Planning and Transport

FORCES FOR CHANGE

Distinctive Cotswold character

Cotswold character in towns and villages needs to be maintained by ensuring sympathetic developments.
For example:

- Infill development in towns and villages needs to respect traditional settlement patterns. A profuse variety of building materials, such as inappropriate concrete, and the lack of reference to traditional rural styles of siting and design can adversely affect character.

- Important open spaces, including gardens, need to be retained. The treatment of large gardens as “brownfield”, and therefore suitable for developments, can lead to loss of settlement character.

- Standardised housing layouts and designs on the fringes of existing settlements can compromise their distinctive characteristics and landscape setting, and should be avoided.

- Standardised street ‘furniture’, such as kerbs, pavements, fencing, signs and lighting can also contribute to producing a ‘sameness’ of character throughout the area. Furniture that reflects local identity while protecting public safety is required.

- Loss of natural character: lack of green space, natural environment in parks, along roads around houses.

- The design of agricultural buildings is also an important issue for the AONB. New, unsightly and poorly positioned structures can be seen across the area and conflict with the ‘unique sense of harmony’ that is so characteristic of the Cotswolds.

- Rural ‘brownfield’ sites also represent a challenge. Good landscaping and design is essential to minimise impacts in the landscape where such sites are redeveloped. However, if they are too remote such sites are not sustainable on a transport and traffic basis and restoration to their former state should be pursued.

- Incorporating to best effect natural features: rivers, woodland, hedges, walls, native species grassland etc

- Seeking to improve and enhance biodiversity rather than just avoiding impact or mitigating for loss.

Affordable housing

The importance of providing affordable housing throughout the Cotswolds is recognised as vital to ensure that balanced communities can survive and prosper, particularly as many jobs within agriculture and tourism are relatively low paid. Younger people are naturally most affected by this issue. It is clearly preferable for those engaged in the caret of the AONB to be able to live within it.

There are continuing numbers of people from outside the Cotswolds purchasing second homes within the area. Within Cotswold District there are now nearly 1,200 second homes (i.e. 3.3% of all households). This trend, together with sales of council owned properties, or the use of houses for seasonal holiday accommodation, has contributed to increased house prices which mean that many local people, including those engaged in the care of the landscape, are unable to compete in the housing market and are forced to move out of their local area, often to nearby towns.

Access to local facilities and services

Market towns and larger villages appear relatively thriving. However, there is considerable concern regarding loss of local facilities and services. Once facilities like shops, schools, post offices and pubs disappear, the mutually supporting nature of social activities and trade - which is part of the fabric of the community - begins to break down. People, including school pupils, become more dependent upon transport and are obliged to travel further afield. The fact that entertainment, particularly for younger people, is increasingly within nearby towns and cities reinforces this trend.

Nearly 1 in 8 of the households living in the Cotswolds AONB is without a car[1]. Many other people are without access to a car during the day. This means they are heavily dependent upon the frequency and quality of public and/or community transport and on the locally available shops and facilities which are vulnerable.

Scale of development- including new agricultural buildings

There is a need for development in rural settlements to meet local needs and support their viability. Housing represents the main pressure for built development in the AONB. Pressure also exists for new employment development, which is essential for the wealth and prosperity of the AONB in the future. Employment sites, new housing and affordable housing in towns and villages need to be most carefully assessed, located and designed to minimise effects on the appearance of the landscape and settings of these settlements. Development should be focused in settlements with good transport links and provision of facilities and services.

[1] Census 2001

Conversions of traditional agricultural buildings

The AONB retains traditional agricultural buildings that have, as yet, not been converted for other uses. Where redundant, national planning guidance requires that priority is given to their use for employment, although there is still great pressure for residential conversion. Such agricultural buildings are often important historic, architectural or landscape features. Their conversion needs to be carefully appraised to retain distinctive landscape character and avoid adverse impact upon important nature conservation interests, such as bats.

Redundant farms

When people who are not farmers buy farms to live in, this can lead to significant changes in the landscape. These changes may result from the effects of conversion on the appearance of traditional buildings, and through changes in the use of adjoining land, such as extensive gardens and planting that is out of character. Such farms could perhaps continue to support the agricultural industry by offering opportunities for re-use of buildings, for example to accommodate plant to process, package and distribute local agricultural goods. This would reduce the problem of redundant buildings.

Loss of tranquillity

Noise and/or activity (including traffic) arising from developments in the countryside (such as the re-use of traditional buildings) can adversely affect tranquil areas. Development at former airfields is a particular issue in this respect. Lighting can also have a widespread impact and needs careful consideration and design.

Equestrian related development

Equine-related activities provide valuable farm diversification opportunities. There will no doubt be continued increased demand for horse riding and training facilities within the AONB, particularly in areas closest to urban areas. Impacts upon landscape quality and character, through new buildings, damage to ground flora, hedges and trees, and changes in the appearance of areas of land must be sensitively controlled. Concentrations of equine related development can be harmful to landscape character.

Tourism and leisure facilities

Tourism is now the mainstay of the economy of the AONB and it is inevitable that there will be continuing pressures for new tourist-related developments within the AONB during the life span of this Management Plan. The Government expects local planning authorities to support sustainable rural tourism and leisure proposals that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and which utilise and enrich, but do not harm, the character of the countryside. Appropriate control over their number and location is anticipated in designated areas such as the AONB. Large-scale developments need to be

closely assessed and if permitted, their impacts need to be minimised and relevant opportunities to support conservation pursued.

Telecommunications

Modern telecommunications, including access to broadband, are important to a successful rural economy. However, careful siting and appropriate design of masts, both within and in sight of the AONB, is essential to minimise the continuing threat they pose to the landscape of the AONB because of their increasing proliferation. This is particularly an issue in relation to the escarpment, which is favoured because of its relative elevation to land to the west of it, but where masts which interrupt the skyline can have a significant impact on its natural appearance.

Renewable energy technologies

The AONB and its surroundings may well attract proposals for more wind turbines or, potentially, wind farms. These could have very visible effects upon the landscape if considerable expansion of facilities is pursued as part of the national drive towards more sustainable energy sources. Small-scale low mounted turbines and solar energy could be more appropriate provided turbines and solar panels are carefully designed and located. The Board has issued a position statement[2] and guidance leaflets on renewable energy, which support the provision of technologies which are not harmful to the landscape, including ground source heat pumps and micro-hydropower[3].

Roads, traffic and parking

The design of roads, traffic generated by different forms of development, traffic calming measures, the impact of parking requirements and new access routes, possibly lit, all need to be carefully assessed and designed. This is especially true in highly visible and more remote and sensitive areas of the AONB. Boundary walls need to be stone where appropriate rather than post and rail fencing.

Rural ‘brownfield sites’

Within the Cotswolds AONB there are various rural ‘brownfield sites’ (i.e. previously developed land and buildings), for example ex-MOD properties including redundant airfields. Re-use of these sites can be significant. Proposals are generally for commercial or mixed uses. Government guidance is that many commercial or light manufacturing uses, especially small-scale enterprises, are acceptable in rural areas and help promote a healthy economy.73 However; proposals can include uses that cause disturbance. Sometimes housing is also proposed but given often remote locations without supporting employment opportunities and local services these can amount to

[2] http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/files/uploads/statementfinal07dec05(1).doc
[3] http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/page_wide.asp?pageID=21#categoryID131

dormitory settlements which can result in further commuting and traffic within the AONB.

Changes of use

Change of use of existing buildings can be an issue because of the potential impact upon adjoining properties and the wider countryside as well as potential increase in traffic movements.. In addition, it may bring the potential for loss of services such as pubs, shops, garages, etc through conversion to residential properties.

Dependence on the car

Car ownership within the Cotswolds AONB is very high. 88% of the households living within the AONB have a car, while 47.5% have two cars or more.[4]1

The impact of major through-routes

The Fosse Way (A429) and the A40 are long-established through-routes within the AONB. Major new roads have also been built through the AONB to serve long distance movement. These routes are essentially part of the national road network rather than designed to improve access within the local area. The introduction of road pricing on major routes could lead to increased use of rural roads.

Positive management is also required to deal with traffic rat-running along minor roads and through villages to and from these routes, which inhibits the use of such roads by walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Proposals are being developed by the Highways Agency to improve journey time reliability on r the A417 trunk road. Government policy is to pursue Traffic management solutions to congestion rather than new road construction.[5] Modern high speed roads can have an adverse impact on the landscape due to the generation of noise, signage, lighting and engineering measures.

Other road improvements

Other road improvements, such as local bypasses, can affect the landscape in a significant way. Problems include increased traffic flows and speed, more heavy vehicles, greater noise and pollution, and greater impact upon walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
These effects must be set against road safety and the real relief provided by bypasses to congested towns and villages suffering from the effects of heavy traffic. The upgrading or maintenance of minor roads, together with inappropriate traffic calming measures, can lead to suburbanisation of the

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[4] Source: 2001 Census Household Profile for Cotswolds AONB, CACI Ltd, 2003.

[5] "Planning and the Strategic Road Network" DfT circular 02/2007

countryside; for example, straightening roads to improve traffic flows can lead to the loss of verges, hedgerows and trees, and cuttings and embankments may be out of character with the landscape. The use of red paint and humps in traffic calming schemes can be harmful to a village street scene.

The Board has agreed a Transport Protocol with the highway authorities in order to ensure that the impact of schemes on the special features of the AONB is fully considered. The Board is also preparing guidance for highway authorities for the management of roadside verges and reduction of signage clutter where safe to do so, and encourage the use of the "shared space" concept to deliver traffic calming in villages.

Increased traffic flows

Increasing flows of regular and seasonal traffic causes congestion in villages and towns, and excessive demand on car parks. Once car parks are full, indiscriminate parking on roads and verges can cause severe problems for communities and damage to verges, village greens and hedgerows. Heavy traffic also discourages other users such as cyclists, walkers and horse-riders. More emphasis on providing suitable off-road routes and safe crossing points may therefore be required. The general visitor experience is thus compromised and the enjoyment of the AONB marred.

The increasing reliance on satellite navigation devices is causing the inappropriate use of small rural roads by HGVs in particular. Vehicles become trapped and cause damage to roadside features.

It is unlikely that widespread uptake of powers available to local authorities to be responsible for the policing of parking in their area will occur during the Plan period.

Large vehicles

The use of roads, particularly minor roads, by lorries and other large vehicles can cause great problems for residents and visitors and can impact upon the landscape. Many local authorities are introducing lorry routing schemes, including weight, width, height and length restrictions. Such schemes are supported by the Board, particularly when co-ordinated across highway authority boundaries.

Road signage

Road signage is nationally specified primarily to meet requirements of road safety and legibility for drivers travelling at speed. Such signage can, however, have significant visual impacts on the landscape. The Board is encouraging highway authorities to undertake clutter audits and remove unnecessary signage, and to use discretion as permitted by national guidance.

Public transport

Residents and visitors do not differentiate between county areas when considering travelling by public transport across the AONB. Public transport provision and policy for the
Cotswolds, as elsewhere in the country, is not properly integrated. Achieving co-ordination is difficult. Very often public transport operates within county borders with limited integration throughout the AONB as a whole. With low population densities in parts of the AONB and the need for a volume of passengers to achieve viability it can be difficult to maintain rural bus services. Those without cars and with low disposable incomes are particularly affected by this situation.

A Cotswolds and Malvern's Line Study has been carried out. This showed significant demand for an improved level of service between London Paddington and Hereford on this route. Redoubling of track at selected single track sections and junctions together with resignalling work is proposed. Appropriate funding is being sought; this is seen as an early priority.
Within the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy, improvements to services on the
Cheltenham/Gloucester to Swindon line to enhance frequencies and create adequate capacity is proposed as a high priority.

Park and Ride

In principle, park and ride is supported by the Board as a means of encouraging use of public transport and reducing car journeys. However, the location, sensitive design and landscaping of such sites, and associated traffic effects, must be appraised very carefully wherever potential adverse effects upon the natural beauty of the AONB could result.

Cycling

Increasing traffic volumes mean that cycling, although environmentally friendly, is not always safe on some roads. This is particularly evident on major through-routes, in congested villages and on minor roads used as 'rat runs' by residents and visitors. Some recreational cycling routes have been devised using minor roads giving visitors access to the relatively undiscovered parts of the Cotswolds.