



**Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and
Stour Valley Project Area
Management Plan 2021-26**

Contents

Executive Summary

1. Foreword

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Purpose of the Document
- 2.2 Statement of Commitment
- 2.3 What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 2.4 What is the Stour Valley Project Area
- 2.5 The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area
- 2.6 Natural Beauty and Special Qualities
- 2.7 Responsibility for Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley
- 2.8 Determining Planning Applications
- 2.9 International, National and Local Context
- 2.10 Statement of Significance
- 2.11 Vision Statement
- 2.12 Review of 2016-2021 plan
- 2.13 The 2021-26 plan

3. Context and Management Plan Policies

- 3.1 The Countryside
- 3.2 Villages, Infrastructure and Residents
- 3.3 Enjoying the Area
- 3.4 Climate Change and Nature Recovery
- 3.5 The River and its Tributaries
- 3.6 Working Together

4. Appendices

- 4.1 Glossary
- 4.2 Governance Structures
- 4.3 AONB and Stour Valley Project Area Facts
- 4.4 Summary of Management Plan Policies

Executive Summary
To follow

1. Foreword

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley project area is undoubtedly one of England's most important landscapes. Its riverside meadows, picturesque villages and rolling farmland, the wildlife it contains and its associations with some of England's finest artists combine to make this a truly special place. The lower valley is rightly nationally designated as an AONB and many have the aspiration to see more of the Stour Valley, already recognised as a valuable landscape, designated as a national landscape.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) places a duty on Local Authorities to prepare a management plan for AONBs and to review them every five years. This is our fourth edition since 2000. We are delighted to be able to include much of the upper Stour Valley in this plan although we recognise that the nationally designated AONB is subject to different local and national policy to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. While this management plan covers both parts of the valley, some of its management plan policies explicitly relate to the national landscape.

For over 30 years the members of AONB Partnership have worked together to meet the statutory purposes of the AONB, to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This benefits those that live and work in the area and contributes to mitigating the impacts of climate change and wildlife decline. However, natural beauty is increasingly an important factor for supporting local businesses in the area, whether that directly benefits the visitor economy or indirectly offers those businesses the opportunity to attract and retain staff to work in or near this outstanding landscape.

For many of us it feels like times are changing more quickly than ever before. This Plan has been developed during the time of a pandemic, the transition of the country leaving the EU and a countrywide focus on national landscapes expressed through the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan, the Glover Review of designated landscapes and an increasing public interest in environmental issues.

The AONB Partnership must work with everyone to ensure the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty is met. It must work harder to reach out to all sections of society, to ensure that all national and local policies recognise the statutory purposes of AONBs and to work with others in the wider community to ensure that the best decisions are made to meet the statutory purposes of the AONB.

We live in a time of unprecedented change. AONBs have an important part to play in society's ability to deal with the challenges that we all face; environmental, economic and wellbeing. The management plan policies contained here will contribute to addressing those challenges.

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Chairman of the AONB Partnership.

2. Introduction

2.1 Purpose of the Document

For the nationally designated AONB, section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty on all relevant authorities to:

have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an AONB when exercising or performing any function in relation to or so as to affect an AONB.

The section 85 Duty of Regard applies to all functions, not just those relating to planning and is applicable whether a function is statutory or permissive.

It is applicable to land outside as well as within an AONB, where an activity may have an impact on an AONB. The requirement is to 'conserve and enhance' and both aspects are required to be addressed.

In relation to planning, the Duty of Regard applies in respect of both plan making and decision taking, including deciding what weight to apply to different planning matters, considering whether planning conditions are necessary and also when considering planning enforcement action. It is good practice for a local planning authority to consider the Duty of Regard at several points [For example a reference of how AONB purposes have been considered in a planning officers report] in the decision making process and to provide written evidence that regard has been had. I am suggesting this for clarity and to assist LPAs ensure they meet the Duty.

This management plan provides a framework for statutory bodies to meet that duty.

For the Stour Valley project area this document, and the management plan policies it contains, provides a framework for meeting the aspiration to conserve and enhance its natural beauty and special qualities.

Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) requires Local Authorities to formulate policy for the management of AONBs and review it every five years. This management plan meets that requirement.

This management plan is set in the context of national and local policy and strategy. The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty with secondary purposes to meet the needs of recreation, safeguarding agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.

2.2 Statement of Commitment

Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership members endorse this plan by agreeing the following statement:

We endorse the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan 2021-26 and will use it as a guiding framework for maintaining and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. We will work in partnership with other organisations to deliver the vision for the area.

In addition, Local Authority partners agree the following statement:

As required by Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 this plan formulates policy for AONB local authorities relating to the management of the Dedham Vale AONB.

For the Stour Valley project area, Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership members endorse this plan by agreeing the following statement:

We endorse the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan 2021-26 and will use it as a guiding framework for maintaining and enhancing the natural beauty of the Stour Valley. We will work in partnership with other organisations to deliver the vision for the area.

2.3 What is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

An AONB is an area, that has been identified by Government to have high scenic quality which has been given statutory protection to conserve and enhance its natural beauty.

In addition to the management plan policies contained within this plan, AONBs are subject to national and local policy to deliver its statutory purpose.

As well as high scenic quality AONBs often have strong associations with artists, heritage features or wildlife habitat. AONBs cover around 15% of the land area of England. There are currently 33 AONBs wholly in England with a further one spanning the English/Welsh border. Information on AONBs can be found on the National Association for AONBs website.

2.4 What is the Stour Valley project area?

The Stour Valley project area lies upstream of the nationally designated AONB and runs across the Essex/Suffolk border from the western boundary of the AONB, to the east of Bures to the near the Cambridgeshire border following the Stour river.

The origins of the Stour Valley project area date to the 1970s and are based in the constituent local authorities desire to 'protect' the area from inappropriate development and for it to be considered for AONB status.

The Stour Valley project area does not benefit from the same level of protection afforded by the policies relating to the AONB. However, the Stour Valley project area is deemed to be a 'valued landscape' as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (revised Feb 2019). The area has been subject to a management plan since 2000 that has been recognised by the constituent local authorities in their local

plans and/or historically been subject to a Special Landscape Area status and subsequent landscape Character Assessments.

2.5 The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area

The Dedham Vale AONB

The Dedham AONB is situated on the Essex/Suffolk border in the East of England. It was designated as an AONB in 1970. The AONB covers the lower reaches of the River Stour and is bounded to the east by the Cattawade Marshes where the river becomes tidal. The western boundary runs between Bures and Wormingford. The northern and southern boundaries are situated a few kilometres either side of the river, at times following the rivers Box and Brett that are tributaries of the Stour.

The Dedham Vale AONB is the fourth smallest AONB in England at 90 square kilometres (around 35 square miles). It is essentially a farmed landscape, with a population of around 10,000. The area is characterised by its picturesque villages, rolling farmland, rivers, meadows, ancient woodlands and a wide variety of local wildlife that combine to create what many describe as the traditional English lowland landscape.

The Dedham Vale AONB has an extraordinary cultural significance. The associations with artists, including the internationally significant landscape artist and painter John Constable, the quantity and quality of historic buildings and hidden archaeology contribute to the areas international importance.

A Landscape Character Assessment of the area recognises six distinct types of landscape: Valley Floor; Rolling Valley Farmlands; Rolling Estate Farmlands; Plateau Farmlands; Undulating Ancient Farmlands and Undulating Estate Farmlands, details of which can be seen on the Suffolk Landscape website, which includes the Essex elements of the AONB.

The Landscape of the area is described in Natural England's National Character Assessment 86, the summary of which states:

It is an ancient landscape of wooded arable countryside with a distinct sense of enclosure. The overall character is of a gently undulating, chalky boulder clay plateau, the undulations being caused by the numerous small-scale river valleys that dissect the plateau. There is a complex network of old species-rich hedgerows, ancient woods and parklands, meadows with streams and rivers that flow eastwards.

Traditional irregular field patterns are still discernible over much of the area, despite field enlargements in the second half of the 20th century. The widespread moderately fertile, chalky clay soils give the vegetation a more or less calcareous character. Gravel and sand deposits under the clay are important geological features, often exposed during mineral extraction, which contribute to our understanding of ice-age environmental change

The Stour Valley project area:

The Stour Valley project area, upstream of the AONB, follows the river Stour that predominately forms the boundary between Essex and Suffolk. The project area is 302 square kilometres (around 181 square miles) running from the Western AONB boundary past Sudbury and Haverhill to near the Cambridgeshire border at Great Bradley. It extends three to four kilometres either side of the river Stour with extensions along the Bumpstead Brook, Belchamp Brook and river Glem.

The project area is predominately rural and often demonstrates medieval settlement patterns. In places the growth of villages and changes to agricultural practices have altered the landscape but not fundamentally changed it. Many of the villages retain their historic centres and have timber framed buildings, imposing churches and village greens. Historic hamlets and isolated farm buildings are scattered throughout the landscape.

The area has many woodlands situated within the tributary valleys but much of the valley floor is given over to arable crops with the notable exception of Sudbury Common Lands where large tracts of water meadows remain as an important feature of the landscape.

2.6 Natural Beauty and Special Qualities

The Dedham Vale AONB

The Natural Beauty characteristics of the AONB relate to the reasons for designation, to conserve and enhance that natural beauty.

Public bodies and statutory undertakers have a duty to have regard to the purpose of AONB designation, when carrying out their day to day functions ..

The section 85 Duty of Regard, from the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, applies to all functions, not just those relating to planning and is applicable whether a function is statutory or permissive.

It is applicable to land outside as well as within an AONB, where an activity may have an impact on an AONB. The requirement is to 'conserve and enhance' and both aspects are required to be addressed.

For Local Authorities, in relation to planning, the Duty of Regard applies in respect of both plan making and decision making, including deciding what weight to apply to different planning matters. It is good practice for a local planning authority to consider this Duty of Regard. This could be undertaken, example, in the planning officers report during determinations or reference to AONB purpose in plan making..

For statutory undertakers, such as utility providers, this requires them to pay regard to the purposes of designation when developing projects that impact on the AONB.

The Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the Dedham Vale AONB are neatly summarised in the former Countryside Commission's publication 'The Dedham Vale Landscape' This document comments that the AONB landscape is:

...important because of its unspoilt rural character. It has remained remarkably free from the intrusion of modern development...

It goes on to comment:

Rich agricultural landscapes and woods are complemented by the consistent use of local building materials and colours in the villages and isolated cottages.

The visual harmony gives the AONB its strong sense of unity, which is vital to its aesthetic appeal and sense of place. Within this overall character, the landscape is greatly enhanced by rich contrasts in scenery and characteristic details.

In 2016 the AONB Partnership commissioned Alison Farmer Associates to:

...review, gather and present evidence on the natural beauty and special qualities of the existing AONB in order to clearly articulate why it is one of England's nationally valued landscapes.

This piece of work includes a detailed assessment of the factors which contribute to the natural beauty and special qualities of the Dedham Vale AONB and the relationship between them. It comments on the natural beauty indicators used as considerations as part of the Dedham Vale's AONB designation process, such as:

- Landscape quality:
Intactness of landscape and generally free of incongruous features
- Scenic quality:
Iconic lowland river valley with assemblage of features
- Relative wildness
Sense of remoteness, historic human and agricultural activity
- Relative tranquillity
Limited, but significant, incursions from human activity
- Natural heritage features
Functioning river, with associated habitats and species
- Cultural heritage
Historic villages, visible archaeology and artistic associations

The work provides supporting evidence on how the Dedham Vale meets these indicators and discusses current, perceived and anticipated risks to these areas Natural Beauty and special qualities.

In summary the document clearly demonstrates that the AONB demonstrates a range of natural beauty features/characteristics which sets it above 'normal countryside' and which deservedly places it within the family of nationally designated landscapes.

The special qualities of the AONB extend to the importance of the above and below ground heritage assets.

The Stour Valley project area

In addition to the work described above Alison Farmer Associates were commissioned to undertake a study of an area of the Stour Valley project area to review, update and gather evidence on the special qualities of an evaluation area to determine its suitability for designation as AONB. As part of this work evidence was gathered on the characteristics of the area using the natural beauty indicators listed above.

In 2019, the AONB Partnership commissioned Alison Farmer Associates to undertake an assessment of the Stour Valley project area. This work was commissioned to develop a better understanding about why the project area is special and what makes it a Valued Landscape. This work included an assessment of the natural beauty, special qualities, landscape and cultural features at the valley scale. It also included an assessment of individual key settlements within the project area to understand how they had evolved historically but also to understand their relationship and importance within the wider valley landscape. The summary of findings from this study identify several themes for the area, namely:

- Outstanding collection of historic buildings and small scale villages that exhibit qualities that should be valued individually and as groups.
- Significant collection of churches whose towers create key landmarks and are often inter-visible across the Stour valley and contribute to a quintessential English lowland scene.
- Extensive areas of valley floor pasture grazed by livestock and associated with pollarded willows high value ecosystem services and settings for historic settlements.
- Perception of a rural backwater.
- The coincidence of historic features and patterns, small church/hall complex hamlets/villages, remnant parkland, pre 18th century enclosures and small copses on the valley sides, gives rise to a tangible time.
- Notable areas of valley and valley floor with are relatively inaccessible except by foot increasing perceptions of tranquillity.
- Wooded skylines that define valleys and reduce intrusion from modern development.

As well as identifying what is special (valued) about the project area, the assessment also identified enhancement opportunities for those parts of the Project Area where the landscape had been altered through changes to agricultural practices or by inappropriate development.

2.7 Responsibility for Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area

The nationally designated AONB) and Stour Valley project area is shown in the map below.

MAP to be included

The Dedham Vale AONB

All statutory bodies and statutory undertakers have a responsibility to pay regard to the purpose of the AONB when decision making. This is not limited to environmental issues but across all their areas of responsibility.

Natural England is responsible for offering advice to Government and others on how AONBs should be managed and protected. Furthermore, Natural England is responsible for recommending to Government on whether to designate land as AONB and are the responsible organisation for undertaking any future boundary variations.

The Stour Valley project area

Local Authorities have a statutory function to undertake spatial planning across the area in which they have jurisdiction. Local Authorities have supported an AONB type management in in the Stour Valley project area via financial support to the AONB team.

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Advisory Committee and Partnership

To ensure the efficient and co-ordinated management of the AONB and Stour Valley project area, a Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership were formed in 1993.

The former deals with the governance of the AONB staff team and provides strategic direction and a scrutiny function. The Partnership is made up of a diverse range of organisations with an interest in the AONB and Stour Valley project area. It works together to support the conservation and enhancement of the environmental, economic and social wellbeing of the area by delivering management plan policies and objectives.

2.8 Planning in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area

Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans

Local Planning Authorities are responsible for preparing Local Plans for their administrative areas. Where these fall within the AONB or Stour Valley project area, Local Planning Authorities should ensure the purpose of designation is recognised within them and help deliver this management plan objectives and policies.

Where town Parish or Town Councils are preparing Neighbourhood Plans within the AONB they should support the purposes of the national designation. For those in the project area it would be appropriate if they met management plan objectives contained within this document.

Determining planning applications

In the Dedham Vale AONB

Planning decisions relating to development applications in AONBs remain with Local Planning Authorities. The National Planning Policy Framework states that:

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas...

It goes on to say:

Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated*

It is worth noting that development is acceptable in the AONB where it contributes to the statutory purposes of the AONB. Development proposals are expected to meet a higher standard of planning and design to ensure that the statutory purposes of the AONB are met.

In the Stour Valley project area

Local Planning Authorities operating across the Stour Valley project area are responsible for determining planning applications within this area. As these authorities have endorsed this plan and contributed to the development of the Valued Landscape work (see section 2.6 above) it is anticipated that the management plan policies and recommendations in the Valued Landscape Assessment for the Stour Valley project area are given appropriate weight in determining applications.

It is anticipated that where planning permission is awarded in the Stour Valley project area it will not significantly impact those defined qualities of the area that make it important to residents and visitors.

2.9 International, National and Local Context

International

Designated areas such as the Dedham Vale AONB remain the fundamental concept of international conservation strategies supported by Governments. AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Landscapes under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (ICUN) global framework.

AONBs are designated under national legislation and at the time of writing it remains to be seen what impacts the decision for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union will have. The most obvious impacts relate to changes to agri-environment schemes and how much weight will be given to designated landscapes in the proposed Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMS). AONBs, and the land within them, are well placed to deliver on the Government mantra of public money for public goods.

Government has indicated that European laws and regulations that offer environmental protections when the United Kingdom was in the European Union will be carried over into UK domestic legislation.

National

There is a wide range of national legislation that influence the delivery of AONB purposes. From the original Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, that provided the legislation to designate AONBs, to a plethora of acts relating to wildlife, planning and the natural environment

During the period of the previous management plan the Government published its 25 Year Environment Plan. It also undertook a review of nationally designated landscapes such as National Parks and AONBs, known as the Glover Review.

The national AONB network has responded to what it sees as the key issues of wildlife decline and the climate crisis with its offer to Government, known as the Colchester Declaration, named after the town it was developed at during the national conference at the University of Essex in 2019.

The 25 Year Environment Plan reflects that:

...AONBs has been among the outstanding environmental achievements of the past 100 years.

And goes on to say:

We will make sure they [AONBs] continue to be conserved and enhanced, while recognising that they are living landscapes that support rural communities.

Before it goes on to recommend a review of designated landscapes, which we now know as the Glover Review.

At the time of writing the Government has not responded to the Glover Review which was published in September 2019 and included 27 proposals. Many of those proposals reflect the aspirations that AONBs have had for many years and are reproduced below.

The proposals in the Glover Review of particular resonance and/or significance for the Dedham Vale AONB are highlighted in bold:

- **Proposal 1: National landscapes should have a renewed mission to recover and enhance nature, and be supported and held to account for delivery by a new National Landscapes Service**
- Proposal 2: The state of nature and natural capital in our national landscapes should be regularly and robustly assessed, informing the priorities for action
- **Proposal 3: Strengthened Management Plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and the response to climate change (notably tree planting and peatland restoration). Their implementation must be backed up by stronger status in law**
- Proposal 4: National landscapes should form the backbone of Nature Recovery Networks – joining things up within and beyond their boundaries
- **Proposal 5: A central place for national landscapes in new Environmental Land Management Schemes**
- **Proposal 6: A strengthened place for national landscapes in the planning system with AONBs given statutory consultee status, encouragement to develop local plans and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework**
- **Proposal 7: A stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes, supported and held to account by the new National Landscapes Service**
- Proposal 8: A night under the stars in a national landscape for every child
- **Proposal 9: New long term programmes to increase the ethnic diversity of visitors**
- **Proposal 10: Landscapes that cater for and improve the nation's health and wellbeing**
- **Proposal 11: Expanding volunteering in our national landscapes**
- **Proposal 12: Better information and signs to guide visitors**

- Proposal 13: A ranger service in all our national landscapes, part of a national family
- Proposal 14: National landscapes supported to become leaders in sustainable tourism
- Proposal 15: Joining up with others to make the most of what we have, and bringing National Trails into the national landscapes family
- Proposal 16: Consider expanding open access rights in national landscapes
- Proposal 17: National landscapes working for vibrant communities
- Proposal 18: A new National Landscapes Housing Association to build affordable homes
- Proposal 19: A new approach to coordinating public transport piloted in the Lake District, and new, more sustainable ways of accessing national landscapes
- Proposal 20: New designated landscapes and a new National Forest
- Proposal 21: Welcoming new landscape approaches in cities and the coast, and a city park competition
- **Proposal 22: A better designations process**
- **Proposal 23: Stronger purposes in law for our national landscapes**
- **Proposal 24: AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes**
- Proposal 25: A new National Landscapes Service bringing our 44 national landscapes together to achieve more than the sum of their parts
- Proposal 26: Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society
- **Proposal 27: A new financial model – more money, more secure, more enterprising**

In summary, the AONB Partnership welcomes the report, it awaits Government response and is particularly interested in proposals relating to the status of AONBs, increasing AONB audiences and more for wildlife decline.

The national AONB network's **Colchester Declaration** outlines the AONB offer to Government, which pledges to:

- Creating an approach for people to make an emotional connection with nature
- To prepare a Nature Recovery Plan for each AONB

- To contribute to work to mitigate and adapt to climate change
- To contribute to work to enhance wildlife habitat

Subject to being given appropriate resources.

Local

As required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Local authorities will:

- *In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.*

This will include relevant policies in their Local Plans and other strategies and plans.

2.10 Statement of Significance

For the Dedham Vale AONB

The Statement of Significance defines the natural beauty, character and special qualities of the Dedham Vale AONB. It provides the criteria against which potential impacts on the nationally designated landscape can be judged.

The Dedham Vale AONB is a predominately agricultural landscape that exhibits a subtle lowland river valley with an assemblage of features associated with this landscape still in place and intact. These features include a gently winding river and tributaries; gentle valley sides with scattered woodlands; sunken rural lanes; picturesque villages with imposing churches and historic timber framed buildings; scattered farmsteads and agricultural buildings; small fields enclosed by ancient hedgerows; riverside grazing meadows with associated drainage ditches and visible and hidden archaeology providing evidence of human habitation over previous millennia.

The area remains mostly free of incongruous development and large scale industrial developments. Despite some intrusions of human activity in the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the area retains a rural charm and tranquillity and is largely free of infrastructure associated with modern life.

The essential character of the Dedham Vale AONB was established in the middle of the previous millennium and has remained intact despite social, technological events. The fundamental beauty of the area and the scenes of a working landscape were captured by England's finest landscape artist, John Constable. The sites of his paintings are still recognisable in the heart of what is now the AONB.

For the Stour Valley project area

The Stour Valley project area is predominately an agricultural area that is a sparsely populated with most people living in village settlements that can trace their history back to the Saxon period and are listed in the Domesday Book of 1086.

The valley slopes are gentle, forming shallow valleys which sit within wider undulating farmland. The junction between valley and wider farmland is transitional and subtle, the presence of a water courses, associated wetland vegetation, and small nucleated villages/hamlets, generally distinguishing the valleys from other landscape undulations.

On the more elevated farmland above the valleys there is a high incidence of medieval moated farmhouses and small copses/blocks of ancient woodland. These features reflect the underlying clay soils found on the higher land. Despite woodland blocks, elevated farmland has a predominantly open character, affording long distance views over the shallow valleys.

The expansive views and openness perceived from higher land contrasts with that of the more intimate valleys and small settlements. The lack of major transport infrastructure gives this landscape a relative tranquillity reinforcing perceptions of a rural backwater

The majority of the settlements have a distinctive settlement pattern with dwellings clustered around small angular greens or tyes. Medieval churches have often been built in prominent positions and knapped in flint reflecting the areas prosperity and the importance of religion during the time of construction.

Villages show a rich heritage of building styles, reflecting changing building techniques, fashions and relative wealth over the centuries of development but many retain a core of medieval timber framed buildings. Beyond the villages there are a series of isolated farmsteads and manorial halls (often moated) reflecting the areas agricultural heritage and accumulated wealth.

2.11 Vision Statement

For the Dedham Vale AONB

It is the aim of this plan that:

The Dedham Vale AONB is a distinctive landscape with agriculture and wildlife at its core. Its natural beauty is conserved and enhanced through the efforts of everybody. The AONB is relevant to all members of society who engage in everything it has to offer. It is an area where residents feel a strong sense belonging, visitors are welcomed to enjoy the AONB and respect it as a special place and the heritage is understood and appreciated by all.

For the Stour Valley project area

The Stour Valley project area is a cherished landscape by both residents and visitors. It has agriculture and wildlife are at its core and everyone appreciates its scenic quality and beauty. The area is treasured and decisions impacting its landscape quality recognise its status as a valued landscape.

2.12 Review of 2016-2021 plan

The 2016-21 Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area management plan was endorsed by the AONB partnership members in 2016. Reports of progress undertaken to deliver the management plan were made to the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership. An evaluation of the previous plan has drawn the following conclusions:

- The AONB vision statement and statement of significance are largely valid and have required minor modifications for the 2021-26 plan to reflect contemporary thinking and the priorities of the Partnership
- The period covered by the 2016-21 plan has seen unprecedented national influences on the AONB expressed through the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and the Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs, as well as reviews of the planning system including the publication of a revised National Planning Policy Framework and changes to the permitted development rules.
- There were unanticipated societal changes during the time of the 2016-21 plan including the UK's decision to leave the European Union, wider recognition of the Climate Crisis and wildlife decline and the Coronavirus pandemic.
- It has been widely recognised that AONBs do not serve all sections of society equally. There are audiences missing the benefits AONBs can bring and more work is needed to engage with them, remove barriers and generating a genuine welcome.
- The management plan has been used by many organisations to support their work to meet the purposes of the AONB and the aspirations of the Stour Valley project area, although more needs to be done.

Notable successes during the period of the 2016-21 plan include:

- Multiple externally funded projects to deliver the purposes of the AONB and to deliver environmental gains in the Stour Valley project area. These include:
 - The River Stour Enhancement Project
 - A LEADER funded project to enhance the Stour Valley for visitors
 - A European funded project to engage businesses in the benefits of the AONB
 - A National Lottery Heritage Funded project to celebrate 50 years of designation
 - Ofgem funding to underground low voltage power cables

- The development of the Stour Valley Farmers Cluster Group with its shared aim with many AONB Partnership organisations to address wildlife decline.
- The development of volunteer activity by the AONB team and several of its partners to deliver the aspirations of the 2016-21 plan. This includes volunteer activity across a wide range of activity including:
 - Conservation
 - Access
 - Events
 - Work placements
 - Project development
 - Community archaeological projects
- The distribution of funds to communities, organisations and businesses through the AONB sustainable development fund and the Stour Valley Environment Fund for projects that meet the environmental, economic and social aspirations of the 2016-21 plan.
- A broader recognition of the importance of the statutory purposes of the AONB and value of the Stour Valley project area through the planning system and public engagement events.

2.13 The 2021-26 plan

This 2021-26 plan has two main areas. The introduction section outlines the area of geographical interest and background of the plan. The context and issues section explores the key issues by theme, the current pressures on those themes and sets out objectives and management plan policies for each theme.

3. Context and Management Plan Policies

This section of the management plan explores the influences on the AONB and Stour Valley project area through a series of themes. The theme areas are:

- The Countryside
- Villages, Infrastructure and Residents
- Enjoying the Area
- Climate Change and Nature Recovery
- The River and its Tributaries
- Working Together

Each theme is given a series of objectives and subsequent management plan objectives.

3.1 The Countryside

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area is a place that provokes feelings of pride. This sense of place and belonging was brought into sharp focus in 1938 when proposals to demolish a coaching arch at the Sun Inn in Dedham acted as a catalyst to raise awareness of the importance of the natural and historic features in the area. These were the first steps in the Dedham Vale securing AONB status in 1970.

Much of the land in the AONB and Stour Valley project area is in private ownership, although there are notable exceptions of areas being owned by charitable organisations with purposes sympathetic to the purposes of the AONB designation.

Most of the land in private ownership is used for agriculture. Agriculture is the primary driver for landscape management in the area. Many of the key landscape features, that contribute to the natural beauty of the area, such as hedgerows, grasslands and woodlands are dependent on farming practices that do not have a significant detrimental impact on the purposes of the AONB designation.

The AONB and Stour Valley project area has an extensive network of public rights of way and promoted routes (for walking and cycling) of various lengths. This includes walking routes of a few miles to the 60 mile Stour Valley Path regional route and promoted cycle routes such as locally developed routes and the national cycle route promoted by Sustrans. Although much of the land is in private ownership, there are huge public benefits from the land in terms of access to the countryside, through the public rights of way network, that bring health and wellbeing benefits as well as economic benefits to local businesses offering visitor services. In 2019 the Dedham Vale AONB visitor economy was calculated to be worth £68M and supported 1,490 jobs. In the Stour Valley project area, the figures are £49M and 1,283 jobs.

The nationally designated AONB and valued Stour Valley project area sit within a wider countryside setting that enhances the value of these landscapes. The

experience of being in the AONB is enhanced by its setting and benefits for wildlife and access also accrue from the wider countryside setting.

Agriculture is supported to conserve and enhance these features through agri-environment schemes. Such schemes are funded through the public purse to secure food supplies and environmental gain. The lifespan of this plan will see support for farming move to a agriculture transition plan before the implementation of the Environmental Land Management scheme. It is anticipated AONBs will have an important role in these.

The character of the area is further influenced by national and local policy. The AONB is subject to policy to meet the reasons for designation, to conserve and enhance natural beauty. While development is not stopped in an AONB, there is a presumption against major development within these designated landscapes. Local Planning Authorities offer further protection to the purposes of the AONB through development control policies contained within Local Plans.

Natural England has produced guidance for the management of landscapes through a series of National Character Areas (NCA). NCA 86 covers much of the AONB and Stour Valley and provides a broad range of information that can be used by individuals and communities to help achieve greater enhancement of the distinctive features of the landscape. The profiles include a description of how the natural environment can contribute to the welfare of people and protect resources provided in each character area and how these benefit people, wildlife and the economy.

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership resolved in 2009 that their long term ambition is for a review of the boundary of the AONB with a desire to see the current boundary extended westwards towards Sudbury. In 2016 the Partnership commissioned Alison Farmer Associates to undertake a study to identify an area in the Stour Valley project area that met the AONB designation criteria. An area to the west of the existing boundary towards Suffolk was identified.

The AONB and Stour Valley project area is home to some excellent wildlife habitat that support important wildlife species. The area has seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest (the nation's best wildlife and or geological sites). Around 2% of the land area of the AONB is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There is a clear link between landscape and wildlife

It is widely reported that recorded wildlife has declined by 60% since 1970. To address this catastrophic wildlife decline different sectors need to work to a common aim to reverse those declines. Space needs to be made for nature both physically and in policy and strategy.

Tranquillity is a key component of the natural beauty. Significant detrimental impacts to tranquillity and the defined characteristics of the AONB can arise from overflying aircraft, road noise and inappropriate use of lighting. NATS, the national air traffic service recognises AONBs, but commercial traffic continues to impact the AONB. Other detractors of tranquillity should be avoided or if that is not possible, minimised.

Light aircraft can further impact the sense of tranquillity in the AONB and Stour Valley project area.

Tranquillity can further be compromised by the inappropriate use of lighting. Light is essential to many aspects of modern life, but inappropriate design can have negative impacts on the purposes of the AONB and the character of the Stour Valley project area.

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley has a rich historic landscape, including a prehistoric element and a possible Neolithic Longbarrow and Cursus monument. Records for the known historic environment can be obtained from The Suffolk Heritage Explorer¹ and the Essex Heritage Gateway².

The Historic Environment Records on both sides of the county boundary are constantly being updated as new information is being discovered and the importance of the historic and prehistoric nature of the AONB and Stour Valley project area is known.

Full records can be obtained from the Suffolk County Historic Environment Record (HER) via a data request (<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/culture-heritage-and-leisure/suffolk-archaeological-service/what-is-the-historic-environment-record/>) The area of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour valley form part of a prehistoric landscape, with a possible Neolithic Longbarrow (HER reference SSM 009), and ring ditch cropmarks, which likely represent Bronze Age funerary monuments (SBN 005, SBN 006, SBN 007, SBN 008, SBN 009, SBN 010, SBN 011, SBN 037, SBN 076, SSM 004, SSM 010 & SSM 016), additionally there is a Neolithic Cursus monument at Stratford St Mary (SSM 003) which over looks the Stour River Valley.

The key influences on the AONB and Stour Valley project area are:

- The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan that sets out sets out how it will improve the environment over a generation by creating richer habitats for wildlife, improving air and water quality.
- The Glover Review. Considers the next steps for National Parks and AONBs in England, with 27 recommendations including those relating addressing wildlife decline, rural communities and wider understanding of AONBs
- The Colchester Declaration, adopted in 2019, is the AONB networks offer to Government to address the twin issues of wildlife decline and climate change
- The role of the new Environmental Land Management scheme in providing public good. This new agri-environment scheme replaces support given to farmers following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union

¹ www.heritage.suffolk.gov.uk

² www.heritagegateway.org.uk

- The Stour Valley Farmer Cluster, covering over 80% of the AONB with a priority to combine and integrate productive agriculture with landscape scale enhancement of wildlife and resource protection
- Planning policy, including the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Planning Authority policies in Local Plans
- Development pressures, including those for infrastructure and urbanisation of the countryside
- Increasing traffic
- Impacts of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects on the AONB and Stour Valley project area
- Potential delivery of a Dedham Vale AONB boundary review
- Climate Change
- Negative impacts on tranquillity such as noise and light pollution Increasing visitor and recreational demand
- The value of the historic environment

Aim:

To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and Stour Valley project area

Objectives:

- Land use management decisions pay regard to the purpose of the AONB, to conserve and enhance its natural beauty
- Decision makers consider the purposes of the AONB when working on development proposals
- The natural features, of the AONB and Stour Valley project area, including its wildlife, are conserved and enhanced
- The AONB and Stour Valley project area's heritage, landscape and wildlife are appreciated by all sections of society
- Secure Dark Sky Status for the AONB

Management Plan Policies:

- CS1 Support work that contributes and protects the statutory purposes of the AONB, including impacts on its defined characteristics of landscape and scenic quality, relative wildness and tranquillity
- CS2 Resist proposals that significantly negatively impact the AONB's natural beauty and special qualities, including those in its setting
- CS3 Support work that contributes to local distinctiveness, appropriate climate change mitigation and wildlife recovery in the AONB and Stour Valley project area
- CS4 Support work to broaden the audiences to the AONB and Stour Valley project area and improve understanding of its natural and built features
- CS5 Work with the Dedham Vale Society and others to secure Dark Sky status for the AONB
- CS6 Support the aspiration to extend the AONB boundary

3.2 Villages, Infrastructure and Residents

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project is a relatively sparsely populated area with most people living in village settlements that can trace their history back to the Saxon period and are listed in the Domesday Book of 1086.

These villages contribute significantly to the reasons for designation for the AONB and the value many place on the Stour Valley project area.

Most of the settlements have a distinctive settlement pattern with dwellings clustered around small angular greens or tyes. Medieval churches have often been built in prominent positions and knapped in flint reflecting the areas prosperity and the importance of religion during the time of construction.

Villages show a rich heritage of building styles, reflecting changing building techniques, fashions and relative wealth over the centuries of development but many retain a core of medieval timber framed buildings. Beyond the villages there are a series of isolated farmsteads and manorial halls (often moated) reflecting the areas agricultural heritage and accumulated wealth.

Roads, electricity distribution networks and telecommunications structures are examples of Infrastructure that is vital to everyday life. These can impact on the purposes of the AONB and the valued landscape of the Stour Valley project area in a negative way.

The local road network often reflects historical transport routes and form part of the character of the area. Sunken lanes are often designated as protected lanes in district and borough council Local Plans. These heritage assets can be at risk from inappropriate use such as use as 'rat runs', by oversized vehicles and sometimes on drivers relying on inappropriate satellite navigation system routes.

Local electricity distribution networks can have a detrimental impact on the natural beauty of the area and new connections should consider the potential impact on the AONB and Stour Valley project area landscape. An Ofgem scheme to underground low voltage overhead power cables in designated protected landscapes, such as AONBs, should be used where possible to offset the negative impacts of this type of infrastructure.

Communications infrastructure including masts, poles (with associated cables) and communication 'boxes' have the potential to conflict with the purposes of the AONB and the natural beauty of the Stour Valley project area. It is recognised that this form of technology is vital to residents' and visitors and is a fast developing technology with the likely roll out of 5G technology during the lifetime of this plan.

National infrastructure in the AONB and Stour Valley project area such as trunk roads; national rail routes; national grid energy transmission equipment and water transfer structures can negatively impact upon the purposes of the AONB. It is recognised that national infrastructure is vital to society and has benefits for local residents.

Renewable energy will need to play an important part in reducing the negative environment impact of societies demand for electricity. There is a presumption, in the national Planning Policy Framework, against major development in the AONB. This

type of development can also have significant negative impacts to the character of the Stour Valley project area. There is an increasing interest in domestic or local energy renewable energy schemes and where these do not have a significant impact on the purposes of the AONB, due to their scale or location, they are considered a benefit to society.

The population profile of the East of England, that includes the AONB and Stour Valley, shows that the population has a slightly older demographic and a higher growth rate than the national average.

The key influences on the AONB and Stour Valley project area are:

- National and Local Plan policy relating to development in the AONB and Stour Valley project area
- The potential for visitor pressures negatively impacting on resident's quality of life
- Residents transport options to access services, work and recreational opportunities
- Inappropriate deployment of infrastructure and upgrades to existing structures.
- Many visitors to the AONB and Stour Valley project area come from just outside its boundaries and have an emotional attachment to the area
- The value of the historic environment and the need to ensure it is considered in decision making

Aim:

To conserve and enhance the characteristics of the built environment

Objectives:

- Residents live in and contribute to a high quality environment
- Development within villages contributes to the purposes of the AONB designation and the characteristics of the Stour Valley project area
- Infrastructure does not significantly negatively impact the AONB or Stour Valley project area

Management Plan Policies:

VIR1 Develop understanding of the purposes of the AONB designation to residents and infrastructure owners to inform any development proposals

VIR2 Champion the purposes of the AONB and characteristics of the Stour Valley project area to Local Planning Authorities and other decision makers

VIR3 Conserve and enhance the AONB by supporting work to reduce the negative impacts of proposed and existing infrastructure

VIR4 Work with the visitor and tourism industry to maximise the economic, social and wellbeing benefits and minimise any negative impacts of the visitor activity

3.3 Enjoying the Area

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project area is a place to enjoy. The area offers a wide variety of opportunities for walking; riding; boating; discovering history and heritage; wildlife watching; fine or rustic dining; environmental education; countryside sports; geocaching; environmental volunteering and visiting historical sites and buildings.

The tourism business is an important element of the local economy. In 2019 the Dedham Vale AONB visitor economy was calculated to be worth £68M and supported 1,490 jobs. In the Stour Valley project area, the figures are £49M and 1,283 jobs.

Much of this tourism business is built on the back of the natural beauty of the area, its historic and cultural associations and its natural and built heritage. Access to these qualities is often through charities such as the National Trust, RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts but commercial interests play an important part, particularly in the hospitality sector. It is a primary long term interest for this sector of the economy that the AONB and Stour Valley project area retains and enhances its landscape quality.

There are opportunities to enjoy the area by volunteering to help the areas wildlife and undertake landscape improvements. Groups from the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, the National Trust, RSPB, Sudbury Common Lands Charity, Wildlife Trusts, Parish Councils and Community groups offer regular opportunities.

Much of the attraction to residents and visitors alike is the relative tranquillity and unspoilt nature of the AONB and Stour Valley project area. Although visitors are always encouraged and welcome to enjoy the area, they are encouraged to respect both the natural environment and local residents.

There has been a recognition that developing the visitor offer in the shoulder season (spring and autumn), as well as in winter months that offers much in terms of peace and tranquillity. Visits during these times help with the viability for commercial operations of both the private sector and the commercial operations of charities. Visitors during these times can often benefit from a sense of remoteness and peacefulness.

In addition to its natural beauty the area is known for its association with artists such as Constable, Gainsborough and Munnings. There is also a wealth of historical features that draw visitors including the Stour navigation, a wealth of archaeology (including both known and unknown below ground heritage assets). Furthermore the historic and picturesque villages, often with outstanding churches are a key feature and characteristic of the AONB and Stour Valley project area.

Most visitors arrive to the area by car. There are some options for travelling to the AONB by train, as it is served by a mainline railway station. The Stour Valley project area is served by a branch line. There are options for more sustainable transport methods once they have arrived in the area, such as bike hire and a limited bus service. The boundary to the AONB and Stour valley is not obvious on the ground and many visitors and residents will not be aware of the boundary.

The growth in the popularity of cycling, canoeing, paddle boarding, walking and running due to the desire for improving health and the positive experiences gained has been witnessed in the area. This activity is an excellent way to experience the natural beauty of the AONB, although some visitor behaviours have been detrimental to the purposes of the AONB and lead to tensions with the resident population.

Those that come to the area enjoy the relative tranquillity and unspoilt nature of the area. Large scale recreational facilities and noisy or intrusive pastimes are likely to have a negative impact on the defined natural beauty qualities of the area, particularly its relative tranquillity.

The intimate nature of the AONB can mean that visitor infrastructure, from signage to built structures require careful consideration to avoid negative impacts on the qualities of the nationally designated landscape. Development and promoted activities need to consider the primary purpose of the AONB, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty.

Activities such as country sports and learning about rural crafts are well catered for in the area and can fit well with the purposes of the AONB and contribute to the wellbeing of the area. There are also a number of golf courses in the area. These golf courses have the potential to contribute to the purposes of the AONB if managed in a sympathetic way

The Government's review into National Parks and AONBs, the Glover Review, identified the lack of diversity in visitors to AONBs. This is something that needs to be addressed, AONBs are national assets and visitors to them should reflect society.

Co-ordination and Developing the Area for Tourism

The AONB and Stour Valley project area runs across many administrative boundaries but there has never been one organisation directly co-ordinating either tourism activity or promotion across the whole area. A LEADER funded project during the time of the previous management plan worked to address this void. Groups such as the River Stour Festival work hard to deliver a coordinated approach to the visitor offer, as does the Wool Towns Association Individual businesses continue to market and promote themselves and often make reference to the natural beauty of the area.

As the area straddles two counties both Visit Essex and Visit Suffolk undertake campaigns to promote the areas, although both organisations are mindful of the fragility of the area.

A Visitor Management Group, operating in the Flatford area, has for many years bought representatives, drawn from the charitable, commercial and public sectors together in an attempt to undertake work to influence visitor behaviours once they have arrived.

The development of a group to promote the area for tourism that does not have a significant negative impact on the purposes of the AONB designation is likely to be welcomed by those in the private, public and third sectors.

Information provided for visitors is key to increasing enjoyment, understanding and encouraging appropriate behaviours. Information is currently available from a wide

range of sources and in different formats. However, information highways are constantly evolving and appropriate mechanisms to engage the different audiences are required. Consideration needs to be made for the currently missing audiences, to ensure all members of society are made aware of the benefits of the AONB.

Information should reflect the different interests in the area and it is appropriate that information is available in a wide variety of formats including: books and pamphlets; leaflets; web based; via social media; static displays; staff and press articles.

It is appropriate that information is disseminated by a variety of methods providing it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of visitors. There is some benefit in having cross promotion between organisations and sectors, and shared messages relating to the area's natural beauty would contribute to the primary purposes of the AONB and supporting the conservation of the Stour Valley.

The key issues that impact the AONB and Stour Valley project area are:

- Visitor activity and behaviours impacting the primary purpose of the AONB, agricultural operations and resident's quality of life at hotspots and at particular times of the year
- A locally important visitor economy
- The lack of a co-ordinating body to promote sustainable tourism
- The lack of more sustainable transport options

Aim:

The AONB and Stour Valley project area are enjoyed by all sections of society

Objectives:

- The AONB and Stour Valley is an area that appeals to all sections of society
- The AONB and Stour Valley project area is enjoyed by visitors from all sections of society without compromising its natural beauty
- The AONB and Stour Valley project area has a sustainable visitor economy
- The understanding of the AONB and its features, to encourage further efforts to conserve and enhance its defined natural beauty

Management Plan Policies:

ETA1 Support projects to broaden the appeal, understanding and engagement with the area to groups that are currently underrepresented in the current visitor profile

ETA2 Support new visitor facilities that reflect the scale and qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley project area and do not significantly detract from its natural beauty

ETA3 Support initiatives to encourage more sustainable transport to and from the area and for travel within the area.

ETA4 Support coordination of the promoting the visitor to the AONB and Stour Valley project area

ETA5 Raise awareness of the AONB designation to visitor service providers and visitors.

ETA6 Promote behaviours that do not adversely impact the residents or the natural beauty of the AONB and Stour Valley

3.4 Climate Change and Nature Recovery

Climate change is one the causes already starting to shape the AONB landscape and its constituent wildlife. Its future impacts are likely to be significant and profound. Land use change is the most significant cause of wildlife decline. Development that delivers on biodiversity net gain and agricultural practices, supported by the agricultural transition plan and the Environmental land management scheme have the potential to address the causes of wildlife decline.

The national AONB network committed to an approach to address the twin concerns of climate change and wildlife decline at its national conference in 2019. This became known as the Colchester Declaration, named after the town it was developed in during the Landscapes for Life conference at the University of Essex. The declaration is reproduced below:

The Colchester Declaration 2019

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, and intergovernmental reports that the current global response to the effects of human impact on nature is insufficient – the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty believes that now is the time to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in AONBs. Using our unique network and partnership model, we are making a collective Declaration on Nature in AONBs, setting out our strategy for change.

With many AONB host authorities having taken the step of declaring a Climate Emergency we are demonstrating our readiness to act to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change.

We believe:

- 1. Natural Beauty has intrinsic value and means so much to people*
- 2. AONBs should be places of rich, diverse and abundant wildlife*
- 3. Nature recovery is central to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty*
- 4. Climate change is the biggest threat to humanity and one of the greatest threats to biodiversity. Designated landscapes offer some of the most powerful solutions to the challenges of climate change*
- 5. The network of AONBs and National Parks, their teams, partnerships, authorities and stakeholders offer a unique solution to tackling environmental challenges*

We pledge:

1. *To enable an approach that creates opportunities within AONBs for people to make an emotional connection with nature.*
2. *To prepare a Nature Recovery Plan for each AONB*

By 2024

1. *To embed an ecosystems services approach into all AONB Management Plans*
2. *To ensure all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero*

By 2030

1. *That at least 200,000 ha of SSSIs in AONBs will be in favourable condition*
2. *That at least 100,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites will have been created/ restored in AONBs to further support the natural movement of plants and animals*
3. *That at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs following the principle of the right tree in the right place*
4. *That, by each AONB immediately adopting a species on the threatened list and by preparing and delivering a Species Action Plan, at least thirty species relevant to AONBs will be taken off the list by 2030*

We call on Westminster and Welsh Governments to provide the power and resources to make these targets achievable

Nationally, wildlife records indicate a 60%³ decrease since 1970, there is no reason to expect this is significantly different to what has been experienced in the AONB and Stour Valley project area. Records for species and habitats is contained in the 'State of AONB report, 2018, see summary at <https://arcg.is/0LP4DC> will need to be repeated at suitable intervals and other available data from the AONB Nature Recovery Plan being developed in 2021 will need to be monitored to understand changes to landscape and wildlife populations

The AONB is working in partnership with the Stour Valley Farmer Cluster to address wildlife decline and has developed a Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB.

The key issues that impact the AONB and Stour Valley project area are:

- Increase in the intensity of rain and storms

³ www.jncc.gov.uk/ukbi-C4a

- Winters are expected to be warmer and wetter with greater rainfall intensity
- Intensification of agricultural practices that have contributed to the decline in wildlife
- Feeling of helplessness in ability to combat impacts of climate change and wildlife decline at an individual level
- The Dedham Vale AONB has selected the Hazel Dormouse as its flagship species for nature recovery following a consultation process with the AONB and Stour valley Partnership and other stakeholders in 2020

Aim:

The AONB and Stour Valley contributes to mitigating climate change and wildlife recovery

Objectives:

- To reduce, minimise and mitigate the impacts of climate change
- To deliver wildlife recovery
- Maintain and enhance soil health
- Work to mitigate climate change and support wildlife recovery do not adversely impact the areas special qualities and historic environment

Management Plan Policies:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| CCNR1 | Implement the Colchester Declaration |
| CCNR2 | Increase tree cover, where appropriate to the AONB and Stour Valley project area landscape (based on the principles of the Wildlife and Countryside Link ⁴ paper) |
| CCNR3 | Support nature based solutions to combat the impacts of climate change that improve landscape and wildlife habitat where this does not compromise the statutory purposes of the AONB |
| CCNR4 | Use AONB Sustainable Development Fund to support projects that address climate change, soil health and wildlife decline |
| CCNR5 | Promote understanding of all causes of climate change and wildlife decline, how people can make a difference and the need for adaptation |

⁴ www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_woodland_expansion_principles_Feb2020.pdf

CCNR6 Provide nature-based solutions to help tackle climate change and increase ecosystem resilience

3.5 The River and its Tributaries

The River Stour is a defining feature of the area. Much of the areas appeal to people, the value to wildlife and local economy is based on the river. Once it was a vitally important trade link boosting commerce between London and Europe to the Stour Valley and Sudbury. Goods such as bricks and wool travelling downstream and 'night soil' (fertiliser in the form of droppings of horses drawing carriages in London) coming upstream.

The river has always been an important wildlife corridor and a place for people to enjoy getting out on and near the water. The river and its tributaries are home to species such as otter, water vole, kingfisher and a diverse range of fish. The quiet or lucky visitor will sometimes be fortunate to catch a glimpse of these charismatic river residents.

River Navigation

The river is navigable by unpowered craft such as canoes and kayaks from Brundon Mill to Cattawade. The River Stour Trust runs electrically powered passenger boat trips from Sudbury and between Flatford and Dedham in the summer months. Many people enjoy getting out on the water and this is a wonderful way of taking in the landscapes of the Stour Valley that so inspired artists such as John Constable, John Nash and Thomas Gainsborough.

Ely Ouse to Essex water Transfer System

The river plays a vital role in the Ely Ouse to Essex Transfer Scheme transporting water from Denver in Norfolk to Abberton and Hanningfield reservoirs to provide a public water supply in Essex. In the early part of this century, Essex & Suffolk Water has increased the capacity of the relatively close Abberton Reservoir by 60% and increased its daily pumping capacity at its river intakes. When natural (unsupported) river flows are high, a greater volume of water can be abstracted and used to fill the the enlarged Abberton Reservoir. This means that the likelihood of the Ely Ouse to Essex Transfer Scheme being needed in the medium term is reduced.

The combined effects of abstractions for agricultural use and that for public water supply means for prolonged periods very little water flows into the estuary, During periods of very low flow the water company is required to operate their intakes to ensure that water flowing into the reach downstream of Stratford St Mary is allowed to continue downstream and discharge to the estuary. These low flows are monitored for ecological purposes by the Environment Agency.

Riverside Trees

Much of the main river and some tributaries are defined in the landscape by plantations of cricket bat willows along the banks. These willows grow to maturity in around 20 years and can provide an important source of income to riparian landowners. These trees can offer some benefit in cooling river waters in the summer months supporting wildlife. However, they are not as effective at shading or providing wildlife habitat as native trees that would historically have been found

along the Stour Valley such as native willows, alder and black poplar, which are being planted by initiatives such as the River Stour Enhancement Project.

Demand for Potable Water

The UK Groundwater Forum estimates that there has been a 70% increase in the demand for water over the last 30 years. The AONB and Stour Valley project area is one of the driest in England with around 110 days where rain is recorded and an annual rainfall measurement of 568mm compared with a national average of 133 days and 855mm. This increasing demand in a dry area of the country means greater pressure on the water supply network including the River Stour that forms part of this network.

An abstraction licensing strategy has been produced by the Environment Agency setting out how water resources are managed in the Essex Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (CAMS) area. It provides information about where water is available for further abstraction and an indication of how reliable a new abstraction license may be.

Water Quality

Water quality in the river Stour and its tributaries is subject to national and European legislation including the Water Framework Directive. It has been stated by the United Kingdom Government that legislation will be brought over from European Law or equivalent laws will be made as the United Kingdom leave the European Union. The directive seeks to improve the ecological and chemical status of the surface water in terms of its:

- Biological quality (fish, benthic invertebrates, aquatic flora).
- Hydro morphological quality such as river bank structure, river continuity or substrate of the river bed.
- Physical-chemical quality such as temperature, oxygenation and nutrient conditions.
- Chemical quality that refers to environmental quality standards for river basin specific pollutants.

There are a variety of initiatives to improve water quality aimed at improving the ecological state of the river including River Basin Management Plans, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy.

Water quality can be adversely impacted by invasive plant species. Exposed bare riverbanks under species such as Himalayan Balsam over winter are at greater risk of erosion increasing the sediment load of the river. Other problems associated with non-native species are de-oxygenation and the shading of native in channel submerged water plants.

The Environment Agency has supported a River Stour Enhancement Project to support work to maintain the environmental quality of the River Stour and its tributaries.

Recreational Use

The river provides many opportunities for fishing, Fishing remains the highest participation sport in England. Many of the fishing rights are owned by clubs such as the London Anglers Club and Colchester Angling Preservation Society.

The river is enjoyed by many. In addition to many private craft that use the river there are boats to hire at Dedham and Flatford. This includes river trips on electric craft from Sudbury, such as the Stour Lighter, restored through the Managing a Masterpiece Landscape Partnership Scheme. There are companies that hire craft, and some provide guided canoe trips along the length of the navigable channel. Vessels using the river are required to be licenced.

The River Stour Trust is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation and restoration of the Stour Navigation. The Environment Agency is the navigation authority and as such manages the navigation that is limited to self-propelled vessels for the length of the Navigation, Sudbury to Cattawade and specific rights for certain powered crafts along specific stretches.

Wild swimming is increasing in popularity with individuals and organised groups taking advantage of the river and its outstanding landscape, some use the municipal swimming facility on the Stour at Sudbury. Many people enjoy spending time next to the river. Access is limited to where Public Rights of Way adjacent to the river, public open spaces such as the Sudbury Common Lands and some land owned by businesses that use the attraction of the river to attract custom, such as the Henny Swan public house and Milsom's Hotel and Restaurant.

Flooding

Climate change means that the UK is experiencing increasing numbers and magnitude of storm events. Stewardship of the countryside, through natural flood management, has done and can continue to reduce this flood risk with increasing land in permanent pasture and agricultural practices to reduce the speed of run off from farmed land.

The operation of the sluice gates associated with the many mills plays a part in managing water levels on the river but are not flood control structures. Soft engineering projects, such as those facilitated by the River Stour Enhancement Project, that direct excessive flows away from sensitive areas can be of benefit to reduce the impacts of flooding.

Routine maintenance of the river and its control structures, ensuring development considers flood risk areas and the use of the Environment Agency's flood alert systems, can help reduce the impacts and risk of floods.

River Morphology

The River Stour has been subject to many alterations by humans over many centuries. Evidence of these alterations can be seen throughout the AONB and Stour Valley project area including its most iconic location at Flatford, the site of the

artist John Constable's 'The Haywain'. Here the river has been diverted to provide water for the local mill.

Many of these alterations have allowed water to flow quickly away meaning riparian areas. This can reduce their value to wildlife, although increase agricultural productivity. The value of wetter areas to ecosystem services and the natural capital they provide to society is recognised by agri-environment schemes, that in some cases support projects to improve the wildlife and landscape function of the river.

The Water Framework Directive is a mechanism to measure the environmental quality of rivers. Measures can be put in place for water bodies with a modified function (such as flood defence and navigation) for them to achieve good ecological potential. These include increasing in channel morphological diversity, retaining marginal aquatic and riparian habitats and improving floodplain connectivity.

In recent years the River Stour Enhancement Project, a partnership between the Environment Agency and the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley project, has worked with landowners to deliver significant environmental gains. These include the creation of backwaters, naturalising, reconnecting the floodplain with the river, the morphology of the river, providing tree cover and the removal on non-native invasive plant species.

There have been historical improvements to the navigation including new cuts, most noticeably at Wormingford where a new channel was cut and a flood relief channel at Nayland. Navigation improvements have included dredging of the channel to ensure that there is sufficient water depth for the river craft.

The river has been manipulated many times by the needs of agriculture. The protection of agricultural land by the creation of river banks, or levees, to protect agricultural land from flooding can be observed through the majority of the river.

The cumulative impact of the changes in the river's morphology for the purposes of industrial navigation and flood defence have had a negative impact on the ability of the river to act as a wildlife habitat.

The key issues that impact the AONB and Stour Valley project area are:

- Demand for agricultural and potable water supplies
- The impacts of climate change
- Loss of wetland habitats
- Lack of riverside trees
- Loss of natural processes operating in the river system
- Requirement to improve ecological condition of catchment through the Water Framework Directive or its successor
- Increasing demand for recreational use of the river

- Ely-Ouse to Essex Water Transfer Scheme
- Expansion of scope for non-native wildlife species
- Costs of maintaining river structures

Aim:

Have a ecologically sound river system that brings contributes to public good

Objectives:

- The catchment functions as a healthy ecosystem that contributes to public good
- The river and its tributaries contribute to the natural beauty of the area
- Wetland habitats, including the rivers and tributaries provide important wildlife habitat
- Flood defence schemes protect people and property and do not impact the areas natural beauty and wildlife habitat
- The river provides opportunities for quiet informal recreation that does not detract from the natural beauty of the AONB and Stour Valley project area
- That projects that benefit the river and its tributaries do not have a negative impact on the areas natural beauty and historic environment

Management Plan Policies:

- Support work to conserve and enhance the river and its tributaries landscape quality and wildlife habitat
- Support projects to implement the Water Framework Directive, or its successor
- Support work to maintain active and conserve historic navigation features where they contribute to the AONB designation and qualities of the Stour Valley project area
- Support flood control and water transfer schemes that conserve and enhance the areas landscape and wildlife habitats
- Support recreational activity that does not significantly detract from the defined natural beauty of the AONB and qualities of the Stour Valley project area
- Support work for sustainable irrigation schemes for local farms

3.6 Working Together

As an African proverb says:

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together

In order to meet the purposes of the AONB designation, it is vital to work together to secure the best outcomes for the purposes of the AONB.

It is a statutory obligation for local authorities to consider the purposes of the AONB and there are obvious benefits to those local authorities in working together to meet this duty. Other organisations, from the public, private and third sectors have a legitimate interest in the purposes of the AONB and how they affect their own purposes. It is for this reason that working together is important in conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB and special qualities of the Stour Valley project area.

Defra and local authorities fund a small AONB staff team to help meet their duty of the purposes of the nationally designated landscape. A wider AONB partnership of organisations representing the environmental, agricultural and business sectors has been formed to further the aims and deliver on AONB objectives.

The purpose to conserve and enhance the AONB cannot be met by the staff team and this partnership alone. All public bodies have a duty to consider the purposes of the AONB in undertaking their duties, as do statutory undertakers. A wide section of society contributes in a significant way to meet the purposes of the AONB and contributes to maintaining the special qualities of the Stour Valley project area.

The Government review of National Parks and AONBs, the Glover Review, has identified that partnership working as a key strength of the AONBs. However, it has identified significant short comings in engaging with all members of society.

Two amenity societies, the Dedham Vale Society and the Colne Stour Countryside Association have many overlapping purposes to the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership. Parish councils similarly have an interest in the AONB and Stour Valley project area and statutory duty to consider the purposes of the AONB in decision making. In recent times several parish councils and the amenity societies have supported the staff team through sharing knowledge and financial contributions.

There are many local community groups that work to improve their local environment and the characteristic features of the AONB and Stour Valley.

The key issues that impact the AONB and Stour Valley project area are:

- Lack of engagement in AONB issues across the whole of society

- Status and understanding of the AONB designation
- Partner capacity to meet AONB obligations or support its purposes

Aim:

Conserve and enhance natural beauty of the AONB and Stour Valley project area

Objectives:

- Work in partnership with all stakeholders to deliver the purposes of the AONB and maintain the for lands qualities of the Stour Valley project area
- Develop a co-ordinated approach to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB and the qualities of the Stour Valley project area
- Maximise benefits for landscape, wildlife and people in the area

Management Plan Policies:

- Work in partnership to deliver the management plan objectives