



KENT DOWNS AONB UNIT

BUSINESS PLAN

1st April 2004 – 31st March 2009

Enhancing Landscapes and Life in the Kent Downs.

‘The ultimate goal is to ensure that the natural beauty, special character and vitality of communities within the Kent Downs AONB are recognised, maintained and strengthened well into the future.

It is a task for everyone to embrace.’

INTRODUCTION

This is the first business plan for the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty partnership and Unit.

It comes at a time of great opportunity and challenge for the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The AONB Management Plan is the framework to seize the opportunity and meet the challenges. The business Plan sets out the staffing and financial resources and action required by the AONB Unit to help to deliver the agreed vision and actions set out in the Management Plan.

The business plan is primarily intended for the funding organisations of the AONB partnership, members of the partnership and for the Unit staff. It is appropriate that the plan has a wider audience too and it will be made available on the AONB Website.

The business plan is deliberately concise focusing on five key areas;

- **The AONB partnership and Unit – Who we are.**
- **Background - Why we are here.**
- **Direction - What we do and where we will be in five years time.**
- **Action - How and when will we do it?**
- **Financial plan - How much will it cost?**

THE AONB PARTNERSHIP AND UNIT – WHO WE ARE

The conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB is an important priority for many organisations and individuals. A wide-ranging partnership has developed to ensure that all key stakeholders are represented and participate in this vital work. And has overall responsibility for the co-ordinated strategic management of the AONB

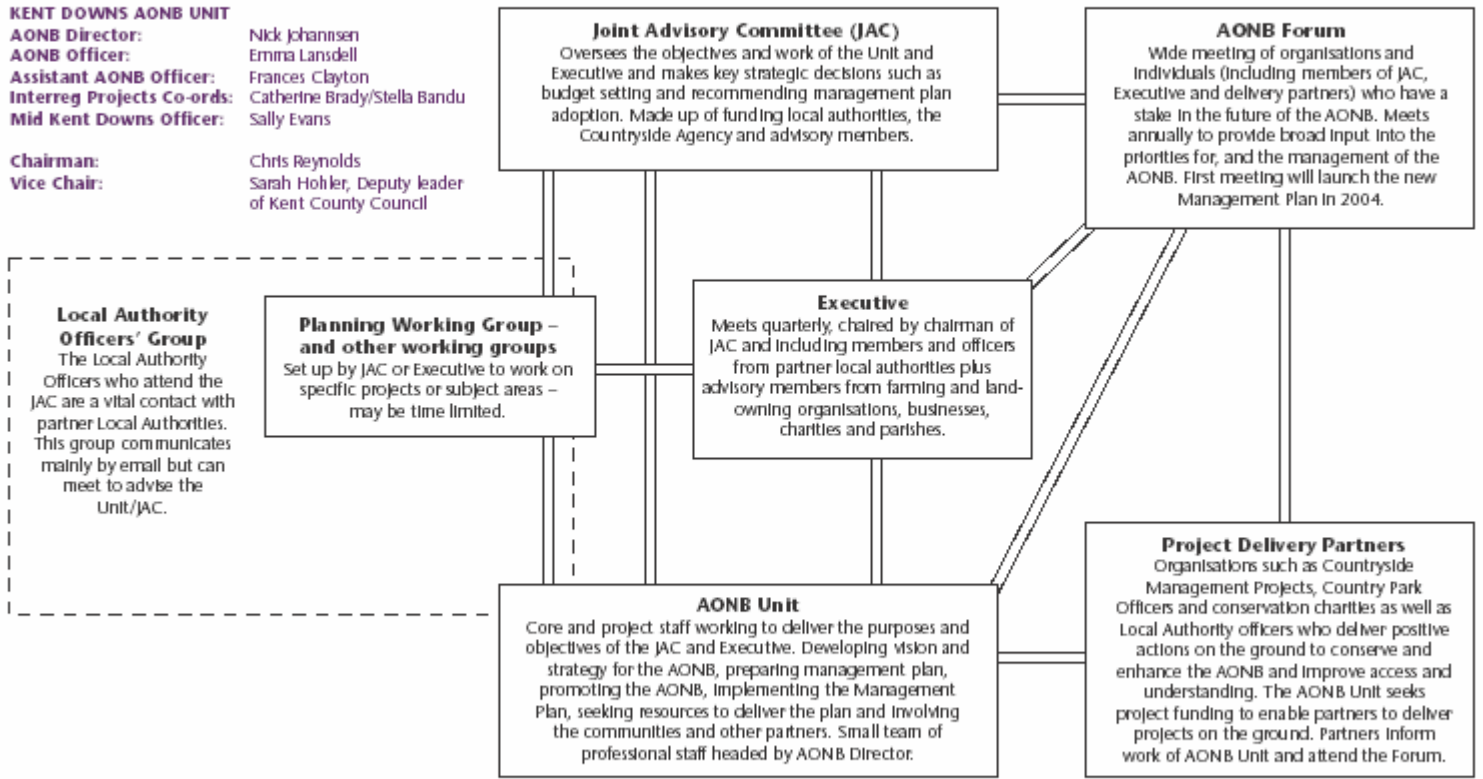
Following a detailed review of the core staffing and governance arrangements in 2002-2003 the partnership agreed the following structure and functions:

The Kent Downs AONB Partnership

KENT DOWNS AONB UNIT

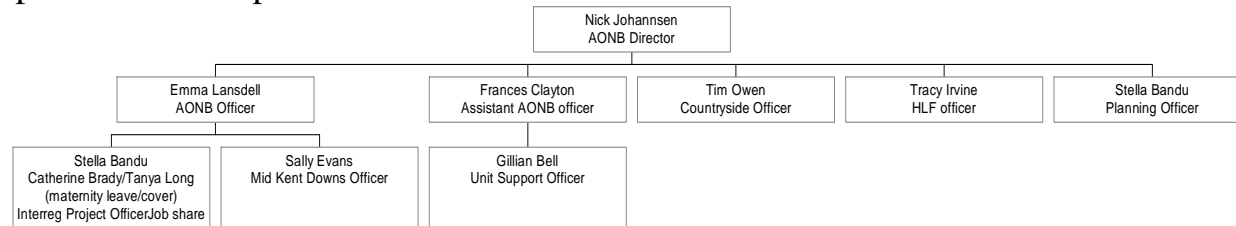
AONB Director: Nick Johansen
AONB Officer: Emma Lansdell
Assistant AONB Officer: Frances Clayton
Interreg Projects Co-ords: Catherine Brady/Stella Bandu
Mid Kent Downs Officer: Sally Evans

Chairman: Chrs Reynolds
Vice Chair: Sarah Hohler, Deputy leader of Kent County Council



The Unit

An important focus of this business plan is the role of the AONB Unit. Following a core staffing review the structure of the Unit has changed – it has expanded to help enable it to deliver the ambitions of the partnership as expressed through the AONB management plan and action plan.



It is essential that the work of the Unit is underpinned by a set of shared values. The key values that all staff within Kent Downs AONB Unit will demonstrate are set out below.

We will be:

- Proactive –driving forward the AONB agenda
- Highly motivated and committed
- Creative and innovative
- Knowledgeable and straightforward
- Business minded, professional and efficient
- Unbureaucratic and offering value for money
- Environmentally sensitive and seek sustainable methods of working.
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We will be effective and respected partners, by being:

- Flexible, responsive, confident and focused.
- Approachable, open, friendly and supportive
- Open, honest and understanding

BACKGROUND - WHY WE ARE HERE

The Kent Downs AONB is a nationally important and protected landscape and was designated in 1968. The Kent Downs cover a quarter of the county of Kent, is 878km² covering parts of 12 Local Authorities. The landscape is rich in quality and detail it is justifiably protected by law at a national level and recognised at an international level.

The Kent Downs is probably one of the most pressurised AONBs in Britain with the proximity of London, its position between several inter- European transport links and with significant urban areas, along with significant new developments proposed at Kent Thameside and Ashford, on its boundary.

The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to ‘conserve and enhance natural beauty...taking account of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and the economic and social needs of local communities’ The secondary purpose is ‘...promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.... the demand for recreation should be met so far as it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.’ (*Countryside Commission CCP 356, 1991*).

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 has added impetus to the protection by statutorily requiring all AONB local authorities to jointly prepare a management plan for the AONB and review it at least at five yearly intervals. In addition, all public bodies and statutory undertakers have a new duty of regard to the purposes of the AONB when carrying out their statutory functions

These provisions present a significant opportunity. By choosing to take this opportunity then the special qualities of this landscape can be conserved and enhanced and the quality of life can be improved for a significant portion of the population of Kent and the South East region.

Equally, if we do not act in a positive way the unique and special character of this wonderful piece of England could be lost forever.

It is the mission and responsibility of the Kent Downs AONB Unit and partnership to realise the purposes of the designation, in other words to :

‘Enhance landscapes and life in the Kent Downs’.

DIRECTION - WHAT WE DO AND WHERE WE WILL BE IN FIVE YEARS TIME.

To realise our mission and responsibilities the Unit and Partnership must operate effectively within 5 core areas of work:

- 3. Effective partnership.**
- 4. Communication, advocacy and influence**
- 5. Enabling action**
- 6. Management planning and monitoring**
- 7. Internal business management**

We are a strategic partnership and to be effective we should deliver in the short term but keep sight of the medium term.

In five years time.

If we are successful in these core areas of work, in five years time we will have a secure and more independent Unit and partnership, which are recognised as the champion for the AONB delivering a well-supported management plan through partners and focused AONB led projects.

Objectives and actions.

Each 'core area of work' and each objective is tied to one or more actions in the attached action plan. Each year we will review the business plan and report to the Executive and Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The review will take on changing circumstances, opportunities and priorities. The business plan and actions will be revised by the end of December

each year and will take account of the annual review and monitoring of the AONB management plan and condition indicators. The business plan will set the context for the budget setting cycle that starts in September.

Priorities and Risks.

We have an ambitious Management Plan and Business Plan. In truth there is more work highlighted in each action plan than we can realistically achieve. It is much better that we prioritise our work and do less well than try to do it all but do it badly. With this in mind the actions highlighted in the action plan are the agreed highest priorities.

By no means all that we do is in our gift – we are a small core Unit of 4.6 members of staff, supported in our work by time limited projects and attached project staff. The action plan puts an assessment of risk against each action.

3. Effective partnership.

To realise our aims and responsibilities for the AONB we must work well in partnership – our partnership is broad and varied, this means that we must add value to the activities of partners and work in a way that is efficient and effective.

3. *Short-term objectives:*

1.1 We will **strengthen the existing partnership** by demonstrating added value, improving communication and delivering the ambitions of our partners.

1.2 We will **support project delivery partners**, as they are an important way to achieve management plan actions on the ground.

- *Medium term objectives:*

1.3 We need to **ensure that the value of the AONB partnership is recognised, valued** and supported as an effective way to realise each partner's ambitions for the AONB.

1.4 We will **broaden the partnership** to include new organisations particularly statutory organisations operating in the AONB

1.5 We need to ensure that **the partnership seeks to deliver the agreed policies** of the AONB management plan beyond the work of the Unit.

1.6 We need to **review our existing partnership** structures and consider Conservation Board status.

2. Communication, advocacy and influence

By communicating effectively we seek the recognition and value of the AONB so that all stakeholders are able to make informed and positive choices to care for it. Good communication is absolutely essential for the future support of the AONB partnership and our future success.

3. Short-term objectives:

2.1 We **will** improve and **widen understanding of the AONB designation** and its value at a local and increasingly regional level. To coordinate this work we will prepare and implement a communication strategy.

2.2 We will **promote the ‘duty of regard’** and seek practical ways to enable the duty to be exercised by all relevant authorities

2.3 We need to **improve the recognition and standing of our management plan** and action plan amongst our partners.

- *Medium term objectives:*

2.4 We need significant **new programmes and influence to gain recognition** and value for the AONB at the regional, national and international level –we wish to do this using a variety of innovative methods and media.

2.5 The AONB should seek to **influence local, regional and national** policy and delivery organisations so that policies and spending programmes that could have a significant positive impact on the future of the Kent Downs landscape.

2.6 We will strengthen and add value to our role in the land use planning system in partnership with the planning working group.

3. Enabling action

Action on the ground is a primary objective of many of the partners in the AONB, indeed our value as a partnership will probably be measured by our ability to enable action on the ground within the AONB.

- *Short-term objective:*

3.1 We will **agree a shared costed AONB Action Plan** that delivers the Vision for the AONB.

3.2 We shall **develop and secure funding** for Kent Downs programmes.

3.3 Provide simple practical guidance **to influence the work programmes and actions of stakeholders** in the AONB.

- *Medium term objectives;*

3.4 We aim to **sustain predictable and reliable funding** to enable the delivery of Kent Downs' programmes.

3.5 We shall **secure significant new funding** streams to deliver action, from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Government, Regional Agencies and Europe.

3.6 We shall **review the action plan annually** to recognise changing circumstances and priorities.

3.7 We shall work closely with public bodies and statutory undertakers to assist with the **delivery of their duty of regard**.

4. Management planning and monitoring

The management plan is an important driver for the future conservation and enhancement of the AONB. It is statutorily required that the plan is reviewed at least at five yearly intervals. There is an important requirement to review the action plan on an annual basis and monitor the management plan and the state of the AONB in order to properly implement the statutory requirement for to review the plan.

- *Short-term objectives:*

4.1 We will ensure the **delivery, promotion an implementation of a high quality management plan** that presents a shared vision and action plan and fulfils the requirements of the CROW act.

4.2 Agree indicators to monitor both management plan and business plan.

- *Medium term objectives;*

4.3 Ensure a **high profile for the management plan** throughout its life.

4.4 We will **update the action plan annually**, involving partners in setting the priorities for the year.

4.5 We will **update the business plan each year** reporting against targets.

4.6 We will ensure the **timely review of the management plan**, update according to changed circumstances – promote an understanding of the value of the document to partners.

4.7 Monitor the effectiveness of the management plan against agreed indicators.

4.8 Monitor effectiveness of business plan.

4.9 Monitor the condition of the AONB against agreed indicators.

5. Internal business management

We seek an effective, efficient and authoritative AONB Unit which is recognised and valued by partners and policy makers as a professional body delivering significant added value and enabling action on the ground.

Short-term objectives:

5.1 We need to **build on the knowledge and expertise of each member of the Unit** in order to realise the ambitions of the business and management plans.

5.2 **Build on existing values and motivation** of team to consistently increase professionalism and value to partners.

5.3 **Establish secure accommodation for the Unit within the AONB.**

5.4 **Produce an annual review** of business plan and action plan.

- *Medium term objectives:*

5.5 Continue consistently to **build capacity, motivation and professionalism** of Unit seeking to retain expertise and high quality staff.

5.6 **Maintain financial security and probity.**

5.7 **Deliver value for money.**

FINANCIAL PLAN – HOW MUCH WILL IT COST.

The funding of the Unit and its actions is divided into two distinct areas; core funding and project funding.

Core funding

Core funding is available to support a small professional team to prepare and revise the management plan and carry out a series of defined 'core functions' prescribed by the Countryside Agency. (Attached appendix 1).

The allocation of core funding from the Countryside Agency is based on a nationally agreed formula, which takes into account the size, and administrative complexity of the AONB. The Kent Downs AONB draws down its maximum allocated core funding from the Countryside Agency and, barring any substantial change in funding arrangements, we expect this to remain secure (increasing with inflation) for the duration of this business plan.

The Countryside Agency contributes 75% of the AONB Unit's core costs the remainder being funded by partner Local Authorities on an equal basis (excepting Kent County Council which contributes about three times that of each of the other Local Authorities and gives significant levels of support for Administration, finance, insurances, GIS etc)

A memorandum of agreement signed by all partners, which agrees an annual inflation increase in contributions, underwrites the contributions of each partner.

The Expected core cost for the Core Unit in the first year of the business plan is £253,639 this is made up of £ £171,215 and £82,424 core activities including office space, planning work, publicity and the costs of running the partnership. This budget is expected to increase with inflation over the period of the management plan.

The annual budgets are presented to the October JAC and confirmed in February. A table showing the expected core costs over the coming five years is attached.

Project Funding.

The AONB Unit runs a series of projects that often deliver core activities as well as the actions of the Management Plan. Projects are usually funded on a time-limited basis. The Countryside Agency contribution to projects is at a maximum of 50%.

Several AONB projects include project staff that work as part of the AONB Unit – examples are the Interreg Officers and the HLF Officer. In addition the Unit runs a series of project programmes which help to deliver the management plan actions, the programmes are described in brief below;

Kent Downs Around Towns.

The Kent Downs around Towns programme seek to address urban fringe problems experienced in the AONB and to find sustainable solutions to them, as well as increasing the access between the towns and Downs..

Celebrating the Kent Downs.

Working in partnership with organisations throughout the AONB the 'Celebrating the Kent Downs' will be a programme of events/ activities interpretation and arts, improving access and enjoyment in the Kent Downs and promoting the designation.

Kent Downs Research Design and Innovation Programme.

A programme that will provide support for the AONB planning role, design guides and research and project development contracts - for instance cultural associations, innovation and landscape action planning.

Kent Downs Landscape Initiative. - Including **landscape enhancement grants** delivering landscape gain throughout the AONB to meet objectives set out in the landscape character assessment and guidelines.

Project funding, by its very nature is much less secure than core funding, it is, however vital to enable the AONB Unit to deliver the ambitions of the partnership. An important part of the work of the Unit is to secure project funding.

The financial gearing of project funding is significant; the AONB programmes, which were run in the financial year 2003-2004, had a gearing of £6 for every £1 from the Countryside Agency.

THE ACTION PLANS EXPLAINED

There are two action plans to accompany this business plan.

The Business Plan Action Plan sets out the actions that need to be taken by the AONB Unit to implement the business plan. Most of these actions are funded by core contributions and so are low to medium risk and part of our ongoing work. They also fulfil the ‘Core Functions’ of an AONB Unit as defined by the Countryside Agency attached in Appendix 1.

The management Plan Action plan is an extract from the AONB management plan showing the actions proposed for the financial year 04-05.

Priorities

Each plan has ‘top priority’ action shown in bold text, these are the agreed highest priority actions for the Unit and partnership. There are many other actions, which are also of a high priority, and work will be carried out to try to implement these actions too – however we will attempt to ensure that the top priorities are delivered.

Risks

Each action is given a risk factor of High Medium or Low; this is an attempt to be clear that, no matter how high a priority an action is, it may not always be possible to deliver it.

Low risk actions are those where the action is primarily on the control of the AONB Unit and the funding is very likely to be available – most actions which are core funded, are low risk.

Medium risk actions are those, which are not necessarily in the control of the AONB Unit and are contingent on others but are likely to be supported. Medium risk actions may not have funding from the AONB core but where project or other funding is judged likely to be available.

High Risk actions are those which are contingent on gaining support from other partners, are complex to achieve and may require complex funding bids, which are not certain. To proceed with a high-risk action the likely benefit needs to be significant.

Funding and Risk

During the lifetime of this business plan it is expected that the Countryside Agency Project funding is likely to decline. This has been the clear line from the Agency for some time and is the result of the increase in core funding given to AONBs. One consequence of this is that most management plan actions will increase in their risk rating, as we may not be able to rely on 50% funding. The new structure of the Unit has anticipated this change and we now have a capacity for raising external funding. It should be clear that all funding that is not directly from the Countryside Agency does come with other agendas or conditions attached and so the delivery of actions will meet other funding parties demands too.