

Summary of Key Achievements from the 2004-9 Plan

Much of the work from the action plans for the 2004-9 plan has provided a platform for subsequent work, some of which will continue into the 2009-14 plan. The main strands of partnership work to conserve and enhance the AONB, to support its understanding and enjoyment, and its sustainable use, are summarised here based on the theme headings in the 2004-9 plan.

Working in partnership and measuring progress

A review of plans and policies relevant to the area was an early piece of work that highlighted the need for improved communication and raising awareness amongst partners and other organisations.

A communication strategy was developed with partnership representatives, the outcomes of which were a new and stronger visual identity focusing on the partnership itself rather than the area it works together to manage (the AONB), with a new logo and consistent design guidelines and templates for partnership publications.

The renewed focus on partnership communications also gave rise to a Partnership Directory for existing and new representatives, followed by publication of a community newsletter in the last two years of the plan.

Development of a strategic communications framework with partners in the final year of the plan has provided a platform from which to take forward joint communication projects in the 2009-14 plan.

Throughout the plan period the Norfolk Coast Guardian has gone from strength to strength, with a refreshed design, a different main theme each year and increased contribution of articles from partners and other specialists. The production and distribution of this annual free newspaper has been the prime public communication tool for the partnership, receiving positive feedback from both local residents and visitors.

Work on assessing the state of the area's natural beauty was progressed, initially through a study of potential sources of information correlated with the management plan vision. These were refined and narrowed down, based on relevance to the area's distinctive qualities of natural beauty and their suitability, for use in the 2009-14 plan, although work remains to be done on this 'condition monitoring' in the current plan.

Review, monitoring and reporting on progress on the action plan part of the management plan was undertaken on an annual basis, with progress reports circulated and posted on the partnership web site, and in an annual report.

While this and other work was going on, the review of the management plan itself was a significant partnership task lasting over two years from its initiation in December 2006.

Working with lead officers and members of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site Management Scheme and the Wash Estuary Strategy Group, a review of these coastal partnerships, which overlap geographically and in some aspects of their remits, was undertaken. The review provided useful clarification of remits, and recommendations for closer and more effective working that were adopted by the management groups for each partnership.

Finally, the partnership celebrated the 40th anniversary of the designation of the AONB in 2008, with a double marathon sponsored coastal run, a specially brewed and named beer, and a wildlife and landscape art exhibition.

Landscape and wildlife, farmland and woodland

The development of a new landscape character assessment for the area as a tool for better and wider understanding, more spatially specific management guidance and better coordinated management was a major piece of the work in this section. It commenced with a series of landscape character assessment training days in 2005, followed by the preparation of a report on integrated landscape character assessment (landscape, ecological and historic character) and coordination of assessment and policies across the Local Development Frameworks covering the AONB. The final stage was preparation of draft integrated landscape character guidance for the area, which integrates the 1997 'Vision for Nature Conservation' for the AONB as well as many other data sources, and which will be finalised and published as associated guidance to the 2009-14 plan.

Landscape character was also a key consideration in two river valley studies – one in the Mun valley, near Mundesley, and a more extensive study on the River Glaven catchment undertaken as a PhD by a student at the University of East Anglia, both involving partner organisations and local landowners.

In another related piece of work, a study of potential 'energy crops' was undertaken, looking at their viability and suitability in the area's diverse landscape types, and providing recommendations for sensitive changes of use off agricultural land in future in response to possible changing demands.

A major opportunity for landscape enhancement arose during the plan when Ofgem, the Government regulator, agreed that funding should be made available through Distribution Network Organisations (DNOs) for removal of overhead electricity lines in AONBs and national parks. EDF Electricity took this up enthusiastically and, with representatives from the protected landscapes in eastern and south eastern England, formed a steering committee to develop and oversee the administration of a fund of nearly £3m over five years (2005-10) for eastern protected landscapes. In the Norfolk Coast AONB, this resulted in work with partners to identify priorities and develop schemes to remove overhead lines and associated poles and equipment near Nelson's birthplace at Burnham Thorpe and at Holme-next-the-Sea, a total of about £225,000 of work removing around 3.5km of overhead lines. British Telecom also cooperated to remove lines at the same time. A further scheme at Salthouse work over £400,000 is scheduled to take place in 2009-10 under the five years of funding. Another 5 years of funding from 2010 was also agreed by Ofgem, following consultation.

Managing the coastline

The plan period saw significant development in Government policy for coastal management, with the publication of its 'Making Space for Water' consultation document early in the period signalling a shift in the Government's approach to managing the coastline. Norfolk Coast partnership staff and partners were closely engaged in this process, and in local initiatives such as the Tyndall Centre's 'Living with a Changing Coastline'.

North Norfolk became a focus for this new approach when it was selected as one of three national pilot areas for reviewing Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs). The revised SMP for Kelling to Lowestoft met strong opposition at the public consultation stage from local communities that would be affected by coastal erosion, with no clear mechanisms for support in adapting to change being available. Partners, especially North Norfolk District

Council, have worked throughout the period to liaise with Government and make the case for such measures, and some progress has been made in modifying Government's position. North Norfolk District Council initiated and took forward development of a Coastal Management Plan.

A successful scheme to realign the Glaven channel at Blakeney Freshes, at the same time relaxing management of the shingle ridge between Cley and Salthouse and improving drainage of the marshes behind the bank in the event of over-topping by the sea, was led by the Environment Agency with close involvement of partners. This became the second realignment scheme aimed at adapting to coastal change on the North Norfolk Heritage Coast, the first being a smaller scheme at Brancaster.

Following the publication of Government guidance, reviews of SMPs for the Wash and Hunstanton to Kelling were initiated, led by the Environment Agency and involving key partners.

Living and working, towards a sustainable future

Affordable housing was one of the issues that came out strongly in public consultation on the 2004-9 plan, and a study on affordable housing in the AONB was an early initiative. Developed with the involvement of local authority planners and housing officers, it has been used by them in tackling this issue.

A Local Products Directory for the AONB and surrounding area was updated, expanded and reprinted, later being revised and updated again as a web site based resource which can be continuously updated with new entries.

In view of the imperative need to develop more sustainable ways of generating energy, a study on potentially viable types of renewable energy generation technologies for the area, and how they could most effectively be accommodated while respecting natural beauty, was commissioned.

A Community Conference was organised in 2004 (at Holt, on planning) and 2005 (on nature conservation, at Hunstanton, in conjunction with the European Marine Site), and a new post of Community Officer on the Norfolk Coast partnership staff team was created in 2005. This gave rise to a series of community quiz evenings in 2006, development of a community section on the Norfolk Coast Partnership web site, regular articles in local newsletters and the initiation of a 'Friends of the Norfolk Coast' volunteer group in 2008.

The Community Officer also took on the administration of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for the AONB, which was set up for the Norfolk Coast with a Grant Advisory Panel and locally appropriate guidance. The SDF was made available to all English AONBs in 2005, a similar fund already being operated by national parks and Welsh AONBs. Over the four years it operated during the plan period, it provided over £209,000 of grants to 35 local projects in the area that helped to promote or develop sustainability and support AONB objectives, with a total value of nearly £500,000.

Throughout the period, Norfolk Coast Partnership staff supported local events with stands to promote awareness and understanding of the AONB and the partnership, including a public event at Wells Carnival Week in 2005 in conjunction with the Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site and the Wash Estuary Management Group.

A successful Rural Development Programme bid to the East of England Development Agency for £3.8m of funding over 6 years for the Norfolk Coast and Broads, based on the

designated areas and their qualities and objectives, was developed with partners, led by the Norfolk Rural Business Advice Service. The programme commenced operation in 2009.

Access, recreation and enjoying natural beauty

Working with the Countryside Agency (subsequently Natural England) and other regional protected landscapes management teams, pilot itineraries for more sustainable tourism, avoiding car use and featuring local products and services, were developed as a web site based resource.

A major study of the impacts and benefits of tourism in the AONB was undertaken, providing recommendations that formed the basis for future work to manage and develop tourism in more sustainable ways. This included the development of an initial, unsuccessful bid for European 'Interreg' funding with a wide range of international partners, followed by a more focused bid based on raising awareness, understanding and sensitivity of use of coastal Natura 2000 sites through innovative means, with an English, Dutch and Belgian partner.

An audit of the various forms of public access (statutory and discretionary) in the area was followed by the development of the technology to make this information available to the public in a comprehensive and easily understandable form through the Norfolk County Council access web site. This initiative continued into the new plan period, with completion anticipated in its first year.

Finally a major review of the popular Norfolk Coast Cycleway (Great Yarmouth to King's Lynn, Sustrans national route 1 and regional route 30) was undertaken with help from local volunteers. This culminated in production of a revised and simplified leaflet with enhanced information and readability, featuring 'loops and links' as well as the main route.