

Landscape:

FORCES FOR CHANGE

Changes in agriculture and forestry

Landscape and rural land use are inextricably linked. Changes in agriculture and forestry will inevitably have an impact upon how the landscape looks in the future, with some changes being seasonal and others incremental:

- Changes in agricultural support mechanisms, with grants switching from production to agri-environment measures, *will* mean that there may be more pressure to change production quickly if prices fall. However, the changes will also create opportunities to obtain more support for environmental benefits but careful assessment of proposals will be necessary.
- Changing farm profitability and incomes and associated markets, premiums and farm payments can lead to changes in farm types, cropping regimes (for example, reductions in all cereals and increases in field beans and oilseed rape) and difficulties in managing farm woodland. An adverse impact on profitability is anticipated arising from reductions in the Single Farm Payment through modulation, particularly affecting larger farms.
- A continuing decline in sheep and cattle grazing on commons and other permanent grassland has resulted in the development of rank grasses and the invasion of scrub. This threatens open landscapes and the future of key areas of unimproved grassland. The 'Caring for the Cotswolds' project, which is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has had¹ real success in promoting better management. However, it remains a major challenge across the AONB given inherent unprofitability and, as a result, continued decline is anticipated.
- Dry stone walls often no longer serve an agricultural purpose. Cotswold stone walls are expensive to maintain because of the friable nature of the stone and also, in some cases, because of theft. Significant lengths of walls have been rebuilt and/or repaired under agri-environment and other schemes. Nevertheless, many walls are still deteriorating and falling down. Hedge maintenance is also an issue.
- Set-aside has become much more significant within the AONB. It accounted for nearly 8% of agricultural land within the AONB in 2002, compared with just over 2% in 1990. Although it can be visually attractive in spring and summer, it can have a marked impact on the landscape in autumn and winter by introducing an unkempt appearance. It may result in the increase of rank grass and arable weeds but is often of benefit to biodiversity. The

¹ Caring for the Cotswolds Programme was completed on 31st December 2007.

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European Commission has announced that it intends to introduce a proposal to set at 0% the obligatory set-aside rate for the 2008 scheme year.²

- The increasing demand for forms of energy other than fossil fuels will lead to an expansion in the growing of energy crops such as Miscanthus. The Board has issued a Position Statement suggesting criteria which can be used to judge whether such proposals would have an adverse impact on the landscape or enjoyment of rights of way. Increasing demand for woodfuel may have a beneficial effect on forestry as woodland is more productively managed.
- Climate change impacts on woodland health and crops grown³.
- Development of equestrian facilities through farm diversification.

Pressures on the escarpment and other important skylines

Given the prominence of the escarpment it is important to protect its appearance and skyline from both inappropriate development, including telecommunication masts and wind turbines, and inappropriate landscape management, including reducing the impact of existing structures. The way in which the highly visible scarp slope is traversed by modern roads and the impact of scrub invasion both require special consideration. This also applies to associated parking areas, particularly those close to viewpoints on the edge of the escarpment. Long unbroken skylines are also important elements of the landscape in other parts of the AONB, such as the high wolds and valley floors. Disrupting these can adversely affect landscape character, including views of the AONB landscape over a wide area.

The landscape setting on the AONB

The surroundings of the AONB are also important to its landscape character and quality. Views out of the AONB and into it from surrounding areas can be very significant, particularly to and from the escarpment. Local planning authorities bordering the AONB need to reflect such considerations in their planning policies. Development proposals that affect views into and out of the AONB also need to be carefully assessed in line with *Planning Policy Statement 7* to ensure that they conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB.

Development pressures

Various developments can damage the landscape, including the settings of settlements. These are subject to planning regulations and are dealt with in the Planning and Development Theme of this Management Plan, Particular examples are:

² DEFRA press release 20th July 2007

³ See Climate Change section for more detail and response.

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- Telecommunications masts
- Electricity wires and pylons
- Quarries
- Laying of pipelines
- Wind turbines or potentially larger wind farms
- Major road improvements
- Housing developments on the edge of settlements
- Large buildings.

While some such facilities may contribute to a viable rural economy and can provide environmental benefits such as renewable energy and local stone, rigorous assessment of need and of any impacts - in line with Planning *Policy Statement 7* - is required. It is vital that such proposals are located and designed extremely carefully, with mitigation measures where appropriate, to ensure that the natural beauty of the AONB is conserved and enhanced. The Board has issued Position Statements on Renewable Energy Generation, Minerals and Waste Planning, and Housing and Development, in order to provide guidance on the planning for these types of development. Future dismantling/ adaptation of structures such as masts, pylons and turbines should be considered if technology moves on. The Board's Landscape Strategy and Guidelines provide detailed guidance on the matters of most relevance to be considered in each of the distinct landscape character types.

Tranquillity

Tranquillity is under pressure from increasing noise, light and traffic. In 1995, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the former Countryside Commission produced Tranquil Area Maps. These showed that there had been a 20% decline in the total area of tranquil countryside between 1960 and 1990 and a damaging fragmentation of the tranquil areas that remained. The Government responded by recognising the need to protect tranquillity in its Rural White Paper published in 2000. Light pollution is a particularly damaging aspect that is affecting night skies across the country; there are now few areas of truly dark skies within the AONB and several county areas which include parts of the AONB have shown some of the higher rates of increase in light pollution between 1993 and 2000. Further work by the CPRE published in 2006 introduced a more refined methodology for measuring tranquillity beyond the impact of light pollution. A tranquillity map of the Cotswolds AONB shows areas where tranquillity is reduced by the impact of major roads, urban areas and aircraft over flying.

Land management of large holdings and estates

Large holdings of 100 hectares or more control 24% of the agricultural land within the AONB and a further 18% is in holdings from 50 to 100 hectares. The way in which these areas are managed is therefore very important to the overall natural beauty of the area.

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The loss of traditional skills

This is perhaps the key issue for the future management of the landscape. With increasing migration of workers to the towns, traditional crafts and skills are being lost from the communities within the AONB, as such workers are often less well paid and forced to move out by higher house prices. A revival in such skills, and the ability to make a living from using them, should be encouraged. In-migration of agricultural/land workers from across Europe may provide new opportunities to source rural skills. Access to training opportunities needs to be made available to all members of the community, tailored as necessary to their diverse needs.