



Suffolk Coast and Heaths

Management Plan Summary 2008-2013

Suffolk Coast and Heaths - An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Welcome to the summary of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2008-2013

In 2000, the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act placed a requirement on local authorities to review Management Plans for AONBs in their area every five years. This plan is the second to be published for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB since the CRoW Act became law. We are the first AONB to go through the five-year review process and one of the first AONBs to have had the environmental impact of our plan formally assessed. Our new Management Plan covers the period 2008-2013, but the Action Plan that forms part of it will be reviewed and updated annually.

The importance of this document cannot be overstated and it will be a vital tool in the long term care of the AONB. At its heart is a new twenty-year vision that sets out in detail our long-term goals, both for the conservation of the AONB and to ensure it meets the needs of residents and visitors too.

Virtually all the Suffolk Coast and Heaths is privately owned, so it's vital that we have the support of landowners if we are to achieve our goals. Fortunately, a considerable part of the AONB is owned by organisations such as the RSPB, National Trust, Natural England, Forestry Commission and Suffolk Wildlife Trust. These organisations share our aspirations for the long-term conservation of the area and are key members of the Partnership of organisations that have agreed to implement the Management Plan.

To have the best chance of success, we need the support of a wide range of organisations and individuals, including the local community and businesses. Twenty six partner organisations have signed a commitment to support and implement this Management Plan, greatly increasing the likelihood that it will have a positive impact on the area.

Cllr David Wood
Chairman of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership

Introduction

Why is the Management Plan needed?

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan seeks to co-ordinate the action of the organisations that make up the AONB Partnership while also setting a framework for any organisation or individual whose activities will have an impact on the objectives for the area. It sets targets for action, especially where it is important for organisations to work together or where action might fall between responsibilities. The Plan also identifies the monitoring needed to identify changes occurring in the AONB and the impacts of the management process.

The Management Plan also has a role in supporting the Local Development Frameworks of the local authorities, identifying issues, aims, objectives and actions that are relevant to the AONB and that can be underpinned by planning policy. It is also set within the context of other local plans and strategies, such as Local Area Agreements and Sustainable Community Strategies.

What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are landscapes that receive special protection from the UK Government. There are 49 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The first AONB was designated in 1956 and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB had its designation confirmed in 1970.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. In pursuing this purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

What does 'Natural Beauty' mean?

In its guidance to AONBs, Natural England defines 'natural beauty' as: 'not just the look of the landscape but also the landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries'.

Responsibility for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB

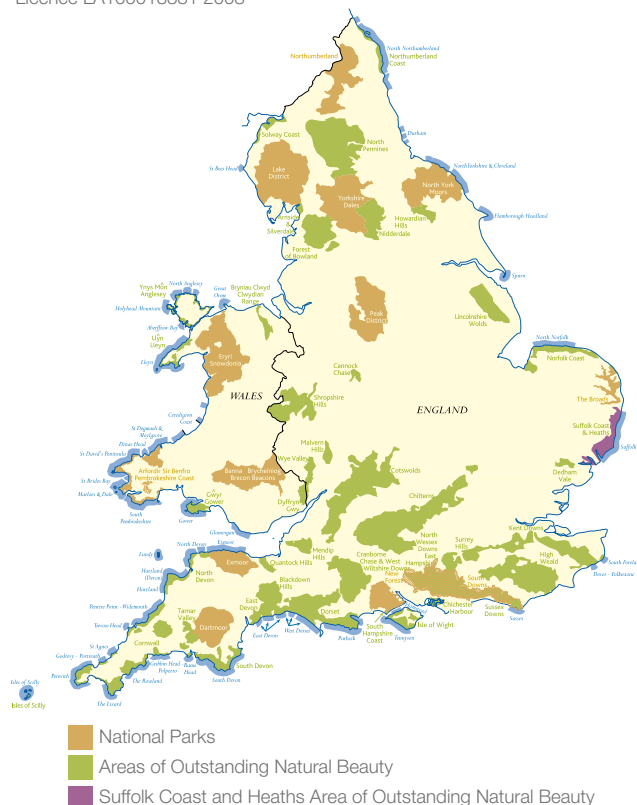
The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB is the responsibility of the local authorities within whose jurisdiction it falls: Suffolk County Council, Waveney District Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Babergh District Council. Section 84 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) empowers local authorities to 'take all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB'.

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership and AONB Unit

To ensure the efficient and coordinated management of the AONB, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership was formed in 1993. The Partnership is made up of organisations with a particular interest in the AONB who work together to implement the Management Plan. It encompasses the local authorities, government agencies, community and voluntary organisations active in the area, all of which have made a public commitment to work together to implement the Management Plan. The Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership is made up of 26 organisations, providing a high level of stakeholder representation.

Protected landscapes in England and Wales

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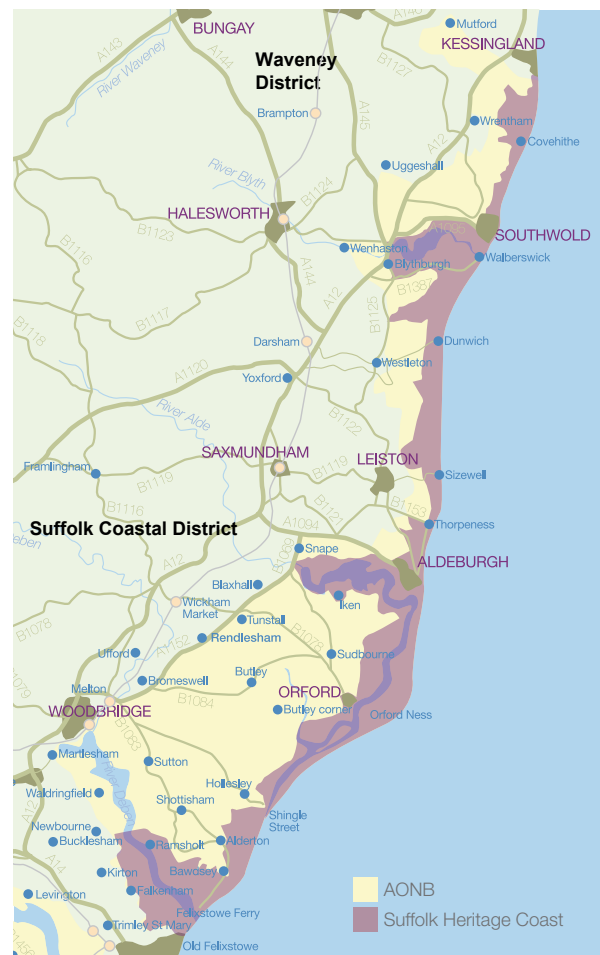
Members of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership:

Babergh District Council	Country Land and Business Association
East of England Development Agency	East of England Tourism
English Heritage	Environment Agency
Essex County Council	Forestry Commission
Haven Gateway Partnership	Ipswich Borough Council
National Farmers' Union	Natural England
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Suffolk ACRE
Suffolk Association of Local Councils	Suffolk Coastal Business Forum
Suffolk Coastal District Council	Suffolk County Council
Suffolk Preservation Society	Suffolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Suffolk Tourism Partnership	Suffolk Wildlife Trust
Tending District Council	The Crown Estate
The National Trust	Waveney District Council

To act as a focal point and champion for the AONB and to co-ordinate the work of the Partnership, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit was established. The team currently consists of seven members of staff and is funded primarily by the local authorities with responsibility for the AONB and by Natural England.

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB an overview

The designated area of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB covers 403 square kilometres, stretching from Kessingland in the north to the River Stour in the south. The Management Plan also covers the whole of the Shotley Peninsula and an area on the south side of the Stour estuary that the Partnership wishes to see designated as an AONB. Although many AONB policies in Regional, Structure and Local Plans refer specifically to the statutory designated area, the additional land has many similar features and the Partnership is keen to see it managed to the same standard. The Management Plan also covers the Suffolk Heritage Coast, which is largely contained within the AONB.



The area covered by the Plan

Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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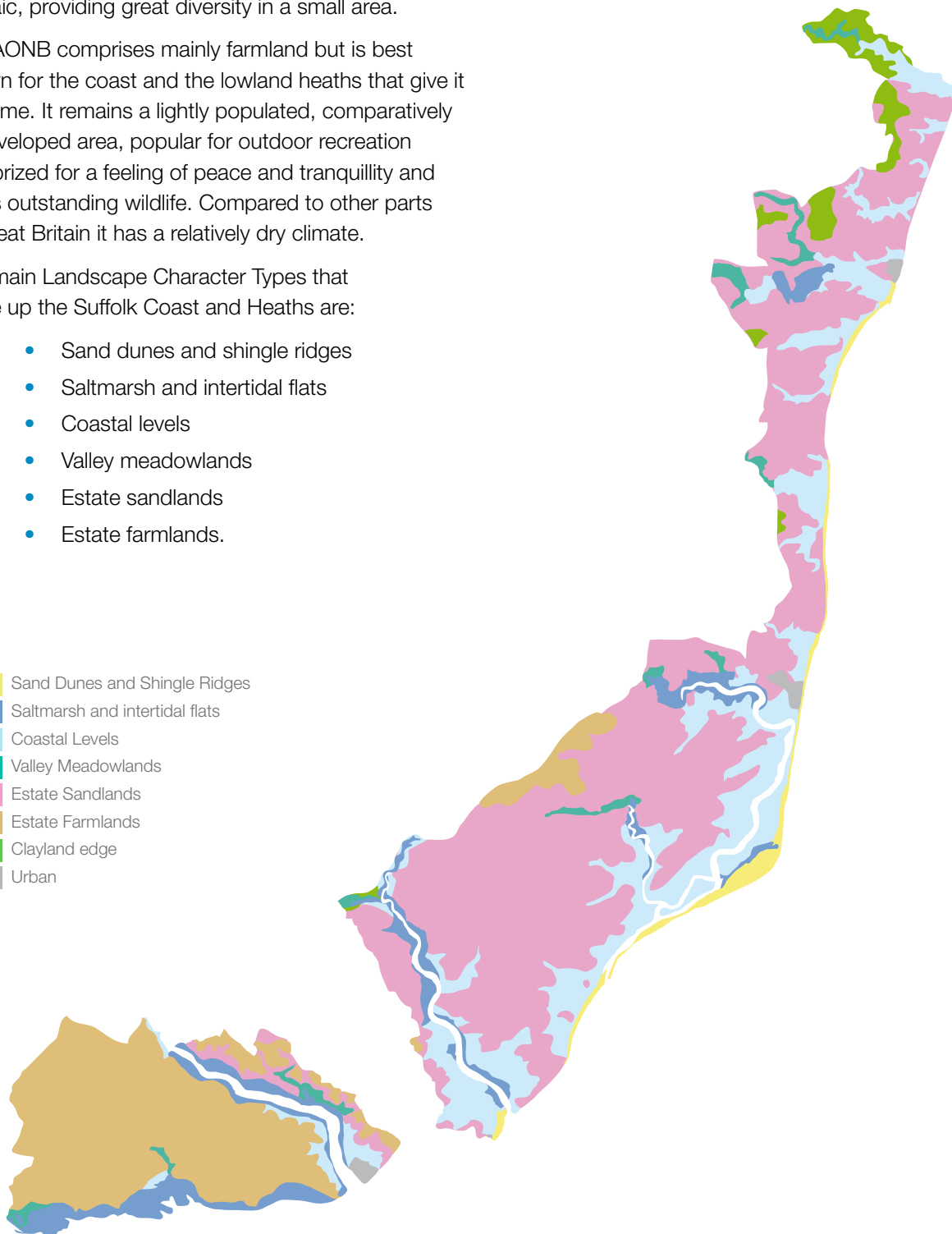
The character and special qualities of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths

The unique character of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB is a product of its underlying geology, shaped by the effects of the sea and the interaction of people with the landscape. It is a mainly flat or gently rolling landscape, often open and with few commanding viewpoints. In many places, and especially near the coast, landscape features lie in an intimate mosaic, providing great diversity in a small area.

The AONB comprises mainly farmland but is best known for the coast and the lowland heaths that give it its name. It remains a lightly populated, comparatively undeveloped area, popular for outdoor recreation and prized for a feeling of peace and tranquillity and for its outstanding wildlife. Compared to other parts of Great Britain it has a relatively dry climate.

The main Landscape Character Types that make up the Suffolk Coast and Heaths are:

- Sand dunes and shingle ridges
- Saltmarsh and intertidal flats
- Coastal levels
- Valley meadowlands
- Estate sandlands
- Estate farmlands.



Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and additional project area: Simplified landscape character

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Sand Dunes and Shingle Ridges

- a dynamic environment of sand and shingle on the coast

This landscape type comprises the low-lying coast of the AONB, a naturally dynamic environment, shaped and reshaped by the action of the sea. In places the coastline is actively eroding while, elsewhere, sand and shingle is being deposited, creating semi-permanent features and allowing specialised shingle plants to become established. The most significant coastal feature is Orfordness, a shingle spit of massive proportions that, with its pattern of shingle ridges, vegetation and pools, is a geological and geomorphological feature of international significance. It is also important for its wildlife and historical interest.

There is no continuous coast road and settlements are small in scale. In spite, or perhaps because of, this the coast is a major tourist destination, an industry that contributes significantly to the local economy. Much of the coast has been given additional formal protection (designation), in recognition of its high wildlife value and is being actively managed.

Saltmarsh and Intertidal Flats

- the saline, tidal areas of rivers

These are the tidal areas of rivers, subject to the saline influence of the sea and varying periods of inundation each day. Human intervention over many centuries has reduced the extent of the AONB's five estuaries, by creating many miles of man-made walls that separate them from the surrounding land.



Vegetated shingle, Shingle Street

The AONB's estuaries are popular for recreational sailing and there are extensive moorings and boatyards that contribute to the local economy. They also support internationally important numbers of wading birds and wildfowl and are designated as part of the European network of nature conservation sites (Natura2000 sites) The major ports of Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich, though just outside the AONB, are located on the Stour and Orwell estuaries.



Mudflats on the River Alde

Coastal Levels

- low lying land found beside estuaries and the coast, protected by sea walls



Grazing marsh on the Shotley peninsula

This landscape type, created by the enclosure of former salt marsh between the 12th and 19th centuries, has been traditionally used for grazing. However, modern pumps and better drainage have allowed extensive areas to be converted to arable. Where grazing is still practised (e.g. dairy herds or specialist, niche products such as organic beef), farming contributes to preserving landscape character and to wildlife conservation. Areas of permanent shallow freshwater are dominated by extensive reed beds and are of high conservation importance. Coastal levels have high amenity value for tourism and leisure based activities such as walking and bird watching. They are also the location for most marinas, boatyards and port installations.

Valley Meadowlands

- river valley grasslands above the tidal range

Comprising only a small part of the AONB, this landscape type is found in the middle reaches of the river valleys above the tidal influence or where streams and small rivers have no direct connection with the sea. They are normally characterised by grass fields in the flood plain that, where waterlogged, can become dominated by reed beds. In some areas they have become wooded and, in places, extensive drainage has allowed arable farming. There are very few buildings, limited mainly to just an occasional isolated house or farmstead. The lower reaches of most valley meadowlands are under some form of conservation management.



Valley meadowland

Estate Sandlands

- the light lands inland and north of the River Deben, a landscape of farmland, forest and the remaining fragments of Sandlings heath



Westleton Heath

The Estate Sandlands is the largest landscape type in the AONB; a narrow hinterland of acidic, sandy, free-draining soil found behind much of the length of the coast. The landscape is sparsely settled with small villages and a scattering of estate farms. The western edge is fringed by heavier soils with ancient woodlands and historic parklands.

Extensive areas of lowland heath developed here during the medieval period, although much has been lost to agriculture, commercial forestry and other development. What remains is of very high conservation value and supports nationally rare wildlife. 85% of the heaths are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and most of the larger sites are designated as part of the European network of nature conservation sites (Natura2000 sites). Most areas of lowland heath have been designated as open access for pedestrians and are popular areas for horse riding and other recreational activities.

Estate Farmlands

- the better soils south of the River Deben, with a landscape of winding lanes, parkland and ancient woodland

This landscape type occurs mainly in the south of the AONB, on the Felixstowe and Shotley peninsulas. The soils are generally less impoverished than the Estate Sandlands to the north and the landscape is primarily agricultural and clustered with medium sized farms. Where irrigation is present, vegetable cultivation can be highly productive. There are some notable hedges of holly with pollard oaks and suckering elm and a substantial number of ancient woods. Meandering lanes and a dense network of rights of way are a feature of the Shotley Peninsula.



Harkstead

Social and environmental policy context and issues

To be successful, the management of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths must take account of the prevailing social, political, economic and environmental situation. What follows is a brief summary of the most important issues.

Climate change

There is a growing weight of scientific opinion supporting the view that global climate change, influenced by the human use of energy and raw materials, is occurring. Any significant change is likely to present a threat to the Suffolk Coast and Heaths and there is a pressing need to understand its implications. Critical issues in the short to medium term are likely to relate to water (flood risk and sustainable use of resources), farming and biodiversity.

The Suffolk coast is particularly vulnerable to the threat of sea level rise, and coastal management and flood defence are the most important issues currently facing communities living in the AONB. Integrated Coastal Zone Management is a local priority and Suffolk Coast and Heaths Partnership could play an important role in helping the regional and countywide initiatives that are currently emerging.

Land use, biodiversity and geodiversity

The UK Government has recently ratified the European Landscape Convention and preliminary work has started on a landscape strategy for the eastern region. Within the AONB, the network of important European Natura 2000 sites is underpinned by strong legislation, and Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) for the most important habitats and species have been created. Water-related European Directives are starting to influence national and regional planning and may bring beneficial impacts to the AONB.

Farming

Arable farming within the AONB remains dynamic, influenced by market forces and the amount of support provided by government. Crop preferences and farming methods may be subject to rapid changes as farmers adapt to the opportunities provided by the prevailing economic situation.

Where irrigation is possible on the light lands within the AONB, production can be intensive and precise cropping regimes can be created that suit vegetable production. As part of the new rotations, turf production and outdoor pig units have become important.

A thriving arable farming industry is beneficial to the local economy but it can also be potentially damaging to the character of the AONB. Current issues include soil damage resulting from de-stoning and turf production; aerial irrigation rigs and the use of reflective plastic in vegetable cultivation; the loss of headlands and over-wintering stubbles, vital for farmland birds and biodiversity; increased water abstraction often at or over the environmental limits for much of the AONB and the growing trend for the creation of winter-filled reservoirs; soil loss due to run-off and wind erosion; and diffuse pollution in run-off.

Dairy farming has significantly declined in the AONB as a result of increased production costs. Sheep farming on heather-dominated heaths is not attractive to commercial farming and is mainly undertaken for conservation reasons. On heaths dominated by acid grassland, sheep farming is more productive but only really viable with support from environmental schemes.

Support schemes such as the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme (ESA) and, to a lesser extent, Countryside Stewardship (CS) have helped to ensure that many potentially harmful changes within farming have been ameliorated. Significant areas of grazing have been retained thanks to ESA and help for heathlands has come from CS. The long-term future of these payments has been questioned with the arrival of Environmental Stewardship. A clearer long-term picture needs to emerge or the river valley grasslands may well decline.

There is a growing awareness of the value of locally grown food, whether for environmental, cost or quality benefits, or to emphasise and support local distinctiveness. Local initiatives, such as farmers' markets and farm shops, are a welcome development in this context.

Forestry

The Sandlings Forest, managed by the Forestry Commission, has provided vertical and textural elements in the landscape and is now recognised as an important part of the local area. Forestry provides many benefits beyond wood products and new management policies have accepted that the social, recreational and biodiversity contributions made by the Sandlings Forest can be very valuable. Extensive grazing incorporating heath and former heath is being tried, and a diversification in the species make-up and structure of the forest is being developed to meet the wider public and biodiversity interests.

Suffolk Coast and Heaths – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Irrigation and plastic



Cut turf, Sutton



Tunstall Forest



Rock armour, East Lane, Bawdsey



Vulnerable sea defences at Minsmere RSPB Nature Reserve

Development

The evolving Regional Spatial Strategy identifies significant growth requirements in the region along with strengthened environmental policies for designated areas. The Haven Gateway encompasses the southern part of the AONB and is recognised by the Government as a 'Growth Point'. This will bring very significant investment in housing and employment that will primarily be met in the urban areas bordering or just outside the AONB. While this will not have a direct impact on the character of the AONB, an increased population bordering the AONB will have a significant knock-on effect in terms of additional pressure for access and recreation.

Demand for major new developments (e.g. the Port of Felixstowe or Sizewell Nuclear Power Station) will be in conflict with the conservation requirements of the AONB. The current nuclear power station at Sizewell and its associated infrastructure has a considerable adverse impact on the natural beauty of the area. Its construction was permitted following a decision that there was an over-riding national need, and it is anticipated that any further development at Sizewell would be judged against the same criteria, and that the dynamic nature of the coastline would also be taken into consideration. Should consent be granted for such a development then a comprehensive package of measures would be required to mitigate the adverse impacts.

Within the AONB, there is strong demand for residential property within much of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, either as first or second homes. This demand pushes up prices with the result that local people are often priced out of the market. Consequently, the priority of any new housing development should be to provide affordable housing to meet local needs that is sympathetic to the local vernacular style.

Tourism is vital to the economy of the AONB but must be developed in sustainable ways. The industry depends on the high quality surroundings provided by the AONB, but a stronger mechanism to allow both businesses and visitors to contribute to its care and wellbeing is needed. Positive examples of co-operation - such as the Connect scheme - will help to push good practice forwards.

The importance and popularity of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths for water-borne recreation is reflected in the demand for landing, mooring and marina facilities, and the strength of the local boatbuilding and servicing industry. Sailing is relatively benign in terms of its impact on the landscape, but its supporting infrastructure can have a significant negative impact on natural beauty. The continuing popularity of water-based recreation means that the demand for further growth in this area is likely.

In general, care needs to be taken that piecemeal development does not produce cumulative adverse impacts. It is vital that all proposals pay attention to local character and the particular sensitivity of the AONB.

Tranquillity

The peace and tranquillity of the AONB and the lack of light pollution - all facets of its natural beauty - are greatly treasured, allowing people to relax and 'recharge their batteries'. With more cars - the only realistic travel option for many - busier skies, mechanised farming, increasing lighting and mobile technology that allows us to do more in remote places, the threats to the area's tranquillity are increasing. Managing traffic and taking care to constrain unneeded noise and light pollution must be an increasing priority within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths.

Future development within the AONB must recognise the essential value of tranquillity and build in solutions that respect this special quality. This may include such easy 'wins' as low level/directional/timed lighting, traffic calming and alternative transport options. Work is also needed to explore how tranquil areas can be mapped and retained.

Access and recreation

The landscape, coast and wildlife assets of the AONB mean that the demand for access is well above the average. There is increasing participation in countryside activities and the area is one of the most important locations for sailing in the whole of the UK.

Suffolk County Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) has set six objectives aimed at providing a network that is accessible and well maintained. The impact of the recently-created Open Access arrangements cannot yet be assessed and the Government is committed to providing similar rights for access to the coast and estuaries. Coastal access should enable more people to enjoy the AONB's pleasures, but will require effective and detailed local planning to ensure satisfactory implementation.



Sizewell Nuclear Power Station



Beachwatch



Aldeburgh



Congestion on the outskirts of Southwold

Greater public access can translate into disturbance and damage to wildlife (particularly through uncontrolled dogs), pressure on popular locations ('honeypots'), adverse impacts on residents, and significant pressure on visitor resources. Shingle and estuarine wildlife are particularly vulnerable to visitor pressure and the sheer number of people visiting the area can, at times, impact on tranquillity. There are also knock-on effects in terms of demand for facilities like car parks, toilets and refreshments. If designed for peak capacity, the facilities will remain obvious even when numbers of visitors are low.

Yet without the chance to enjoy the beauties and pleasures of the AONB, it will always be harder to gain the necessary commitment to its conservation. A positive and balanced approach is needed if people are to have an enjoyable experience while recognising the responsibilities that come with the rights of access.

Understanding and behaviour

The AONB designation should be regarded as a benefit for all partner organisations and local communities. However, with that benefit comes the need to take ownership of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths by promoting its value and raising awareness. Currently, within the Partnership, this activity is frequently left to the AONB Unit and, while they may have a co-ordinating role, more organisations need to be actively seeking ways to relate to the designation.

With so many competing demands on a small area, the impact of what people do becomes critical. Currently, most users of the AONB live either inside or within 15 miles of the boundary, an area that includes the major towns of Ipswich and Lowestoft. Visitor management is an issue for many locations within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, so the focus for awareness, promotion and interpretation should be directed at this core audience.

The provision of material for young people is very important. Clarity from educators about what resources would be most appropriate, cross-related to AONB objectives, may highlight where development would be valuable.

The presence of litter within the AONB and especially at the coast is unwelcome. Food packaging is a major source of coastal rubbish along with discarded fishing tackle and dog waste. The AONB Unit co-ordinates Beachwatch and Adopt-A-Beach in Suffolk – an excellent example of Partnership and community engagement, aimed at tackling a key issue. This involvement of both the Partnership and the wider community needs to grow, as does an awareness of how to reduce, reuse and recycle our waste.

Our twenty-year vision for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths

So that our work to care for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths can be measured against an ideal outcome, we present here our vision for the Suffolk Coast and Heaths in 2028 - twenty years from now. Our vision statement builds on that published as part of the previous statutory Management Plan (2002). It has been divided into two sections in order to separate outcomes that are 'cross-cutting' or broadly applicable to all protected landscapes from those that are specific to the particular landscape of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths. It has also been updated to reflect the current environmental context.

Our vision stems from the primary aim of AONB designation to conserve and enhance natural beauty (see introduction). Our vision also takes account of the need to manage the resources, features and development in a sustainable way and to meet the demand for recreation where this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty. The objectives and actions contained in section five of this Management Plan are based on these aims and may be seen as steps towards achieving the vision presented here.

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths in 2028

'A high quality landscape, its special qualities retained and enhanced'

As a result of strong leadership and effective Partnership action, the area's natural beauty has been successfully retained and, wherever possible, enhanced. The landscape, while dynamic and changing, continues to have the character recognised in the original designation. The challenges posed by climate change and sea level rise have been met and, wherever possible, mitigated. New development has been sympathetic to the area's architectural heritage and blends harmoniously with the existing built and natural environment. The AONB designation has been extended to include the Stour estuary and its southern shore.

'High quality facilities and integrated transport give everyone the opportunity to enjoy the AONB'

Excellent visitor facilities and information enable the public to appreciate the area and enjoy the many opportunities for recreation. High quality access extends to the full length of the coast but remains fully consistent with the needs of conservation. Flexible and integrated transport options are readily available and meet the needs of both residents and visitors. Walking and cycling are practical choices within a sustainable transport network. Residents and visitors are aware of their responsibilities, actively helping to retain the area's special qualities.

'Passionate local communities are actively engaged with their environment'

There is a deep appreciation and understanding of the area's special qualities by local people. Communities are fully engaged in the management of their environment and the challenge of sustainable living, and carbon emission reduction has been embraced. There is social justice for those affected by flooding and other phenomena caused by climate change.

'A thriving economy: a landscape of opportunity'

New and established enterprises use the area in an informed and sustainable way, flourishing in a beautiful environment. Within a broad-based local economy, sustainable tourism is widespread and makes a significant contribution to the care of the area. Farmers markets are commonplace. Energy production processes do not detract from the high value of the landscape.

'Tranquillity has been retained and undesirable intrusion prevented'

The importance of peace and tranquillity to the character of the AONB is fully recognised and sources of noise and visual intrusion have been resisted or mitigated. The area's dark night skies are valued as an important feature and continue to be retained.

Our vision for the key landscape areas

'An outstanding lowland coast, managed for people and wildlife'

An integrated approach to managing the coastal zone has enhanced its value for people and wildlife. A careful balance has been struck between the need to safeguard communities and key infrastructure while ensuring that the dynamic character of the coastline is retained. Improved public awareness and active management has reversed the declining condition of local coastal habitats and provided robust protection for coastal BAP species. The loss of freshwater wetlands to coastal erosion or flooding has been planned for and replacement habitat created, locally whenever possible. The erosion of maritime cliffs and slopes continues to replenish sand and shingle beaches along the coastline. Coastal farmland is managed with particular environmental sensitivity and landowners receive financial support for managing land for flood or sea defence. Public access is actively encouraged but is consistent with the high conservation value of the coastline.

‘The estuaries retain their landscape and wildlife value while meeting the needs of recreation and industry’

The estuaries are proactively managed to balance the demands of recreation and commerce with the needs of wildlife, preserving their natural dynamic character and contributing to quality of life. Rich inter-tidal feeding grounds have been retained while areas of salt marsh are expanded to enhance the effectiveness of flood defences and increase biodiversity. Heritage features are protected in context or, where this is impossible, rescued and recorded.

‘River valleys are managed as natural systems, providing space for water and wildlife’

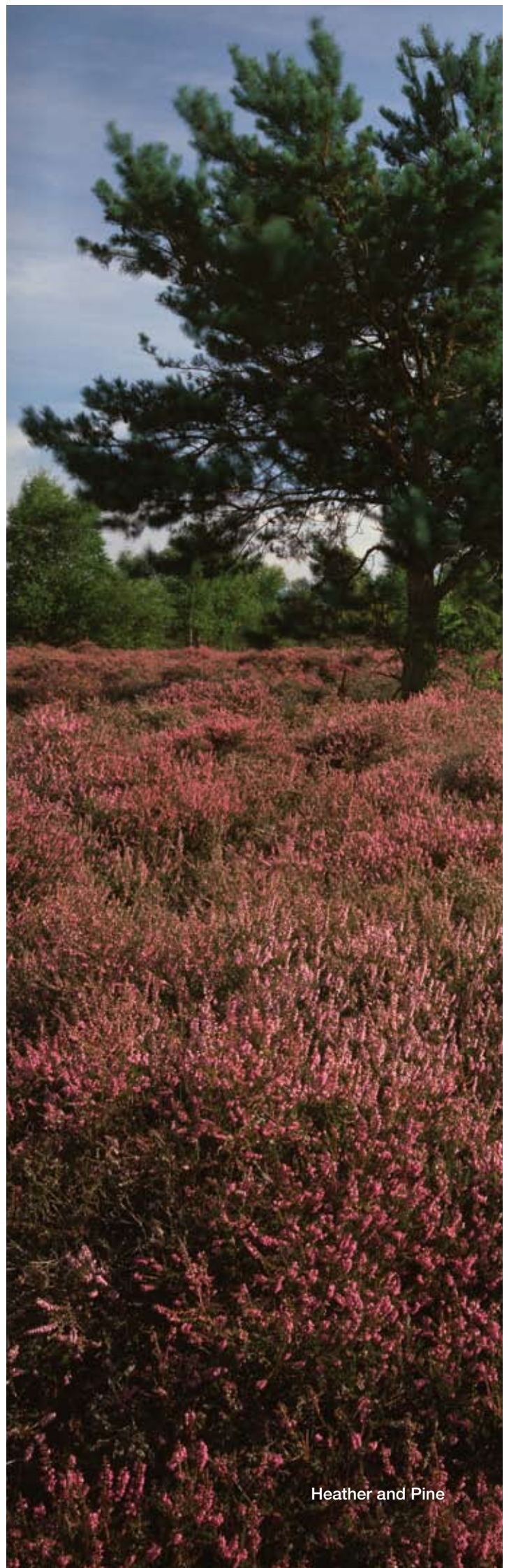
The importance of naturally functioning rivers and streams has been understood and embraced by the community. Work is underway to allow rivers and streams to reconnect with their floodplains and for natural fluvial landforms such as meanders, riffles, pools, bars and bluffs to develop. The role of floodplains in holding and gradually releasing storm water has been understood and plays a key role in mitigating the impacts of storm events associated with climate change. Housing development no longer impinges upon floodplains. Fragmentation of riverbank habitat has been stemmed, and many river valleys are now effectively functioning biodiversity corridors, containing a mosaic of woodland, grassland and fen.

‘The Sandlings heaths have increased in size and forest areas have diversified’

Active management has expanded the area of Sandlings heath, reducing fragmentation and safeguarding biodiversity. Grazing has increased and spread into adjoining forest and grassland, creating open vistas with scattered trees and varied textures. The Sandlings forests are managed for the benefit of wildlife and people as well as for their timber, creating a richer, more diverse landscape with high levels of public access.

‘Farming remains economically viable while enhancing biodiversity and landscape character’

Arable farmers make extensive use of agri-environmental schemes to help wildlife, restore landscape detail and retain heritage features. Grazing continues to maintain the open fields and produce diverse habitats. Unsustainable farming practices have been phased out and land managers are recognised as vital contributors to the special qualities of the area.



Heather and Pine

Action Plan

The management of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths must meet three key requirements, arising from the purpose of AONB designation:

Requirement A:

- To conserve and enhance natural beauty
- To maintain the special qualities of the landscape.

Requirement B:

- To manage the assets and resources of the AONB in a sustainable way
- Seeking to meet environmental, economic and social needs.

Requirement C:

- To meet the demand for recreation where this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the management of the land
- Helping people enjoy, understand and value the AONB.

To meet these requirements, there is a series of 14 aims that stem from the Vision and the factors influencing change. These can be seen as the medium term targets.

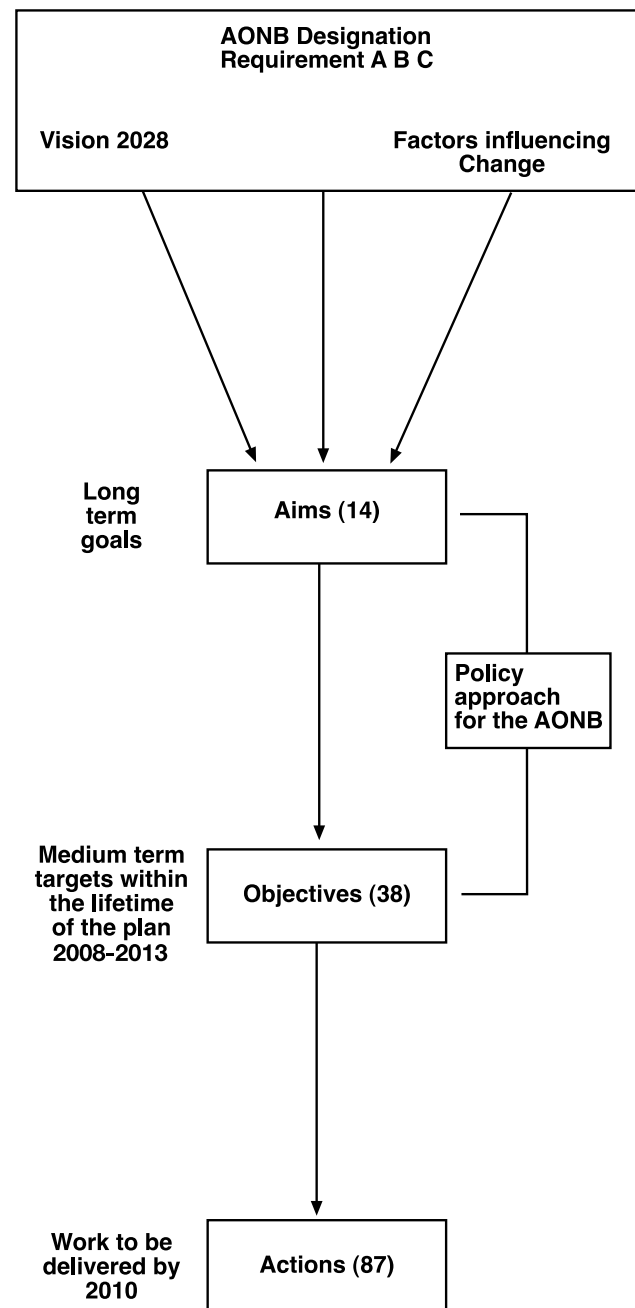
To meet those Aims there is a series of objectives that we will seek to meet within the Plan period i.e. before or by 2013. The Aims and Objectives together define the policy approach to managing the Suffolk Coast and Heaths.

To meet the objectives there is a series of actions to be implemented over the next 3 years. These are the short-term targets. The action plan will be reviewed annually, updating where relevant. There will be a new action plan created mid way through the Plan period.

The actions will require resources and have been prioritised to help to direct resources. The resource needs will be detailed by the lead bodies, with the help of support organisations as relevant. The AONB Partnership and Unit will have an annual business plan developed to direct activities and detail resource needs.

The Actions that are considered essential are highlighted in yellow.

A key to abbreviations can be found on the inside back Cover.



Priority actions relevant to all three AONB management requirements

Aim 1: Develop mitigation and adaptation techniques to climate change that will conserve the special qualities of the AONB						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
1.1 Improve understanding of the implications of climate change on example species, habitats, landscapes and the characteristics of the AONB.	1.1a Initiate a task group to investigate the impacts of climate change on characteristic landscapes/habitats/species of the AONB and develop a methodology to assess future management options for at least one indicative habitat.	NE	Sandings Group, Coastal BAP Grp		●	●
1.2 Support the need for climate change mitigation at the local level.	1.2a Promote the concept of reducing carbon emissions to local communities.	SCHU		●	●	●
	1.2b Use the Greenest County concept to underpin a campaign to increase understanding and involvement in seeking a sustainable lifestyle in Suffolk.	SCC	SSP	●	●	●

Aim 2: Integrate planning and management of the coast and estuaries to meet AONB objectives so that all interests are recognised and the special qualities of the AONB are conserved						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
2.1 Develop an integrated plan for the sustainable management of the coastal zone that incorporates shoreline and estuary flood defence and coast protection and is recognised in the Local Development Framework.	2.1a Establish a mechanism to bring relevant authorities together to take forward ICZM in Suffolk, within the context of the East Anglian coastline.	SCDC	SCHU, SCC, WDC, EA, NE, EH	●	●	
	2.1b Establish a mechanism to bring relevant authorities together to take forward ICZM in Suffolk, within the context of the East Anglian coastline.	SCDC	WDC, SCC, EA, NE, SCHU, EH	●	●	
2.2 Establish the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Partnership as a local champion for ICZM.	2.2a Develop a campaign for the coast that enables local communities to identify what they value about the Suffolk coast and estuaries and to debate how to adapt to the changes faced.	SCHU	Partnership	●	●	●
	2.2b Facilitate and develop local estuary management groups based on the estuaries and their surroundings.	SCHU	EA, NE, WDC, SCDC, SCC, TDC, BDC, IBC	●	●	●
	2.2c Produce interpretation that improves understanding about the issues facing the coast and estuaries for (a) schools, (b) decision makers, (c) the public.	SCHU	EA, NE, Vol orgs, EH, WDC, SCDC, SCC, TDC, BDC, IBC	●	●	●
	2.2d Develop a coastal based multi-project under the European Interreg programme to deliver innovative ICZM projects.	SCHU	Partnership	●		

Requirement A: To conserve and enhance natural beauty

Aim 3: Conserve landscape character and enhance the distinctive nature of the AONB						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
3.1. Refine understanding and clarify the elements that make up the distinctive character of the local landscape.	3.1a Develop bespoke landscape type descriptions for the AONB in an accessible format and language, tested at community level.	SCC	SCHU, SCDC, WDC, BDC, TDC, NE	●		
	3.1b Commission a level 3 Landscape Character Assessment and explore issues of landscape sensitivities.	SCC	SCDC, WDC, BDC, TDC, NE, NE, SCHU		●	●
	3.1c Review consistency of Landscape Character reference in Local Development Documents and seek to apply consistently through the development control process.	SCDC, WDC, BDC, TDC	SCHU, SCC		●	
3.2 Seek improvements to the landscape through the removal of eyesores.	3.2a Develop and lead a programme of restoration of landscape quality.	SCHU	FWAG, CLA, NFU, EH, conservation orgs			●
	3.2b Co-ordinate under-grounding of low voltage wires projects and lobby Ofgem for continuation of scheme.	SCHU	NE	●	●	
3.3 Designate land of high landscape importance as AONB.	3.3a Continue to press for the designation of the Stour estuary and its southern shore as AONB.	TDC	ECC, NE	●	●	●

Requirement A: To conserve and enhance natural beauty

Aim 4: Conserve biodiversity and lessen fragmentation of habitats						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
4.1 Ensure 95% of all Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in favourable or recovering condition by 2010.	4.1a Lead a project to tackle the remaining barriers to achieving the SSSI target in the AONB, through targeted action between Partners.	NE	RSPB, SWT, NT, EA, CLA, NFU	●	●	●
4.2 Develop strategic plans to lessen fragmentation of AONB priority habitats.	4.2a Devise a five year strategy for the creation of new lowland heath/acid grassland.	Sandlings Group		●	●	
	4.2b Devise a five year strategy, as part of an integrated coastal zone management approach and relating to the coastal vision exercise, to at least maintain but ideally expand the BAP coastal habitats.	Coastal BAP Grp	NE, EA, LAs	●	●	
	4.2c Run a consultation project in the Alde to Blyth area on a vision of how to manage biodiversity and habitats on a landscape scale to adapt to climate change.	FC	SCHU, NE, SWT, RSPB, NT, SCC, CLA, NFU		●	●
	4.2d Develop a sub-area based, shared vision for land management in the area between the Alde and the Deben as a model approach for moving towards a more natural forest and countryside.	RSPB / FC	NE, SWT, SCHU SALC, NFU, CLA		●	●
4.3 Ensure that all AONB priority habitats and species have active and relevant Biodiversity Action Plans and that progress is being made.	4.3a Supply the Suffolk and Essex Biodiversity Partnerships with agreed list of AONB priority species and habitats and establish a reporting procedure for the AONB Partnership's monitoring.	SCHU	Partnership; Sandlings Grp; Coastal BAP Grp	●		
	4.3b Increase involvement of volunteers in surveying and managing habitats to improve baseline and foster understanding.	SCHU	SWT, RSPB, NT, FC, NE	●	●	●

Requirement A: To conserve and enhance natural beauty

Aim 5: Conserve the historic resources of the area including landscapes, archaeology and the built environment						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
5.1 Develop Historic Landscape Characterisation as a tool to further historic asset management.	5.1a Complete the revision of the Historic Landscape Characterisation and produce interpretation to help understand it.	SCC/ Archaeology Unit	EH	●	●	
5.2 Improve awareness of the range and importance of the historic assets of the AONB.	5.2a Raise awareness and understanding of the historic dimension along the coast by developing interpretative material based on the strategic assessment.	SCC/ Archaeology Unit	SCHU, EH		●	●
	5.2b Develop and run programme of training to inform advisers, planners and land managers of the distinctive and characteristic historic features of the AONB.	SCHU	SCC/ Archaeology Unit, EH	●	●	●
	5.2c Develop a strategy for retaining the distinctive and historic nature of hedges in the AONB.	SCHU	SCC, SBRC, vol orgs, ECC		●	●

Requirement A: To conserve and enhance natural beauty

Aim 6: Manage farming and forestry in a sustainable way that enhances landscape and historic character, biodiversity and geodiversity						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
6.1 Use agri-environment support schemes effectively to encourage sustainable farming within the AONB.	6.1a Press for AONB landscape conservation and enhancement as a priority in agri-environment scheme targeting, and lobby Natural England to adopt them.	Partnership	FWAG, CLA, NFU	●	●	
	6.1b Develop and try an integrated landowner advice project for the AONB working with as many AONB partners as possible.	NE	FWAG, RSPB, SWT, EA, NFU, CLA, SCHU		●	●
6.2 Retain sufficient appropriate grazing livestock to conserve the important and characteristic habitats of the AONB.	6.2a Ensure grazing continues on important semi-natural land by developing a pilot project that implements learning from the regional under-grazing work.	NE	FWAG	●	●	●
6.3 Improve the awareness and understanding of farmers on how they contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the special qualities of the AONB.	6.3a Create a promotional leaflet for landowners on farming to help meet AONB objectives developed with local farmers.	SCHU	FWAG, CLA, NFU	●	●	
	6.3b Hold an annual liaison and training seminar bringing together farmers and farm advisors in the AONB.	FWAG	SCHU, NE	●	●	●
	6.3c Distribute and promote the reservoir design guide.	EA	SCHU, FWAG, NFU, CLA, NE	●	●	
6.4 Develop the multi-objective management of the Sandlings forest to help landscape, biodiversity and recreation.	6.4a Hold at least one annual liaison meeting with stakeholders about management of the Sandlings Forest.	FC	SCHU	●	●	●
	6.4b Develop the management plan for Dunwich Forest, seeking to incorporate wide ranging grazing and fewer internal barriers.	FC	RSPB, SWT, NE, SCHU	●	●	●
	6.4c Develop a strategy for more natural habitats in and around the southern blocks of the Sandlings forest.	FC	Partnership, landowners		●	●

Requirement A: To conserve and enhance natural beauty

Aim 7: Retain the tranquillity of the area						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
7.1 Develop a local level/ AONB wide tranquillity map based on a commonly agreed set of tranquillity detractors.	7.1a Develop local map /definition of tranquillity using CPRE's baseline work.	SCHU / SPS	SCDC, WDC, BDC, TDC, NE		●	
	7.1b Use map/methodology process to produce draft ideas on main tranquillity detractors and undertake public consultation.	SCHU	SCDC, WDC, BDC, TDC, NE		●	
7.2 Identify good practice exemplars that can be promoted throughout the AONB to protect tranquillity.	7.2a Hold Partnership community forum based on the concept of tranquillity to test ideas and identify good practice.	Partnership				●

Aim 8: Conserve the geodiversity of the area						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
8.1 Help progress the implementation of the Suffolk Geodiversity Action Plan where relevant to the AONB.	8.1a Produce an inventory of the main/priority aspects of geodiversity in the AONB.	SGP	SCHU, SCC		●	
8.2 Improve awareness of the links between landscape and geology, landforms and natural processes.	8.2a Provide targeted information to relevant bodies e.g. planners and decision makers.	SGP	EH		●	
	8.2b Produce a suite of geodiversity 'knowledge' fact sheets.	SGP				●

Requirement B: Manage the assets and resources of the AONB in a sustainable way

Aim 9: Have a built environment that reflects local character and is of a scale and form appropriate to the AONB						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
9.1 Establish a consistent approach throughout the AONB on development policies and implementation.	9.1a Hold an annual liaison meeting over implementing development control policies consistently within the AONB.	SCDC / LAs	SCHU, EH	●	●	●
	9.1b Produce the East Suffolk Catchment Abstraction Plan to guide water abstraction in the medium term (cross relates to sustainable farming).	EA		●		
	9.1c Provide design guidance for developers on how to reflect character and appropriate scale and form for new buildings in the AONB.	SPS, SCDC	SCHU, LAs, EH		●	
9.2 Work with Haven Gateway Partnership to maximise gains and minimise adverse impacts for the AONB.	9.2a Publish the green infrastructure strategy for the Haven Gateway and develop an action plan for implementation.	HGP, SCC	LAs, NE, EH	●	●	
	9.2b Pilot a green infrastructure audit at a parish level to develop the concept of multi-functional green space to help the AONB and the Haven Gateway GIS.	Suffolk ACRE	SCHU, HGP		●	

Aim 10: Have the tourism industry and the Suffolk tourism brand based on sustainable practices						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
10.1 Strengthen the association between sustainable tourism and the Suffolk tourism brand.	10.1a Develop annual campaigns to promote sustainable tourism within businesses.	STP		●	●	●
10.2 Firmly establish good practice examples of sustainable tourism activities within the AONB.	10.2a Build the Connect scheme to make it effective for businesses and for raising money for conservation.	SCHU	STP	●	●	●
	10.2b Build on the car-free itineraries project to make it more effective.	NE	SCHU, STP	●	●	

Requirement C: Meet the demand for recreation where it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the management of the land

Aim 11: Have access and recreation provision that respects biodiversity, landscape, geodiversity and historic assets						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
11.1 Implement the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.	11.1a Identify the three year ROWIP priority work programme for the AONB.	SCC		●		
	11.1b Update and publish a new route guide to the Sandlings Walk.	SCHU	SCC, Sandlings Grp, LAs	●	●	
	11.1c Update and publish a new route guide to the Suffolk Coast Path.	SCHU	SCC, LAs		●	
	11.1d Update and publish a new route guide to the Stour and Orwell Walk.	SCHU	SCC, LAs, S&OEMG			●
	11.1e Produce a cycling strategy to improve cycling provision and opportunities within the AONB.	SCC	FC, SCDC, WDC, SCHU, BDC		●	
	11.1f Improve the footpath and cycle links between Snape and Aldeburgh, and Aldeburgh and Thorpeness.	SCC	SCDC, SCHU	●	●	●
	11.1g Produce three new 'explorer' footpath guides to popular areas within the AONB.	SCHU	SCC	●	●	
	11.1h Encourage greater access from a diverse range of people from 2009.	SCHU	Partnership		●	●
	11.1i Run a project linking access and behaviour with the conservation of shingle plants and animals to help improve the condition of designated areas.	SCHU	NE, SCDC, Conservation Orgs		●	●
	11.1j Develop an initiative to promote good dog behaviour in the AONB and especially in sensitive wildlife areas.	SCHU	IBC, SWT, RSPB, NT		●	●
11.2 Manage open and coastal access to bring integrated benefits to people, wildlife and landscape.	11.2a Review the introduction of Open Access and consider any management changes necessary.	SCC	NE	●		
	11.2b Work with stakeholders to develop a consistent and integrated approach to implementing coastal access in Suffolk.	SCC	SCHU, LAs, NE SALC, Suffolk ACRE, CLA, NFU	●	●	●
	11.2c Develop the concept of integrated coastal/estuarine wardens to improve people's enjoyment of the coast (incl. habitat and access management, surveys and recording, interpretation and information).	SCHU	Conservation Orgs	●	●	●
11.3 Promote the need for, and the benefits of, integrated/multi-objective management of green space.	11.3a Establish a working group with a three year remit to stimulate the development of the Sandlings Forest Recreational Strategy into implemented projects through a partnership approach.	FC	Partnership	●	●	●
	11.3b Develop a programme of action to improve multi-objective use of formal and informal recreation sites.	SCHU	Estuary management groups	●	●	●
11.4 Increase the opportunities for non-car access in the AONB.	11.4a Safeguard the Coastlink service and seek a parallel service for the Alde to Deben area.	SCC	Suffolk ACRE, Coastal Accessible Transp. Services	●	●	●

Requirement C: Meet the demand for recreation where it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the management of the land

Aim 12: Provide interpretation that improves understanding, guides behaviour and helps people to enjoy the AONB						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
12.1 Deliver consistent messages about the importance and value of the AONB.	12.1a Agree core AONB information and branding for dissemination by Partnership.	SCHU	Partnership	●		
	12.1b AONB Partners will promote AONB objectives through their own corporate information channels such as newsletters and web pages.	Partnership		●	●	●
	12.1c Undertake regular reviews of the AONB web site and publications portfolio to plan regular revision and updates.	SCHU		●	●	●
	12.1d Develop proposals for AONB parish and/or boundary signing system that identifies and demarcates AONB.	SCHU		●	●	●
	12.1e Increase the provision of information to enable people to enjoy the AONB in a sustainable way.	SCHU	Partnership		●	●
12.2 Increase the provision of information to enable people to enjoy the AONB in a sustainable way.	12.2a Review the introduction of Open Access and consider any management changes necessary.	SCHU		●	●	●
12.3 Increase the provision of interpretation to raise understanding about the management of the AONB.	12.3a Run a programme of interpretation about key elements of the coast.	SCHU			●	●
	12.3b Develop a plan for securing improved orientation/interpretation about the AONB, incorporating appropriate bids for funding as required.	SCHU	Partnership	●	●	
	12.3c Undertake a new interpretation programme to foster support for heathland management.	Sandlings Group			●	●
	12.3d Create a business plan for securing improved orientation/interpretation about the AONB through existing or new visitor centres.	SCHU	WDC, SCDC, SCC, TDC, BDC, IBC, ECC		●	

Actions that help engage the community in all three aims of the plan

Aim 13: Support community involvement in the active conservation and enhancement of the AONB						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
13.1 Offer grant aid at community level to support local activities to meet AONB objectives.	13.1a Use the Sustainable Development Fund to make a difference at the community level.	SCHU		●	●	●
13.2 Strengthen the opportunities for involvement in actively caring for and understanding the AONB.	13.2a. Coordinate and promote the AONB Voluntary Rangers scheme.	SCHU		●	●	●
	13.2b Expand, develop and promote the Beachwatch and Adopt-a-Beach projects.	SCHU		●	●	●
13.3 Promote the need to involve relevant stakeholders in decisions about the management of the AONB.	13.3a Promote the value of community plans to all parishes in the AONB, and support wherever possible.	LAs and LSPs		●	●	●
	13.3b Produce an annual summary of work undertaken by partners that has involved stakeholders in making decisions about their environment.	Partnership		●	●	●

Aim 14: Run an effective AONB Partnership						
Objectives: by 2013 we will:	Actions: before the end of 2010 we will:	Organisations		Timescale		
		Lead	Support	2008	2009	2010
14.1 Develop clear AONB policy on priority issues.	14.1a. Develop detailed policies for the AONB on priority issues affecting the Suffolk Coast and Heaths.	Partnership		●	●	
14.2 Enable stakeholders to contribute to the management of the AONB.	14.2a Hold regular public meetings to ensure stakeholders contribute to management direction.	Partnership		●	●	●
	14.2b Hold at least two Partnership and funding executive meetings each year.	Partnership		●	●	●
14.3 Monitor and report on progress of the implementation of the AONB Management Plan.	14.3a Produce an annual report on progress in implementing the Management Plan.	SCHU	Partnership	●	●	●
	14.3b Review the data and indicators needed to monitor progress of the AONB Plan and initiate action to collect the necessary data.	Partnership		●	●	●
14.4 Refresh governance procedures for the AONB Partnership and Unit.	14.4a Review governance needs to reflect closer working of AONB Units in Suffolk, and priorities within the AONB Management Plan.	JAC	Partnership	●	●	

Key Organisation Abbreviations

BDC	Babergh District Council
CLA	Country Land and Buisness Association
EA	Environment Agency
EH	English Heritage
FC	Forestry Commission
HGP	Haven Gateway Partnership
LA	Local Authorities
LSP	Local Strategic Partnerships
NE	Natural England
NFU	National Farmers' Union
Partnership	The AONB Partnership
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SALC	Suffolk Association of Local Councils
SBRC	Suffolk Biological Records Centre
SCHU	Suffolk Coastal and Heaths Unit
SCDC	Suffolk Coastal District Council
SCC	Suffolk County Council
SFWAG	Suffolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
SGP	Suffolk Geodiversity Partnership
S&OEMG	Stour and Orwell Estuaries Management Group
SPS	Suffolk Preservation Society
SSP	Suffolk Strategic Partnership
STP	Suffolk Tourism Partnership
SWT	Suffolk Wildlife Trust
TDC	Tendring District Council
WDC	Waveney District Council

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Suffolk Coast and Heaths

Management Plan Summary 2008-2013

Suffolk Coast and Heaths - An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
