

Signs in the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

This guidance has been prepared by the Norfolk Coast Partnership Forum as a contribution to partnership management of the AONB. The Forum comprises representatives of organisations and interests with a role in managing the AONB or parts of it. It recommends this guidance to all the organisations within the Norfolk Coast Partnership, both for their own operations, and to promote to other organisations and interests.

Introduction

Signs of various types are widely used in the AONB at present. They include road signs, warning signs, information / interpretation signs, advertising signs. They have an important role to play in providing information to the public that helps to promote their safety, their enjoyment and understanding of the area, the protection of its environment, visitor and traffic management, and the promotion of local businesses. However, they can also detract significantly from the natural beauty of the area by causing detriment to the visual qualities of the countryside in general, and particularly the wilderness aspects of its more remote and wild areas.

The following guidelines are designed to promote thought and care in the use of signing in the villages, countryside and coast of the AONB, so that signs are used only where necessary, and then only in a way which minimises their effect on the natural beauty of the area.

This should be communicated throughout relevant organisations, so that the person who erects signs on site is as aware as their managers of the effects of that sign on the local environment and the matters that should be considered in its design and siting.

NOTE Local planning authorities are responsible for the day to day operation of the regulations to control signs. However, many signs do not need express consent. This guidance is intended to be taken into consideration for all signs.

Aim of the guidance

To promote good practice on the use of signs in the AONB, minimising the visual effects of signs on sensitive environments

Objectives of the guidance

- To inform organisations that erect signs of the sensitivity of the countryside, especially the AONB, and the potentially harmful effects of signs within it.
- To ensure that each sign is justified by necessity rather than 'standard practice'.
- To ensure that signs are kept to the minimum number and size to achieve their purpose and that they are sensitively designed.

Guidance

Necessity

The need for any sign should be examined closely, and that need weighed against any potential harm to the appearance of the local environment. Signs are necessary where they provide information to people that they need to find, access, enjoy and understand

the site or area safely, which cannot be provided more effectively in an alternative way with less visual effect on the environment.

The type of information that it may be necessary to provide on a sign includes public safety, traffic management, visitor management, interpretive information, business or 'destination' identity.

For any sign that is deemed to be necessary after careful consideration, the following guidelines are recommended:

Siting

- Signs should be sited so that they are visible only to those who need to see them, and only from the direction from which people may be expected to approach the sign
- Information signs should normally be provided only at access points to sites, and then in such a position as to minimise their visual effect on the environment. However, there may also be some scope for appropriate interpretation within some sites, provided this is done in a sensitive and restrained manner.
- The wilderness quality of the open coast is particularly sensitive to the visual impacts of signs. Signs on the saltmarshes, remote beaches and dunes, should be limited to those required for environmental protection, public safety or other essential purposes.
- Agencies should share supporting structures for signs where the opportunity exists and the overall impact will be reduced.

Design / Materials

- If signs are designed to an 'in-house' style for use in several different locations, they should be appropriate to the most sensitive location in which they will be used.
- Signs should be of the minimum size needed to convey the necessary information effectively. Careful choice of wording can help to reduce the size.
- Signs should be as low as possible - lectern style signs can help in this respect.
- Careful consideration should be given to colours, materials and finish (including any supporting posts) in order to produce a sign in keeping with its immediate environment. White and/or reflective gloss finishes can be unnecessarily obtrusive, as can illumination.

Note: In certain cases, assistance from AONB funding may be available to assist in meeting any additional costs which result from designing to a higher specification than normal.

Review and maintenance

- The need for any sign(s) should be reviewed regularly, and signs removed if they are no longer necessary.
- Signs should be regularly inspected and maintained, or replaced if necessary, to avoid giving an area an 'uncared for' appearance that could encourage other types of damage to its landscape and wildlife.