the management of landscape features ensuring they are maintained, enhanced, understood and appreciated.

Lan/P1 Character

The special qualities, distinctive character and key features of the South Devon AONB landscape and South Devon Heritage Coast will be conserved and enhanced.

Lan/P2 Technical assessments

The use of Landscape and Seascape Character Assessments and Historic Landscape and Seascape Characterisation will continue to be advocated so that land use and marine planning and management decisions respect, maintain and where possible enhance landscape character contributing to the special qualities of the South Devon AONB.

Lan/P3 Landscape condition

Opportunities will be sought to strengthen landscape character by improving the condition of existing landscape features in poor condition and reinstating landscape features identified as missing or fragmented.

Lan/P4 Tranquillity

The tranquillity, natural nightscapes and dark skies of the AONB will be enhanced and maintained in a consistent, cross-boundary evidence-based approach.

Lan/P5 Skylines and views

The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the South Devon AONB will be protected. Suitable alternatives to infrastructure responsible for visual intrusion will be sought together with improvements to reduce the visual impact of unsightly past development.

Lan/P6 Seascapes

The open undeveloped seascape seen from the coast forms a defining setting for the South Devon AONB: the long uninterrupted views, wild character and natural horizons will be protected and sustained.

Lan/P7 Setting to the AONB

The deeply rural character of much of the land adjoining the AONB boundary forms an essential setting for the AONB and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character.

Theme 2: Natural resources & climate

The high-quality environment within the AONB is reflected in the clean air, low levels of light pollution, clean bathing waters and tranquillity all fundamental to attracting significant numbers of visitors to the area. This environmental quality provides a healthy environment for people living in and visiting the AONB. Whilst bathing waters and water bodies have seen quality improvements over the last few years, there has been a reduction in tranquillity in some areas with new developments and new leisure activities.

Climate change is one of the most significant pressures on the environment reflected in hotter and drier summers, warmer and wetter winters with more extreme weather and increased flood risk compounded by sea-level rise. The ability of the AONB Partnership to contribute to the mitigation of the effects of climate change is minimal in global terms. However, the Partnership supports the positive impact of local adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

Development and land management practices in water catchments are increasing nutrient loadings, storm water runoff rates, siltation and pollution incidents that are impacting downstream. Diffuse pollution and nutrient enrichment, algal blooms and localised pollution from boating activities are some of the factors affecting water quality in the AONB.

Key policy objective: To support the sustainable management of natural resources in the AONB and its setting.

NatRes/P1 Natural capital.

A landscape scale natural capital approach will be taken where practicable to sustainably use and manage natural resources in the AONB.

NatRes/P2 Water quality

The highest standards of water quality will be secured throughout the South Devon AONB. The effective integration of land, freshwater and estuary management will be sought at a river catchment scale to address sustainable soil, waste and nutrient management, point source and diffuse pollution, and the abstraction, supply and use of water.

NatRes/P3 Pollution response

Effective contingency planning will be maintained to guide emergency responses to pollution incidents affecting land, sea and air.

NatRes/P4 Climate change

Communities will be assisted in developing resilience and adapting to climate change, whilst working with physical processes to ensure that the special qualities of the South Devon AONB are conserved and enhanced.

NatRes/P5 Waste

Domestic and commercial waste reduction, management and recycling initiatives including the reuse of locally distinctive building materials will be supported and promoted, where they conserve natural resources and enhance landscape character.

NatRes/P6 Energy

Initiatives will be supported that reduce energy use, increase energy efficiency and use renewable heat and power sources particularly from local wood fuel supply chains where these initiatives conserve and enhance the special qualities of the South Devon AONB and promote the principal of good environmental stewardship of resources.

NatRes/P7 Flooding & erosion

Approaches to flood risk management and erosion control which work with natural processes, conserve the natural environment and improve biodiversity will be advocated and supported.

Theme 3: Biodiversity & geodiversity

The area supports an outstanding range of habitats, species and geological features – ranging from salt marshes, reedbeds and eelgrass to hedge banks, ancient oak woodlands, farmland and coastal grasslands; and from exposed shorelines with sea arches, wave-cut platforms, crags, cliffs, dunes and shingle ridges to sheltered marine inlets with expansive mudflats. The natural environment provides a varied, colourful landscape tapestry which enriches and supports the lives of residents and visitors and underpins the tourism economy.

The quality of the area's biodiversity and geodiversity is recognised in a range of designations that include international designations such as the UNESCO Global Geopark status and Special Areas of Conservation, reflecting the importance of parts of the AONB at a European scale, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves that highlight importance at a national scale, and local nature reserve and county wildlife sites, recognising parts of the AONB that are of more local importance.

The fragmentation of habitats has reduced the ability of less mobile species to move successfully, leading to isolation and loss. The extent, condition and integrity of the network of 'local sites' that generally receive lower levels of protection, resources and attention continue to be of concern. As our current "climate space" moves northwards, habitats and species will be significantly affected. Invasive non-native species continue to expand and alter the balance of natural biodiversity throughout all of the habitats in the area.

Key policy objective: To conserve and enhance the biodiversity and geological assets of the AONB as part of a bigger, better and more connected landscape.

BioGeo/P1 Designated sites

Designated sites of international, national and local importance for biodiversity and geodiversity will be protected and managed effectively to achieve their conservation objectives and be better linked to the wider habitat network.

BioGeo/P2 Priority species

Priority species will be protected and conserved. Targeted action will be taken to support the recovery of those species whose conservation is not delivered through wider habitat-based measures.

BioGeo/P3 Ecological networks

The repair, restoration and reconnection of well-functioning landscape scale ecological networks will be supported.

BioGeo/P4 Geodiversity

The conservation and enhancement of significant geological and geomorphological features throughout the area will be sought, underpinned by a presumption in favour of sustaining natural processes.

BioGeo/P5 Reconnecting people and wildlife

Opportunities will be sought to reconnect the AONB's residents, visitors and workforce with nature, promote appreciation of the benefits nature provides to us and to inspire positive action and help monitor wildlife populations.

BioGeo/P6 Positive cumulative impacts

Opportunities will be sought to maximise the benefits for wildlife from the management of all types of land and water irrespective of scale.

BioGeo/P7 Damage and disturbance

Increased recreational pressure will be resisted and managed at locations where unacceptable damage or disturbance to vulnerable habitats and species is likely to arise.

BioGeo/P8 Invasive non-native species

A strategic approach to the control, or eradication where feasible, of invasive non-native species will be taken where they threaten to damage local habitats and species, and where action is practicable. The provision of guidance and advice to landowners with the most damaging invasive non-native species will be central to this approach.

Theme 4: Historic environment

People have lived in the area from pre-historic times shaping the landscape with ancient burial mounds, coastal hillforts, historic farmsteads, remote fishing villages and ancient landscape features. Maritime and agricultural heritage is reflected in local culture and traditions often linked to the seasons or historic events.

Work continues to improve the coordination and management of historic environment features throughout the AONB. The AONB Staff Unit and partners work together to ensure they are maintained, enhanced, understood and appreciated. The condition of nationally important scheduled monuments, historic features such as field barns and some coastal structures are threatened by factors including cultivation, scrub encroachment, burrowing animals and coastal erosion.

Key policy objective: To conserve and enhance the AONBs historic features and distinctive vernacular buildings as part of a living and working landscape ensuring mechanisms are in place to secure their continued long-term management and care.

Hist/P1 Cultural and historic environment

The identification, protection and active conservation of the AONB's cultural and historic environment will be promoted and supported.

Hist/P2 A historic environment asset

The South Devon AONB landscape will be regarded as a single unified historic environment asset of national importance.

Hist/P3 Public access

Public access will be encouraged to historic sites that are able to withstand visitor pressure without undue harm to their nature conservation interests and physical features.

Hist/P4 Statutory protection

Statutory protection together with appropriate management will be sought for the most important historic monuments and buildings.

Hist/P5 Technical resources

The use of Historic Landscape and Seascape Characterisation, the Historic Environment Record, Tithe Maps and other tools and information resources will be promoted in order to inform projects, policies and activities.

Hist/P6 Coastal heritage

The conservation of coastal heritage assets will be incorporated into adaptation plans and realignment measures in recognition of their contribution to coastal landscape character.

Hist/P7 Land management

The protection and enhancement of historic environment assets shall be integrated into other planning, coastal and land management initiatives in the AONB in recognition of their contribution to landscape character.

Theme 5: Farming & land management

The farmed area of the AONB reflects centuries of land management practices and traditions which remain at the heart of our rural communities, producing high quality food, maintaining and shaping the landscape. Farming has a key role to play in protecting the environment by keeping air and rivers clean, improving soils and providing wildlife habitats. The agricultural sector is entering a period of major change especially funding and market uncertainties while arrangements for post Brexit environmental land management schemes are awaited and a seven-year transition period enables farm businesses to plan.

Existing government direct payments to farmers will be phased out and a new system will recognise and value the broader benefits with payments being based on the provision of public goods. The decline in farming incomes and increased financial pressures are leading land owners to seek alternative land uses, such as the use of agricultural land for caravan parks, game shoots, tourist attractions, flood alleviation and the creation of wildlife habitats.

Increased public interest has been expressed over soil health, fertilisers, pesticides and land management techniques and recent spread of plant and animal diseases represent an increased threat to business viability. A decline in family mixed farms accompanied by an ageing farming population, a shortage of new entrants to the industry, and an increasing burden of regulation and administration that threatens the culture of farming.

Open fires, wood-burning stoves and bio-mass boilers have risen in popularity over recent years, prices for timber and woodfuel are currently high and demand is increasing. However, many of the woodlands in the AONB are in small units with poor road access, steep slopes and low quality timber. The barriers to access, size of the woodlands and fragmented supply chain mean that costs of management can often be higher than rewards. Improving access to woodlands and supporting the supply chain could bring more woodlands into sustainable management, benefiting wildlife and increasing employment.

Key policy objective: To help and support the farming and land management sector conserve and enhance the AONB.

LanMan/P1 Critical to the AONB's future

A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming and land management sector providing high quality food, fuel, timber and benefits to people and wildlife will be fostered as one of the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the AONB.

LanMan/P2 Farming with nature

Support will be sought for farmers and land managers who sustain land of exceptional landscape and nature conservation interest in recognition of the additional costs incurred in operating these farming systems.

LanMan/P3 Trees, woodland and hedgebanks

The retention and sensitive management of trees, woodlands, orchards and Devon hedges will be promoted. The planting of new orchards, woodland, hedgerow trees and specimen trees will be encouraged, subject to existing biodiversity interests and the careful selection of sites and species to reflect and strengthen local landscape character.

LanMan/P4 Historic trees

Ancient woodland, ancient trees outside woods and veteran trees, which are significant and irreplaceable landscape features in the AONB, will be managed, conserved and enhanced.

LanMan/P5 Environmental land management

High quality environmental land management, including agri-environment schemes, will be promoted to help conserve and enhance the special qualities and distinctive agricultural landscapes of the AONB whilst supporting farmers and landowners.

LanMan/P6 Communities, farming and our environment

Wider community engagement with the farming and land management sector will enable a deeper understanding of the important role played by land managers in maintaining the AONB's special qualities, and providing the food, produce and natural environment services we all rely on.

LanMan/P7 Evolving farms

The evolution of farm types, modernisation activities, diversification enterprises and added value operations that conserve and enhance the South Devon AONB's special qualities will be supported.

LanMan/P8 Land management support

Co-ordinated advice and collaboration on environment focused land management will be delivered to support land managers to maintain productive and environmentally sustainable landscapes that deliver on local priorities and contribute to national themes.

Theme 6: Coast & Marine

The conservation and enhancement of the high quality and internationally significant coastline of the AONB and South Devon Heritage Coast is a priority. The undeveloped coast, inshore waters and wider marine component of the South Devon AONB are considered as one of the special qualities that define the unique natural beauty for which the area is designated as a nationally important protected landscape.

There is continued pressure for infrastructure and other developments, including coast defence around individual properties and highway repair. Sea level rise coupled with extreme storm events is creating significant challenges for some coastal locations in the AONB.

Some prominent coastal sites are spoiled by past poor-quality development, compounded by growing pressure for commercial activities, intensive recreational use and erosion. Recreational conflicts and disturbance of tranquil areas are sometimes caused by motorised craft and at a small number of beaches users compete for safe launch and water space.

Litter is widely perceived as a problem in the AONB, with even a small amount having a marked effect on people's perception of a wild and unspoilt coastline. High levels of beach litter are brought in by the tides, reflecting a wider issue with marine litter. Marine plastics are a growing concern, as evidence increases about the harm these cause to marine wildlife and fish stocks. Various projects to contributing to the reduction of litter and plastics are being developed by the AONB Unit and partners.

Key policy objective: To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, special qualities and natural processes of the AONBs coastline and neighbouring areas of sea.

Mar/P1 Coastal character

The tranquil and undeveloped character of the coast will be protected. Opportunities will be sought for improvements in the condition of degraded sites.

Mar/P2 Coast and marine management

The effective integration of AONB management with the management of the adjoining marine environment will be sought to ensure that the development and delivery of Marine Plans for the South and Southwest areas and Coastal Change Management Areas and access to the coastal margin under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, have regard for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, special qualities and key features of the AONB.

Mar/P3 High quality marine environment

The special qualities associated with the Marine Protected Area network and the South Devon Heritage Coast will be reflected and promoted throughout AONB literature, campaigns, awareness and communication programmes.

Mar/P4 Coast protection

The South Devon and Dorset Shoreline Management Plan along with Coastal Change Management Areas provide a policy framework for the next 100 years. There will be a presumption that natural coastal processes will be allowed to act in areas identified as requiring no active intervention. For those areas requiring intervention, soft engineering solutions that work with natural physical processes will be preferred together with the realignment of coastal infrastructure to more suitable locations where there is space to accommodate it.

Mar/P5 Sustainable recreational management

Information, education and awareness campaigns will be used in managing recreational pressures and conflicts at the coast. Where demonstrable problems and safety issues remain, relevant organisations will carefully consider the most appropriate steps to be taken in order to address the situation.

Mar/P6 Protective public ownership

The acquisition of undeveloped coastline for protective public ownership will be supported. The management of newly acquired sites will be supported where this accords with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, special qualities and key features of the South Devon AONB.

Theme 7: Rivers and Estuaries

The five ria estuaries of the Avon, Dart, Erme, Salcombe - Kingsbridge and Yealm form a defining feature of the South Devon AONB. Their nature changes dramatically with the tide from shimmering mudflats to wide expanses of water. Intricate networks of tidal creeks branch off from the main waterways often with saltmarshes and reedbeds at their extremities. Steep oak-wooded valley sides and hedge-patterned farmland bring a characteristic fringe of trees down to the water's edge. The harbours and estuary mouths all have a long history as havens for seafarers.

They all retain large areas of relatively unspoilt and undeveloped bed, foreshore and shoreline but with their considerable history of human use and harvesting. They supply considerable ecosystem services to communities, and several are formally designated and protected in recognition of their rich and diverse natural history. The estuaries also contain historic and archaeological assets, which contribute significantly to their character and economy, and are very popular with visitors.

The increased number of extreme storm events and sea level rise is impacting on river and estuary infrastructure and some settlements. There is significant pressure from built development along estuary shorelines, with cumulative impacts on landscape, habitats, species and water quality. Established maritime businesses are being gradually displaced from their traditional premises, undermining the viability of essential shore-side support services and increasing pressure on other undeveloped estuary-side locations to accommodate boating uses.

There is strong recreational demand for moorings and marina spaces within the estuaries and pressure on key access points. There are requirements for improved shore-side infrastructure for the fishing and mariculture sector and better launch facilities for small recreational craft. Estuary trails offer great potential for reconnecting with nature and improving health and well-being although this has the potential to increase disturbance of sensitive wildlife.

Key policy objective: To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, special qualities and natural processes of the AONBs rivers and estuaries.

Est/P1 Estuary character

A thriving maritime economy contained within the existing developed harbour areas will be promoted, complimented by high quality boating facilities and infrastructure. The more remote parts of the estuaries will be managed for their tranquil and unspoiled character and safeguarded from moorings spread and development.

Est/P2 Foreshore management

A presumption against any further loss in extent or quality of foreshore, seabed or habitat will be supported.

Est/P3 Coordination and management

The effective coordination and management of the area's rivers and estuaries will be supported and developed through the *AONB Estuaries Partnership and Management Plan (Annex 2)*, Estuary forums, and the Catchment Based Approach.

Est/P4 Maritime services

Boat maintenance, repair and storage facilities will be retained within harbour areas and the loss of essential shore-side infrastructure by conversion to other uses will be resisted.

Est/P5 Mariculture

Sustainable mariculture enterprises will be retained and encouraged in appropriate locations, both as a traditional feature of the AONB economy and as a "driver" for further improvements to water quality.

Est/P6 Climate change

The adaptation of habitats and species to climate change and sea level rise will be promoted through sustaining natural processes and/or the delivery of natural flood management to help to future proof existing levels of flood protection against the increasing risks from climate change.

Est/P7 Environmental management

Harbour Authorities will be supported in maintaining effective arrangements for managing moorings, navigation, dredging and waste, underpinned with good environmental practices which ensure the conservation and enhancement of the South Devon AONB's special qualities.

Est/P8 Fisheries management

Projects and initiatives that provide effective conservation of fish stocks and improved fish access in rivers and estuaries will be supported.

People: To encourage and support sustainable economic development, social engagement and recreational activity that conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the AONB.

Theme 8: Tourism, Access & Recreation

Tourism is a vital part of the local economy with many visitors drawn here by the stunning beaches and dramatic coastlines. The natural beauty of the landscape is a major attraction for most visitors. South Devon's coast and countryside provides both high end and budget opportunities for those wishing to enjoy the AONB. Whilst it is recognised that sustainable forms of tourism can make valuable contributions to the local economy and rural development, increasing visitor pressure also has the potential to affect the character of the area's natural and historical assets.

Physical access has been a high priority through provision of public rights of way, open access land and opportunities for sport and recreation, as well as the health benefits from more active lifestyles. The South Devon coast has exceptional opportunities for water sports such as surfing, kayaking, coasteering, paddle boarding and wild swimming. These and more intrusive motorised water sports activities are becoming increasingly popular taking people closer to nature and reaching previously inaccessible or less visited sites. All of these have the potential to impact negatively on the AONB if not sensitively managed.

There is considerable potential for the AONB to contribute to the health and wellbeing of resident and visiting populations. Evidence of the value of being in just looking at natural environments, particularly green and blue environments, for both physical and mental health is growing.

Key policy objective: To ensure tourism, access and recreation develop at sustainable levels whilst maintaining and contributing to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

Acc/P1 Sustainable Tourism

A sustainable, year-round tourism industry which benefits from and contributes to the environmental quality of the area will be supported. The loss of accommodation and facilities for visitors and recreational users will be resisted. Activities and initiatives to extend the main tourism season and to assist in promoting the area to overseas visitors will be supported.

Acc/P2 Popular sites

The provision of sustainable visitor facilities, recreational infrastructure and information will be promoted at the most heavily used destinations. Management resources, promotion and marketing will be concentrated on the more popular and developed sites which are best able to accommodate and contain intensive recreational pressure.

Acc/P3 Information

Co-ordinated information and interpretation about countryside, coastal, marine and estuarine recreation and access will be promoted through a range of media, to help foster greater understanding, appropriate expectations and considerate behaviour. Car parks and principal access points such as slipways will be used as locations wherever possible to minimise signage proliferation.

Acc/P4 Rights of Way

A well-connected network of paths and strategic recreational routes will be sensitively maintained and promoted. Opportunities will be sought to extend them and improve linkages where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

Acc/P5 Intrusive recreational activities

In remote and tranquil countryside areas intrusive recreational activities will be discouraged. The conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the protection of vulnerable wildlife will be given priority in the promotion of access and recreation.

Acc/P6 Access to beaches and the coastal corridor

Under the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 a new England Coast path and open access to a defined coastal margin will be created whilst maintaining levels of tranquillity and safeguarding sensitive sites, habitats and species.

Acc/P7 Recreation, leisure and sports

The quiet enjoyment of the South Devon AONB by the public will be promoted through recreation, leisure activities and sports that respect other users and the area's natural beauty, special qualities and land management.

Acc/P8. Naturally healthy

Opportunities to use the natural environment resource of the South Devon AONB to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, particularly where this coincides with opportunities to enhance the area's special qualities.

Theme 9: Planning and Sustainable Development

The statutory Management Plan is a material consideration in plan-making and decision-taking as part of development management processes. The Partnership Committee and AONB Staff Unit are not statutory planning consultees although the Staff Unit does provide protected landscape advice to the Local Planning Authorities for those applications that have a significant impact on the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.

The area remains under intense pressure from housing development on green field sites both inside the boundary and in the adjoining rural setting. The constraints on available land mean that areas within the AONB boundary and its setting are under pressure for the conversion of business, tourism and employment land to residential use. The scale and pace of new development in the sub-region is bringing a range of indirect impacts to protected landscapes such as additional traffic flows, car parking, recreational pressures and disturbance to wildlife.

Key policy objective: To use planning policy and the mitigation hierarchy to conserve and enhance AONB special qualities for compatible sustainable development.

Plan/P1 Plan-making

Planning policies will give great weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and special qualities of the South Devon AONB, while supporting limited development that is appropriate to its setting, is in keeping with its character, and meets the economic and social needs of local communities.

Plan/P2 Decision-taking

Development management decisions will give great weight to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the South Devon AONB; and support development that is appropriate and proportionate to its setting within or adjacent to the South Devon AONB by seeking to avoid, minimise or as a last resort compensate, for harm to the special qualities and distinctive characteristics of the AONB

Plan/P3 Planning protocol

Local Planning Authorities will consult the AONB Unit on planning policy and significant planning applications following agreed planning protocols and use the South Devon AONB Management Plan as a material consideration to inform plan-making and decision-making.

Plan/P4 Representations

On behalf of the AONB Partnership, the AONB Staff Unit will provide representations to a wide range of plan makers to ensure that due regard is had to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and special qualities of the South Devon AONB in the development of policy and strategy.

Plan/P5 Consultees

Natural England will continue to be the principal statutory consultee on planning and sustainable development matters affecting Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The AONB Staff Unit will respond to those planning applications that significantly impact on the natural beauty and special qualities of the South Devon AONB.

Plan/P6 Providing advice

Advice on development proposals will increasingly be provided through standing advice, position statements and supporting documents including the *South Devon AONB Planning Guidance* (Annex 1).

Plan/P7 Developer contributions

Where new developments are likely to increase recreational pressures on the countryside, coast or estuaries, developers will be expected to provide suitable recreational facilities on-site as well as contributing to improving carrying capacity and facilities in the surrounding area.

Theme 10: Transport & Highways

As well as providing vital services for communities and workplaces, public transport can help to reduce emissions, taking cars off the road and reducing congestion. The development of safe and parallel access routes supports local communities and further encourages sustainable transport.

Intense traffic pressure, particularly in the summer months, causes congestion at certain locations and creates an intrusion into the quality of the countryside and its tranquillity. Vehicles continue to damage roadside hedge banks and verges, historic highway features and bridges and contribute to the spread of invasive species.

There is a legacy of obtrusive lighting, concrete post and wire fencing, missing hedge banks and unsympathetic road alignments, while modern specifications for kerbing, signage, lining and traffic calming can have an urbanising impact on the rural road network. The increase in motorised traffic has rendered many rural roads unsuitable for use by walkers, horse riders and cyclists.

Key policy objective: Reduce the impact of transport networks and services on the environment, landscape character and enjoyment of the AONB and South Devon Heritage Coast.

Trans/P1 Highway management

Highway network maintenance and improvements will be undertaken in a manner which is sensitive and appropriate to the rural character of the AONB and compatible with its special qualities.

Trans/P2 Features of the road network

The landscape, biodiversity, cultural features and structures of the AONB's road network will be protected, conserved and enhanced.

Trans/P3 Parking

Vehicle pressures will generally be contained within existing locations and the construction of significant additional car parking capacity at remote coastal sites will be resisted. Landscape improvements will be sought for existing carparks which are visually intrusive or in poor condition.

Trans/P4 Green Lanes

The lawful and responsible use of unmetalled roads by pedestrians, cyclists, horse-riders and carriage drivers will be promoted.

Trans/P5 Large vehicles

Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the pressure of large and heavy vehicles on the minor road network.

Trans/P6 Sustainable transport

The provision of sustainable public transport services and convenient alternatives to the use of the car will be supported where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and landscape character.

Theme 11: Rural Economy and Services

The South Devon AONB is a living and working landscape, with wide range of business and economic activity taking place. The social needs of local communities vary from towns to isolated rural hamlets.

The higher cost of products and services, austerity measures and changes in global market forces have served to accentuate deep-rooted challenges already facing rural businesses in the area. The rate of closure of essential rural services continues to affect the sustainability of smaller rural settlements in the AONB. Parts of the AONB are remote rural areas with poor transport networks, a high proportion of micro businesses and limited markets due to their distance from urban areas. The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership aims to double the size of the economy by 2030 whilst accommodating the importance protected landscapes and value of Natural Capital.

Growth opportunities within the local rural economy include: local food and drink produce; sustainable construction, farm diversification and tourism. Sensitively located digital infrastructure improvements have the potential to encourage greater opportunities for both businesses and residents within the AONB while reducing the need for the travel and delivering other positive environmental impacts.

Key policy objective: To develop a sustainable rural economy that benefits from the South Devon AONB brand and asset; and actively contributes to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB.

Econ/P1 Rural economy

The growth of the area's economy will be supported where sustainable economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other. Employment sectors having a traditional association with the AONB and which conserve or enhance the AONB's special qualities will be promoted and supported. Natural capital accounting will be used to assess and monitor progress toward conserving and enhancing the area at a landscape scale and achieving a net gain for biodiversity.

Econ/P2 Supply chains

Improvements will be sought to the processing and supply chains of products which are sustainably harvested from the land and waters of the AONB; developing nearby markets, revitalising rural incomes and supporting the land management sector. Sustainable initiatives will be encouraged that result in residents, retailers and visitors purchasing locally sourced, high quality food, wood fuel, materials and produce.

Econ/P3 Rural business

Sustainable rural business and farm diversification initiatives will be supported where these maintain or enhance the special qualities or distinctive landscape character of the AONB and contribute to employment and prosperity.

Econ/P4 Environmental performance

High standards of environmental performance by local companies, and the development and use of “clean” technologies which create prosperity and employment with positive impacts on the local environment, will be promoted.

Econ/P5 Local services

The retention and improvement of viable, accessible, essential local services such as shops, post offices and pubs will be sought, together with associated community infrastructure in market towns and villages. The loss of business premises and local services by conversion to other uses will be resisted. Effective use will be made of the Community Asset Register under the Localism Act 2011 to secure the future of valued community facilities.

Econ/P6 Capacity and skills

Economic capacity and skills in the area will be supported through training opportunities, community enterprise, business networking and cooperation especially where these assist businesses to contribute to AONB purposes.

Theme 12: Community and Culture

The Partnership supports opportunities to develop local community initiatives and activity in collaboration with others to help develop skills, improve health, raise awareness and encourage cohesion.

The resident community of South Devon is diverse ranging from very affluent areas to deprived rural communities. This diversity is also visible in the visitor population reflecting historical tourism flows, a wide range of visitor accommodation types and changing activity trends among visitors and service providers.

South Devon continues to provide an attractive retirement and second home destination, and young adults are leaving the area to go to higher education and job opportunities elsewhere. Young people find it extremely difficult to afford a home in the area because of below average wages and the high cost of housing. Many rural support services and community organisations are thinly stretched and face difficulty recruiting volunteers. A high quality of life does not extend to all. Social and cultural exclusion, poor health, poverty and isolation are still experienced, particularly amongst the elderly in hidden pockets of deprivation.

Communities are becoming increasingly divorced from land management and farming traditions reflected in the growing disconnection between children and the natural environment, reflected in obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and the loss of independence and confidence in decision making.

Key policy objective: To provide improved access to resilient services, facilities and active participation in community and landscape related social enterprise.

Comm/P1 Special qualities

Initiatives that engage local communities in understanding, exploring, celebrating, conserving and enhancing the special qualities and distinctive characteristics of the AONB will be promoted and developed.

Comm/P2 Sustainable lifestyles

Community-based initiatives that promote sustainable lifestyles will be supported and promoted where they are compatible with the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

Comm/P3 Resilience

Communities will be supported in creating vibrant, healthy and resilient neighbourhoods enjoying a high quality of life with good access to facilities.

Comm/P4 Cultural traditions

Activities which reinforce the cultural traditions of the AONB will be supported and fostered, especially where these strengthen the link between people and landscape.

Comm/P5 Community planning

The Partnership will support and promote neighbourhood planning, community action and voluntary services to conserve and enhance the AONB.

Comm/P6 Community participation

Local community participation will be encouraged in the research, recording, celebration, promotion, care and conservation of natural history, heritage and historic features.

Partnership: To ensure the AONB is recognised and valued as a national, regional and local asset and effectively managed in partnership with stakeholders.

Theme 13: Awareness and Communication

South Devon does not have a clear geographical place in the public imagination or provide an obvious boundary for the AONB. Natural beauty is a difficult term to communicate effectively to different audiences, especially as most of the South Devon AONB is a cultural, working landscape shaped and managed by people. Many residents of the area, especially the young and those in adjoining urban areas, are not engaged with the AONB for a range of reasons - cultural, financial, mobility and social exclusion.

Austerity and the emphasis on economic growth are challenging the relevance and value of the AONB designation and management amongst some decision makers.

Key policy objective: To increase awareness of the South Devon AONB and its special qualities, the purpose of its designation, the role of the Partnership and range of ways to get involved.

Aware/P1 AONB awareness

Inspire an awareness and understanding of the South Devon AONB and its special qualities amongst residents, businesses, organisations and visitors in and around the AONB.

Aware/P2 Ecosystem Services

An improved understanding of all the benefits the AONB provides for people will be at the core of communication activity, seeking to foster decisions and actions that value the services that the natural environment provides.

Aware/P3 Goods and services

Local communities and visitors will be encouraged to make consumer choices to support local, high quality products and services that sustain the area's special qualities, landscape and the people who manage it and make a living from it.

Aware/P4 Caring for the AONB

Initiatives leading to inspire behaviour change and increase positive action for the natural beauty and special qualities of the AONB will be supported and promoted.

Aware/P5 Involving everyone

Organisations, groups and communities will be encouraged and supported in playing an active role in conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB.

Aware/P6 Lifelong learning

People of all ages will be encouraged to investigate, record and celebrate their local places, and enjoy considerate and informed experiences of wildlife and the natural environment.

Theme 14: Management, Organisation & Partnerships

The Partnership Committee provides a strategic lead in the conservation and enhancement of the area and consists of representatives from local authorities: Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council, Torbay Council. Statutory bodies: Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England. Organisations: Field Studies Council, National Trust, Plymouth University and community representatives: farming and business community, parish councils, voluntary organisations, professional environmental non-government organisations, the tourism sector, amenity groups and an estuary and marine representative.

Implementing this ambitious Management Plan involves a wide range of agencies, organisations, local groups, landowners and individuals. Partnerships have been formed with a range of organisations whose activities make a significant contribution to caring for the special qualities of the South Devon AONB.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a general statutory duty on relevant authorities “to have regard” for the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB when exercising any of their functions, and a specific duty on local authorities to prepare AONB management plans.

The boundary to the South Devon AONB has remained unchanged since its original designation in 1960. In common with other AONBs, no recorded statement or citation was issued at the time setting out a clear rationale for the designation. The AONB Management Plan and in particular the special qualities section of this plan set out what it is that makes the area worthy of designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Key policy objective: To use the Management Plan strategy, policies and delivery plan to direct strategic leadership in the delivery of tangible benefits to the landscape, communities and economy of the AONB.

Part/P1 Legal duty of regard

Relevant authorities will have regard for the purpose of AONB designation in the conduct of their functions and decision making, as required by Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Part/P2 Management Plan implementation

The AONB Partnership, through its member organisations and the AONB Staff Unit, will seek to achieve its vision for the AONB by implementing the Delivery Plan.

Part/P3 AONB Partnership arrangements

Defra and the relevant local authorities will maintain effective partnership arrangements including a dedicated locally based South Devon AONB Staff Unit.

Part/P4 Management initiatives

The AONB Partnership will direct management initiatives inside the AONB and in those adjoining hinterland and marine areas outside the boundary which have an important bearing on the AONB.

Part/P5 Partnerships

The AONB Partnership will foster constructive links with partnerships and strategic initiatives at local, county, regional, national and international level.

Part/P6 National Association for AONBs

The AONB Partnership will work closely with other protected landscapes and actively support the National Association for AONBs.

Part/P7 AONB boundary

The AONB Partnership will keep the boundary of the AONB under review to ensure that the designation remains appropriate and fit for purpose in South Devon.

AONB Partnership focus areas

The Management Plan directly relates to the strategic aims of the Defra 25 Year Environment Plan. The annual delivery plan outlines the projects and outcomes that conserve the South Devon AONB and where possible result in environmental 'net gain'.

The AONB Partnership focus areas reflect current issues by prioritising projects that deliver benefits to land management, biodiversity, planning and those based on estuaries and the coast. Communication and wider education activities are also essential actions for the team. Priority themes aside, the AONB Staff Unit will work with partners to respond to all the themes in the plan taking advantage of funding opportunities where appropriate.

Measuring progress and change

A national protected landscape monitoring framework developed by Defra and Natural England involves the collection and distribution of data sets from several statutory organisations. The *State of the AONB* (Annex 3) details the information currently available and progress on Management Plan implementation will be reported on the AONB website with summaries published in the AONB Unit Annual Report.

Annex documents

The following annexes form an integral and important part of the Management Plan and can be viewed on-line.

1. *AONB Planning Guidance*
2. *South Devon AONB Estuaries Management Plan 2017 -2024*
3. *State of the AONB*
4. *Understanding the special qualities of the South Devon AONB*
5. *Strategic Environmental Assessment, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulation Assessment*
6. *Statement of representation*
7. *Strategic context and background to AONBs*

The annexes and other documents relating to AONB activity can be found on the AONB website southdevonaonb.org.uk. The AONB Staff Unit and Partnership will refer to these and other documents in its responses to planning consultations and land management initiatives.

Picture credits

A number of the images used in this plan were taken by entrants in the 2018 AONB photo competition. We are grateful to competitors for the use of these pictures. Full details of AONB photographic competition entrants are in the *State of the AONB* report.

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Requests for alternatively accessible versions of this Plan will be accommodated where practical.

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