



## **1.0 Introduction**

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## 1.1 Context

The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally important protected landscape, whose special characteristics include its dramatic landform and views, rich habitats, extensive ancient woodland, mixed farmland, rich historic and built heritage, and its tranquillity and remoteness. Within its bounds it shows a considerable variation in landscape character that encompasses open and wooded downs, broad river valleys, dry valleys, arable farmland vales, wooded greensand ridge, and open chalk cliff coastline. "The Kent Downs AONB is a capital resource that underpins much economic activity in Kent. Its high quality environment helps to attract businesses, contributes to the quality of life that people in the county value so highly and supports a substantial visitor economy". (South East England Development Agency)

## 1.2 Purpose of the Handbook

The purpose of the handbook is to provide practical, readily accessible design guidance to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics of the AONB as a whole, and the distinctiveness of its individual character areas. Whilst the special character and unique landscape quality of the AONB remains largely undiminished, the landscape is under commercial and development pressure which can result in poor location and design of new development, unsympathetic improvements to the boundaries of properties, creeping 'suburbanisation', growth in new uses for land such as equestrian management, decline in traditional land management and intensive farming practices. There is also pressure from traffic, noise and light pollution, as well as illegal activities such as flytipping and off-road activity by motorbikes and 4 x 4 vehicles. The guidelines are not meant to inhibit innovative design, but to provide a sound framework and information basis from which sympathetic design and management can be developed. Design should seek to encourage the use of materials which are conserving in their own right, for instance products from coppiced woods.

## 1.3 Duty of Regard

The status of AONBs has been enhanced through measures introduced in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, which give greater support to their planning and management. These measures include a

duty on relevant authorities, public bodies and statutory undertakers to take account of the need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of AONB landscapes when carrying out their statutory functions.

## 1.4 Consultation

In preparing this document an initial consultation was undertaken in November 2003 with representatives of local authorities, parish councils, local farmers etc. to discuss the scope, content and look of the document. The views of the consultees have been sought with the intention that the handbook be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and be available from the AONB Unit. Further information can be found in the Statement of Consultation available from the AONB Unit.

## 1.5 Users

The handbook is intended to be used by the following audiences:

- Residents and community groups
- Local businesses, farmers and landowners
- Developers, architects, planners and designers
- Local planning authorities
- Highway engineers
- Elected members and officers of local and parish councils
- Public utilities
- Telecommunication and public service providers.
- Countryside management organisations.

## 1.6 Relationship to the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2004-2009 (April 2004)

The CROW Act requires management plans to be produced, published and regularly revised by local authorities. By providing landscape design guidance, this handbook contributes to the implementation of the management plan objectives and policies. A monitoring system has been set for the Management Plan objectives. Copies of the Management Plan are available from the Kent Downs AONB Unit.

## 1.7 Relationship to Kent and Medway Structure Plan (Deposit September 2003) and Local Plan Policies

Policies set out within the Kent and Medway Structure Plan (Deposit Plan, September 2003) and Local Plans for the area are designed to 'ensure

that Kent's AONBs are protected and enhanced'. The Structure Plan states that 'changes in the countryside which are necessary and inevitable should be managed in a way which, as far as possible, strengthens its pattern and diversity rather than eroding character and distinctiveness'. This document should be referred to alongside the policies set out in the Kent and Medway Structure Plan and other Local Plans for the area.

## **1.8 Relationship to the planning permission application process**

This handbook provides advice on the particular qualities of the Kent Downs AONB and can be used in conjunction with other guidance as available.

Much of the guidance given in this document refers to works which are part of the design process, rather than those which specifically require planning permission; however, when considering works in the AONB, the applicant/s and/or their agent, should always contact the local planning authority (LPA – see useful contacts) to confirm whether any consents are needed. Some works will require building regulations consent or, possibly, consents under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act [as amended] 1990, etc.

Local Plans/Local Development Frameworks and Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents will be available to give local guidance and may even be site specific. A planning officer will let you know what documents are relevant and will be able to confirm if any consents are needed.

## **1.9 Updating and changes to guidance**

It is likely that new products and guidance will emerge during the life of this publication. These will be sent to all recipients of the handbook. This document has a pouch at the back in which to insert updates and amendments.

Despite detailed consultation during the preparation of this handbook we are aware that there may be errors or omissions. We are always keen to receive further comments or observations and will forward these to other users of this handbook.

## **1.10 Relationship to Other Design Guidance**

### **Kent Design Guide**

Kent Design – a guide to sustainable development seeks to promote sustainability and good design throughout Kent. It identifies principles for environmentally sustainable development and high quality design illustrated with numerous best practice case studies. Whilst the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Guide provides more detailed landscape guidance within the AONB, the Kent Design Guide (published by Kent County Council) should also be followed in preparing development schemes.

### **Village Design Statements**

A number of villages within the Kent Downs AONB (for example: Charing, Lynsted, Westerham, Wye, Boughton Aluph and Eastwell) have produced village design statements which describe the distinctive character of the village and the surrounding countryside and identify design principles based on local character. These should also be consulted where relevant. The Local Planning Authority/Parish Council or AONB Unit should be contacted for information on Village Design Statements.



### **1.11 Disability Discrimination Act**

Since October 1999, service providers have had to consider making reasonable adjustments to the way they deliver their services so that disabled people can use them. From October 2004, service providers must ensure that the final stage of the duties within The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Part III) are put into practice. This requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access. Physical features external to buildings are also covered under the Act, for example paths and seating in a pub garden. Further information on the external features that commonly need attention in public buildings is provided by The Centre for Accessible Environments publication: 'Designing for Accessibility' ([http://www.cae.org.uk/cae\\_publications/DFA2004.html](http://www.cae.org.uk/cae_publications/DFA2004.html)).

Landscape Design within the AONB should adhere to advice set out within the Act. However, at the time of publication the precise application of the Act to the wider countryside (e.g. Public Rights of Way and associated furniture – stiles, gates etc) is unclear. Further information is provided by BT 'Countryside for All' within *A Good Practice Guide to Disabled People's Access in the Countryside* ([www.fieldfare.org.uk/btcfa.htm](http://www.fieldfare.org.uk/btcfa.htm)). This document provides standards and guidelines on access to the countryside that takes all visitors' needs into account. These standards aim to help people who provide countryside services to make paths and trails more accessible and to help disabled people locate accessible paths and trails. Further good practice guidance in the form of an inclusive design toolkit will soon be available from Kent County Council's Access Development Team (produced in collaboration with the Sensory Trust). For more information contact: [explorent@kent.gov.uk](mailto:explorent@kent.gov.uk). The Countryside Agency will also be publishing further guidance in early 2005, to supplement the 'Countryside for All' guide. ([www.countryside.gov.uk/WiderWelcome/DiversityReview/disabledcountrysideaccess.asp](http://www.countryside.gov.uk/WiderWelcome/DiversityReview/disabledcountrysideaccess.asp))

### **1.12 Relationship to Kent Biodiversity Action Plan**

The 1997 Kent BAP (Biodiversity Action Plan) is currently being updated by a broad partnership of more than 35 organisations. Twenty-seven habitat action plans have been produced in 2004. Each sets out the action that partners will take to conserve each of the 27 habitats considered a priority for nature conservation in Kent. Priority habitats that are an integral part of the Kent Downs AONB landscape include lowland calcareous grassland, ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows, lowland beech & yew woodland, lowland mixed broadleaved woodland, wet woodland, chalk rivers and reedbeds. For more information on the Kent BAP or an individual habitat action plan, contact the Co-ordinator on 01622 221537 or e-mail [info@kentbap.org.uk](mailto:info@kentbap.org.uk). Alternatively, you can visit [www.kentbap.org.uk](http://www.kentbap.org.uk)

### **1.13 Using the Guidance**

The guidance is structured as follows:

#### **Section 2.0 AONB-wide Landscape Design Principles**

These apply to schemes throughout the AONB. Some guidelines are inter-related and will overlap.

#### **Section 3.0 Landscape Character Area Design Guidance**

Users should follow the guidelines which apply to the area in which their site is located.

#### **Section 4.0 Detailed Guidance**

The aim of this section is to provide further information and guidance on the use, design and specification of materials and structures mentioned in previous sections.

In addition, the following information is provided in the Appendices:

#### **1.0 Selected References**

#### **2.0 Useful Contacts and Background Information**

#### **3.0 Glossary of Terms**

#### **4.0 List of consultees**