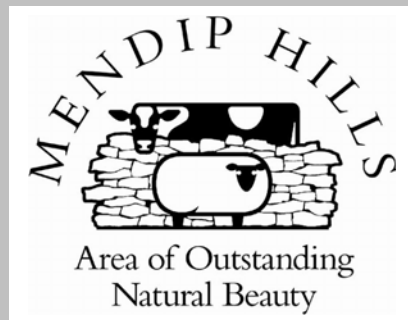




THE MENDIP HILLS

Scoping Report

Strategic Environmental Assessment
of the
Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Management Plan



Mendip Hills AONB
Scoping Report for the
Strategic Environmental Assessment of the
Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
Management Plan

October 2007

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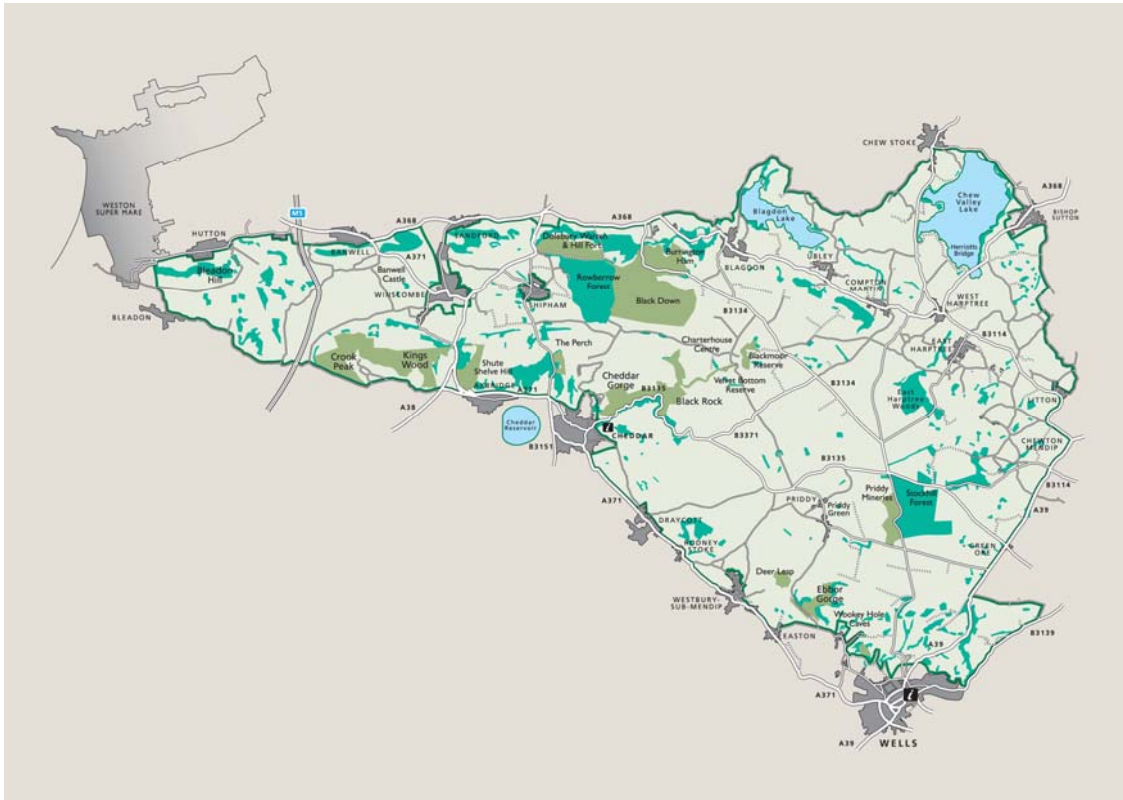
Appendix 1. Partnership Committee

The Scoping Report for the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan Strategic Environmental Assessment

1. The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Mendip Hills AONB was designated in 1972. It covers 198sq kms of the Mendip Hills from Bleadon in the west to the A39 in the east.

The AONB Partnership is made up of 45 organisations including 28 parish councils committed to seeking to implement the AONB Management Plan. See Appendix 1 for list of bodies.



2. The SEA Methodology

The methodology used for this SEA is based on the Guidance to English AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of AONB Management Plans, provided by Natural England July 2007.

As stated in the guidance:

*The purpose of a SEA is to ensure that land-use plans and programmes, that are likely to have significant effects on the environment, are subjected to a **strategic level** (high and overarching) assessment of options and alternative courses of action during plan preparation in order to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects.*

The Management Plan process fulfils many of the requirements set out in the SEA process. As the Management Plan is aiming to conserve and enhance the landscape, it is already putting the environment at the heart of the plan-making process, which is a key aim of SEA, and the steps for both processes have strong parallels.

Proposed stages in the process

1. Scoping

1.1 Identification of current issues and objectives (January – March 2007)

Developed through

- consultation with the AONB Partnership through scoping exercise and specific meeting with partners and the Partnership meeting on 22nd March 2007
- analysis of significant regional and local plans and strategies

1.2 Submission of scoping report to Natural England, Environment Agency and English Heritage (October 2007) and AONB Partnership

1.3 Analysis of responses from scoping report consultees (December 2007)

2. Developing SEA Environmental Report (January – April 2008)

Parallel process alongside the drafting of the AONB Management Plan

3. Consultation on SEA Environmental Report and AONB Management Plan (April to June 2008)

4. Analysis of responses to consultation (June 2008)

5. Summary of issues raised from SEA consultation produced as appendix document to AONB Management Plan (July 2008) demonstrating how it has informed the Management Plan.

6. AONB Management Plan (including appendices) approved by AONB Partnership (autumn 2008) and submitted for adoption by local authorities and partner organisations by March 31st 2009.

7. AONB Management Plan published and launched.

3. The context scope

Review of relevant plans and policies

The scope for this work has been considering what are the main directives, plans and strategies that influence the aspects of the AONB that the new Management Plan is seeking to address. Often the documents are further refined by interpretation at a 'lower level' (e.g. national strategies translated into regional or local strategies). These plans and documents may be helpful when considering in-combination effects in appropriate assessment.

Directive, Plan, Strategy (published /produced)
Selected European directives and international conventions
Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC
Nitrates directive: water pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources
Ramsar convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat – 1971
Aarhus Convention 1998
European Landscape Convention (UK ratified 2006)
EU sixth Environmental Action Plan 2002
National
The wildlife and countryside act (1981 & amendments)
The Conservation (Natural habitats etc.) Regulations (1994 & amendments)
Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)
The countryside and rights of way act (2000)
Climate change – UK programme (2000)
The UK Government sustainable development strategy – securing the future (2005)
Environment Agency Catchment Flood Management Plans
Environment Agency Catchment Abstraction Plans
Habitats Directive
Regional
South West Sustainability Framework (2000) – Sustainability South West
South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) 2006–2026 – South West Regional Assembly
Our Environment, Our Future Regional Strategy for the SW Environment (2004) –The South West Regional Assembly
South West Biodiversity Action Plan (1997) South West Biodiversity Partnership
South West Nature Map (2004) South West Biodiversity Partnership
Regional Economic Strategy for South West England 2006–2015 (2006) The SW Regional Development Agency
South West Integrated Regional Strategy (2004) The South West Regional Assembly
The Way Ahead– Delivering Sustainable Communities in the South West (2005) The South West Regional Development Agency

SW Rural Delivery Framework (2005) The South West Regional Assembly
Regional Housing Strategy 2005–2016 and Sustainable Communities South West (2005)– South West Housing Body
Regional Waste Strategy for South West – Rubbish to Resource 2004–2020 –(2004) South West Regional Assembly
Regional Tourism Strategy South West – Towards 2015 (2005) South West RDA
Strategy for sustainable Food and Farming – Making a difference SW Delivery Plan (2004) – SWRDA/GOSW
Strategy for the Historic Environment in the South West (2004) – English Heritage
South West Culture Strategy – In search of chunky Dunsters (2000) Culture South West
SW Regional Woodlands and Forestry Framework 2005– 2015 (2005) Forestry Commission
Regional Renewable Energy Strategy for South West England 2003–2012 (2003) SWRDA/GOSW
State of the Region 2006 (2007) South West Observatory
State of the South West Environment Report (2006) Environment Agency
Developing the Regional Transport Strategy (2004) South West Regional Assembly
Rural Development Programme England (RDPE) South West Implementation Plan 2007–2013 – South West Regional Development Agency
River Basin Management Plans – Environment Agency – in consultation
SW Strategic Plan for Water Related Sport and Recreation – Environment Agency – consultation
Local
<p>Bath and North East Somerset Council: Local Plan (Adoption scheduled Oct 2007) Core Strategy – issues and option stage Dec 2007 Site allocation/Development delivery – issues and option stage – Feb 2008 Replacement dwellings/extensions in the Green Belt – scoping report July 07 Planning obligations SPD – Scoping report April 2007 Joint Waste DPD – Draft consultation May 08 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest SPD – Scoping report July 2007 Affordable Housing SPD – consultation Nov 2007 Rights of Way Improvement Plan Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Final Joint Local Transport Plan 2006–2011 Bath and North East Somerset Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007 Local Area Agreement 2007 Community Strategy ‘Be:Better for Everyone’ 2004 WILDthings, A Biodiversity Action Plan and Partnership of Bath and North East Somerset 2006–2010</p>

North Somerset Council:

Replacement Local Plan (2007)
Core Strategy Consultation Oct 2007
Weston Regeneration Area Action Plan Preferred Options consultation June 2008
Joint Waste DPD Preferred Options consultation June 2007
Affordable Housing SPD Consultation June 2007
Implementation SPD (S106) Consultation June 2008
Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2007– 2017
North Somerset 'Action for Nature'
Local Area Agreement 2007
Community Strategy 2004

Somerset County Council:

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review (2000)
Somerset Minerals Plan (2004)
Somerset Waste Local Plan (2005)
Minerals and Waste Development Framework –consultation Sept 2007
Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Local Transport Plan 2006–2011
Local Area Agreement 2006
Somerset – A landscape for the future (2004)
Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan
Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy

Mendip District Council:

Local Plan (2002)
Core Strategy – Examination and adoption due 2008
Core Development Control Policies consultation 2007
Sustainable Energy SPD Adoption due Sept 2007
Affordable Housing SPD – Adoption due Sept 2007
A community strategy for Mendip (2006)

Sedgemoor District Council:

Local Plan (2004)
Core Strategy consultation August 2007 – submission July 2008
Development Management Plan Policies consultation June 2007
Sedgemoor Community Strategy (2006)
Sedgemoor Biodiversity Action Plan

Other

Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2004–9
Agricultural Building Design Guidelines for the Mendip Hills AONB SPG (2001)
Guidelines for Horse related Development for the Mendip Hills AONB SPG (2004)

4. The environmental baseline

The following statistical information is being collected either through the SWPLF arrangement with the SW Regional Observatory (SWRO) or by the Mendip Hills AONB (MHAONB) unit who in some cases will have to seek out information from others.

Overtime this information will record change in the State of the AONB and indicate the effectiveness of Management Plan policies.

Topic	Data or Indicator (<i>italic</i>)	Held by
Historic Features	<i>% of scheduled monuments in favourable condition</i>	SWRO
	Condition/Location of Dry stone walls	MHAONB
	Listed buildings, Parks and gardens	SWRO
	<i>Number of buildings on Buildings at Risk Register ???</i>	SWRO
	Conservation Areas	Local authorities
Land Management	<i>% of land managed under agri-environment schemes</i>	SWRO
	Land under positive conservation management	SWT,AWT,NT
Biodiversity	<i>% of SSSIs in favourable condition</i>	SWRO
	<i>% change in farmland birds</i>	RSPB
	<i>% change – Long eared owl</i>	Hawk and Owl Trust
	<i>% change in Butterfly species</i>	MHAONB
	Wildlife designations: SSSIs, NNR, County Wildlife Sites, SACs, Ramsar	MHAONB
Geology	Regionally Important Geological Sites	Bristol Regional Environment Record Centre & Somerset Environmental Records Centre
Rivers	<i>% change in pollution incidents reported to Environment Agency</i>	SWRO
Social	Population data	SWRO

Economic	<i>% employed in farming</i> Number of people participating in paying outdoor activities Visitor Spend	SWRO Active Mendip SW Tourism
Access	<i>% ROW classified as Easy to use</i> <i>Number of people recorded on PROW with visitor counters</i> Length of PROW Open Access land	Local authorities MHAONB Local authorities NE
Tranquillity	<i>% loss of dark skies</i>	CPRE
Development	Planning GIS DATA: Number of significant planning applications recorded Change of use from agriculture to another use Number of new telecom developments approved	MHAONB

5. Environmental and Sustainable Objectives

Each existing and proposed Management Plan policy will be assessed against the eleven objectives in the NE Guidance to determine whether or not they are likely to have significant effects on the environmental assets of the AONB

Environmental objectives

- E1 To protect and where practical enhance biodiversity (habitats)
- E2 To protect and enhance fauna and flora (individual species)
- E3 To ensure no adverse effect arises on population (i.e. demographic balance)
- E4 To safeguard human health
- E5 To protect and enhance soil quality
- E6 To protect water
- E7 To protect air and climate
- E8 To maintain cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage)
- E9 To protect and enhance landscape
- E10 To protect material assets including natural resources
- E11 To avoid significant adverse effects between the above interrelationships

It is then proposed to apply a second tier sustainability objectives to indicate the level of sustainability being achieved and will provide further opportunity for enhancement or mitigation.

Sustainability objectives

- S1** To create more vibrant, cohesive, safe and mixed communities
- S2** To protect the quality and character of individual settlements and communities
- S3** To protect the environment, people and properties from flood risk
- S4** To reduce the need and desire to travel by car
- S5** To promote healthy lifestyles
- S6** To raise standards of education and training and promote employment skills
- S7** To promote the development of an economy that supports social and environmental objectives
- S8** To promote good governance
- S9** To minimise the consumption of natural resources including fossil fuels, minerals, land take and water

6. Statement of key issues

The following table lists the key environmental issues as identified in the current AONB Management Plan and through recent consultation work undertaken and endorsed at the AONB Partnership March 2007 meeting.

Issues have been grouped using the existing Management Plan themes. Note that Quarrying does not appear as a separate theme as in the Management Plan but the issues related to this are listed under development. The review of the Management Plan may propose alternative theme headings for issues.

Indicators are suggested for each theme and relate to those shown in the Environmental baseline. Those suggested here are intended to monitor how the AONB Plan is influencing the environment over time.

Themes	Issues	Indicators to measure change to highlighted issues
Landscape	Retaining wild, remote character Conservation of geological features Retaining field boundaries Developing Rural skills Boundary review	% Heathland area Number of Regionally Important Geological Sites Condition of dry stone walls hedges
Biodiversity	Maintaining rich diversity of habitats and species Habitat management	% of SSSIs in favourable condition % of land in the different

	Farming – agri environment schemes Management of scrub/bracken	agri –environment scheme
Trees, Woodland and Forestry	Important landscape features biodiversity and economic recreation, value New native woodlands	Woodland Grant scheme data (FC)
Heritage	Recording of historic landscape Management of sites and buildings Cultural heritage	% scheduled monuments in favourable condition
Agriculture	Changes in farming Landscape Biodiversity Recreation and access Climate change	% of land in agri environment scheme % farm types
Recreation, access and tourism	Recreation activity Landscape, biodiversity, heritage, transport, communities	Visitor numbers on PROW Visitor spend
Communities, settlement and development	Retaining character and protecting landscape Development pressure from urban fringes Village services and economy Safety Energy production – wind turbines Tranquillity – light pollution Minerals and waste planning	% of villages with services % loss of dark skies Number of significant planning applications recorded Farm and equestrian related crime figures
Traffic and Transport	Car and HGV traffic Impact on climate and quality of life Public transport Recreation – vulnerable road users	Mileage of roads HGV restricted roads Accident figures
Climate change	Landscape Biodiversity Land use – Energy production Water resources	Ecological footprint for AONB (SWRO)

Appendix 1

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership organisations:

Somerset County Council
Bath and North East Somerset Council
North Somerset Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Mendip District Council
Mendip Hills AONB Service
Charterhouse Centre

Natural England
Forestry Commission
Bristol Water plc
Mendip Society
National Farmers Union
Country Landowners Association
Council for the Protection of Rural England
National Trust
Somerset Wildlife Trust

28 Parish Councils:

Axbridge
Banwell
Blagdon
Bleadon
Butcombe
Burrington
Cheddar
Chew Stoke
Chewton Mendip
Churchill
Compton Bishop
Compton Martin
East Harptree
Hinton Blewett
Hutton
Litton
Loxton
Nempnett Thrubwell
Priddy

Rodney Stoke
Shipham
St Cuthbert Out
Stowey Sutton
Ubley
Wells
Westbury sub Mendip
West Harptree
Winscombe and Sandford