

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
30 MARCH 2006**

AONB CONDITION AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To approve the list of Condition and Performance Indicators established to monitor the change in Condition of the AONB landscape and the Performance of the AONB partnership and to approve the reporting cycles.

2.0 DISCUSSION

- 2.1 The AONB Management Plan contained draft Condition and Performance Indicators, which it was proposed would be refined and then used to measure management activity within the AONB. The information would be used to monitor performance, inform partner organisations of progress and subsequently inform future reviews of the AONB Management Plan.
- 2.2 Indicators seem to be a fact of modern corporate life and definitions vary. In the AONB context, Performance Indicators will be used to measure the activities (outputs) of the AONB partnership, whilst Condition Indicators will be used to measure the impact (outcomes) that these activities have on the quality of the AONB landscape.
- 2.3 Many attempts have been made to agree national sets of Indicators. The National Parks have been discussing draft Indicators for many years, but have not been able to agree a set that is meaningful for all of them. The South West Protected Landscapes Forum, which consists of 13 AONBs and 2 National Parks, is currently working on a set of Indicators for the South West region.
- 2.4 The Countryside Agency's Countryside Quality Counts initiative is also measuring Indicators that are similar to the ones proposed for the Howardian Hills.
- 2.5 The Countryside Agency guidance on reviewing AONB Management Plans is currently being prepared by consultants and it looks likely that this will suggest a series of Condition Indicators that all AONBs should take on board and include in their Management Plans when they are next reviewed. Many of these Indicators are similar, if not identical, to those proposed for the Howardian Hills.
- 2.6 Despite the confusing picture on terminology, it is important that the JAC starts to carry out some monitoring, even though we might have to amend the Indicators at some time in the future. The provision of information on activity and results is increasingly likely to be taken into account when deciding funding allocations, as AONB partnerships must be seen to be delivering tangible improvements to natural beauty in return for public funding. It is however clear that the Indicators being suggested in other studies are very similar to those proposed by the AONB partnership itself and so any subsequent change is not likely to have a significantly detrimental effect on our monitoring process.

2.7 Following the publication of draft Indicators in the AONB Management Plan, the AONB Partnership Group meeting in February 2005 refined and ranked the list of potential Indicators. The results of this exercise have now been collated, leading to the establishment of proposed Condition and Performance Indicators for the Howardian Hills and its AONB partnership. These are attached as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

3.0 MONITORING

3.1 Data on the Condition Indicators is likely to be available from national bodies, using information that they already collect. It is important to make sure that this information is 'cut' to the AONB boundary so that it is accurate. Some of the datasets likely to be used were 'cut' to AONB boundaries for the Management Plan preparation process 2 years ago and more are now available at that level of detail. We will need to encourage the provision of data at this scale if it is not already available. It is proposed that information on Condition Indicators is compared on a 5-yearly cycle, to co-incide with Management Plan reviews. It is not considered meaningful to assess landscape change over a shorter time period of time.

3.2 Performance Indicators will need to be measured by the AONB Unit, collating information fed back from partner organisations and adding it to the activities of the Unit itself. The first attempt at this exercise was on 24th March at the AONB Partnership Group meeting, which showed that it is difficult to extract information from partner organisations. The meeting did however agree that the process was basically sound and that the list of Indicators was useful and accurate. The reporting process will be refined for next year, as it is proposed to report progress on Performance Indicators to the JAC and wider AONB partnership annually.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- a) The list of Condition Indicators attached as Appendix 1 be approved.
- b) The list of Performance Indicators attached as Appendix 2 be approved.
- c) The reporting cycles for Condition and Performance Indicators be approved, as outlined in paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 above.