



<b>Committee</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date</b>	06/02/2024
<b>Subject</b>	Endorsement and adoption of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-28
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Rachel Smith-Lyte Cabinet Member with responsibility for The Environment
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Key Decision?	Yes
Is the report Open or Exempt?	OPEN

Category of Exempt Information and reason why it is <b>NOT</b> in the public interest to disclose the exempt information.	Not applicable
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## Purpose/Summary

The purpose of the report is to seek endorsement and adoption of the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-28.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) (CRoW Act) places a duty on local authorities to prepare and publish a Management Plan at five year intervals. The Management Plan has been reviewed and published, and the endorsement and adoption of the authority is now being sought under the provisions of the CRoW Act (2000).

## Recommendation(s)

That the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-2028 (“the AONB Management Plan”), as attached at Appendix A to this report, is endorsed and adopted by East Suffolk Council.

## Strategic plan

### How does this proposal support Our Direction 2028?

<b>Environmental Impact</b>	The AONB Management Plan supports both ‘restoring ecosystems and biodiversity’ through the ongoing delivery and value of the landscape of the AONB. Additionally the core approach to the AONB Management Plan is focused on ‘preserving and maintain the district beauty and heritage’.
<b>Sustainable Housing</b>	Not applicable.
<b>Tackling Inequalities</b>	The AONB Management Plan promotes and value and priority of allowing access into the open countryside for all users and visitors to the district. Actively addressing both ‘working with partners to better understand need’ and ‘reduce health inequality and improve wellbeing’
<b>Thriving Economy</b>	The AONB Management Plan ensures the quality and value of the AONB is maintained and enhanced encouraging visitors and tourism to the district.
<b>Our Foundations / governance of the organisation</b>	Not applicable.

## Justification for recommendations

### 1. Background

- 1.1. The Suffolk & Essex Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally designated landscape and is one of 38 AONBs that exist across England and Wales. It covers 115 square miles of East Suffolk, almost a quarter of the land area of the district. Around two thirds of the AONB area are within East Suffolk, meaning that activities in East Suffolk have a significant bearing on the AONB. A map showing the area covered is contained in the AONB Management Plan at Appendix A of this report (page 56 of the AONB Management Plan).
- 1.2. In November 2023, AONBs were branded as National Landscapes. The AONB is now therefore known as the Suffolk & Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape, albeit Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty remains the statutory terminology. The addition of Essex reflects the extension of the AONB into Essex and the Stour Estuary in 2020.
- 1.3. The purpose of AONBs is set out in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949) as to “conserve and enhance natural beauty”. The statutory role of local authorities in relation to AONBs is defined in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) (as amended, including recently under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act) as: “In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.” This statutory purpose therefore relates to East Suffolk Council in the exercising of its functions in the AONB.
- 1.4. The AONB staff team is governed through a Joint Advisory Committee, of which East Suffolk Council is a partner along with other constituent authorities and other organisations such as environment and business organisations (these are listed in Appendix 4 of the AONB Management Plan attached as Appendix A to this report).
- 1.5. The AONB Management Plan forms the policy on the AONB and informs how authorities in the AONB will have regard to the statutory purposes of the AONB. The AONB Management Plan is referred to in the Council’s two Local Plans, in relation to policies on Landscape Character, and is a material consideration in the consideration of planning applications in the AONB.
- 1.6. The AONB Management Plan 2023-2028 follows on from the AONB Management Plan 2018-2023, which has been guiding activities and decisions over that time. The AONB Management Plan lists (on page 23) a number of actions / outcomes arising from the 2018 – 23 AONB Management Plan. The new AONB Plan is the fourth version of the Plan to be published since the CROW Act requirement to prepare such documents came into force.
- 1.7. The review of the AONB Management Plan began in January 2021. The review was led by the AONB staff team and has been governed by the Partnership and the Joint Advisory Committee. The review process followed guidance on the review of AONB management

plans set out by Natural England (Government advisor on AONBs and guidance published by the National Association for AONBs (Now National Landscapes Association))

1.8. A public consultation was undertaken between 3rd May and 2nd August 2023, on a draft of the revised AONB Management Plan, along with Habitats Regulations Assessment. The comments received were considered in finalising the AONB Management Plan. East Suffolk Council provided comments as part of the consultation where these addressed points of detail and not fundamental concerns. East Suffolk Council are in agreement that comments provided have been addressed.

1.9. The renewed AONB Management Plan is attached as Appendix A to this report. The AONB Management Plan sets out a Vision, Themes and Policies for the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths in the mid-2040s, including:

*Management Plan Vision including:*

- *Environmental Vision*
- *Social Vision*
- *Economic Vision*

*Management Plan Themes including:*

- *Landscape*
- *Coast and Estuaries*
- *Nature Recovery*
- *Land Use and Planning*
- *Farming*
- *Forestry and Woodland*
- *Landscapes for All*
- *Climate Change*
- *Working Together*

*Management Plan Policies:*

- *Landscape*
- *Coasts and Estuaries*
- *Nature Recovery*
- *Lands Use and Planning*
- *Landscapes for All*
- *Climate Change*
- *Working Together*

1.10. The renewed AONB Management Plan meets the requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) that places a duty on local authorities to prepare and publish a plan at five-year intervals.

## **2. Introduction**

2.1. As stated in section 1.0 Background.

### **3. Proposal**

- 3.1. That the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-2028 (“the AONB Management Plan”), as attached at Appendix A to this report, is endorsed and adopted by East Suffolk Council

### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1. East Suffolk Council contribute a total of £50,080 per year to the National Landscape Partnership. The payments would continue, and the completion of the AONB Management Plan would not affect this sum. Part of this contribution supports the burden on East Suffolk Council to produce and review the AONB Management Plan as outlined above.

### **5. Legal Implications**

- 5.1. The renewed AONB Management Plan meets the requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) that places a duty on local authorities to prepare and publish a plan at five-year intervals. By endorsing the AONB Management Plan, East Suffolk Council meets these requirements. The AONB Management Plan has been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. It has also been subject to a Habitats Regulation Assessment, in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). An Equality Impact Assessment was also undertaken to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

### **6. Risk Implications**

- 6.1. There are no risks envisaged in relation to the endorsement and adoption of the AONB Management Plan.

### **7. Options**

- 7.1. Agree the recommendation to endorse and adopt the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-2028. The existing Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan has reached the end of its timespan (2018-2023). The renewed The Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan meets the requirement of Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) that places a duty on local authorities to prepare and publish a plan at five-year intervals.
- 7.2. The recommendation will ensure East Suffolk Council support and help deliver the vision, themes and management policies set out within the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-28.
- 7.3. East Suffolk Council, as a Member of the Suffolk & Essex Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership, along with other constituent Councils have been consulted on the emerging plan since June 2023 with comments and recommendations provided to help shape and deliver the updated plan.
- 7.4. Alternatively, not to agree the recommendation, would result in East Suffolk Council not meeting the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) Section 89. Additionally, the plan would be undermined should the Local Authority not show support and endorsement and adoption of the plan.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1. That the Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2023-2028 (“the AONB Management Plan”), as attached at Appendix A to this report, is endorsed and adopted by East Suffolk Council.

## **9. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 9.1. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) (Section 89) places a duty on local authorities to prepare and publish a plan at five-year intervals. In endorsing and adopting the AONB Management Plan East Suffolk Council will be meeting this statutory requirement. Further the review of the AONB Management Plan provides an up-to-date basis for the authority in furthering the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.

## **10. Conclusions/Next Steps**

- 10.1. To ensure East Suffolk Council continue the support and promotion of the next five-year AONB management plan including its vision and management policies.

## Areas of consideration comments

### Section 151 Officer comments:

Not applicable

### Monitoring Officer comments:

Not applicable

### Equality, Diversity and Inclusion/EQIA:

The AONB Management Plan has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment undertaken by the National Landscapes staff team that is hosted at Suffolk County Council. No Impact.

### Safeguarding:

Not applicable

### Crime and Disorder:

Not applicable

### Corporate Services implications:

*(i.e., Legal, Finance, Procurement, Human Resources, Digital, Customer Services, Asset Management)*

No comments

### Residents and Businesses consultation/consideration:

Not applicable.

## Appendices:

<b>Appendix A</b>	The Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths AONB Management Plan 2023-28, December 2023
<b>Appendix B</b>	Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report, June 2023
<b>Appendix C</b>	Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report, September 2023

## Background reference papers:

None.