

# 3. Sustainable Development

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## Summary of changes

### **Note of changes following final comments from the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee/ Jan/ Feb 2021**

*The revised description of a Landscape Led approach has been included – this was discussed at the JAC meeting in Jan '21*

*It has been noted that the Government's 'standard method' which uses a formula to identify the minimum number of homes expected to be planned for, increases Kent and Medway's housing need, compared to the Kent Growth and Infrastructure framework.*

*Specific reference to use of land bridges mentioned in SD 12 following request of highway authority.*

### **3. Our vision for sustainable development in the Kent Downs AONB**

In 2031 ... the principles and goals of sustainable development are at the heart of the management of the Kent Downs. Change reinforces and enhances the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs and benefits its communities and economy. While the surrounding urban areas have expanded considerably, innovative management techniques and policy approaches successfully address the pressure and opportunities presented by growth to the landscapes of the AONB. Through landscape scale restoration, conservation and enhancement the Kent Downs has a key role in mitigating and balancing any negative environmental impacts of the significant growth that Kent has (and continues to) experience.

The impacts of climate change are being felt but the mitigation and adaptive responses taken are landscape led, effective and carefully chosen to enhance the characteristics, qualities and distinctiveness of the landscape rather than detracting from them. The natural capital and ecosystems service provision of the Kent Downs has been enhanced. Important areas of tranquillity have been identified, protected and expanded and provide 'oases of calm'.

The Kent Downs landscape and partnership take an important and appropriate role in the economic and societal recovery from Covid-19.

#### **3.1 Overview**

Achieving sustainable development is an overarching principle for much national and international policy. The UN General Assembly defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

##### **3.1.1 The Sustainable Development Goals**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a historic global agreement to eradicate extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice and leave no one behind. Agreed by world leaders at the UN in 2015, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs are universal with all signatories expected to contribute to them internationally and deliver them domestically. This Management Plan is underpinned by and contributes towards delivery of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals; the Plan contributes locally to some of the ways that the UK Government is supporting the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals domestically.

##### **3.1.2 Sustainable Development in the Kent Downs AONB**

Sustainable development has economic, social and environmental dimensions. In the

context of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, sustainability should be judged widely and in accordance with the sustainable development goals but with a focus on the purposes of the AONB designation.

Applying this to the local circumstances of the Kent Downs, particular attention should be given to the special characteristics and qualities of the area and supporting a landscape led approach. These in turn help to apply to a variety of plans, strategies and policy frameworks so that proposals in or affecting the AONB can be judged. The protection afforded to the AONB should be commensurate with the national and international status of the area and give appropriate weight to the AONB's importance.

To assist this process, this management plan identifies the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs landscape and provides an updated description of the landscape character of the area. In this context, key issues, threats and opportunities are identified along with a vision, aims and principles which respond to them. Strategic issues are identified in this section of the plan these are: over-arching 'guiding themes' (3.2) arising from the purposes of designation the context of the natural capital approach and the need to respond to climate change and ecological loss, and 'recurrent themes' (3.3) which arise frequently across the topics in this plan. These themes will be considered first when considering projects, proposals, policies and local authority functions, before turning to specific sections later in the management plan. In the absence of local criteria-based policies, the intention is that this management plan's vision, aims and principles will provide helpful evidence to assist with decision making.

### **3.1.3 Unprecedented growth and development pressures**

The position of the Kent Downs, close to London, mainland Europe, major urban centres and growth areas means that the Kent Downs AONB, perhaps more than any other of Britain's protected landscapes – AONBs, Heritage Coasts or National Parks, has experienced and is experiencing severe development pressure. Evidence from a Defra commissioned review of growth and development in AONBs carried forward by Prof. Bibby (University of Sheffield) shows the Kent Downs AONB as being an 'outlier' in the amount of growth it has accommodated '*The Kent Downs AONB stands out as an area which has experienced major, but expected, change, showing a rate of urban growth of almost 10%.pa, with the urban area spreading by 14 ha over the decade*' (2014 unpublished) the population of the Kent Downs has increased by 3% in the previous plan period.

The Kent Growth and Infrastructure Framework (2018 update) prepared by a wide partnership of Local Authorities at the County level has identified an unprecedented level of planned growth in Kent in the period 2011 to 2031, this includes a 24% growth in the number of homes (additional 178,600) and a 23% growth in the number of people (additional 396,300); there is an increase of 21% of jobs (additional 170,300) planned. It should be noted that the Government's 'standard method' which uses a formula to identify the minimum number of homes expected to be planned for, increases Kent and Medway's housing need, compared to the Kent Growth and Infrastructure framework.

It is the scale and pace of change which was the primary reason that the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee decided to shorten the immediate vision period of the AONB Management Plan from 20 to 10 years; so that the plan responds effectively to the immediate issues of growth, biodiversity loss and climate change.

The issues of growth, urbanisation and development present a variety of opportunities and threats. New transportation infrastructure including strategic trans-European highways, High Speed Rail, the proposed Lower Thames Crossing, communications infrastructure and housing, as well as the pressures of intensive agriculture and forestry, increased recreational use and illegal activities such as fly tipping and off road driving, loss of tranquillity, landscape character and qualities can detract significantly from this important landscape.

An important role of the management plan is to achieve the management and mitigation of the detracting pressures on the landscape and to do so with ambition and at a scale to match the threat – good examples include the creation of land bridges which can mitigate the very significant negative impacts on the AONB from major roads and provided ecological connections. At the same time the approach of the Management Plan is to seek a positive exchange of goods and services between the Kent Downs and the surrounding urban areas. Despite the intense pressure experienced in the Kent Downs, it is still true that the AONB has largely retained its character and qualities. Community based, focused projects have shown the real benefit of sustainable development approaches.

The development pressures experienced in the Kent Downs AONB are specifically referenced in the Government's Landscape Review describing the Kent Downs (and High Weald) as:

*'especially large AONBs which cross multiple local authority boundaries and under particular development pressure,'*

### **3.1.4 Cumulative Change**

Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change creating a cumulative impact on the special character and qualities of the AONB. The landscape character assessment review of the Kent Downs continually picked up small scale poorly designed or inappropriately located, housing development, detracting influences from recreational land management, such as golf courses, equine facilities and visitor attractions, poor boundary treatments, badly designed highways, water and telecoms infrastructure, each individually small impact taken cumulatively is progressively diminishing the qualities and character of the AONB at a strategic scale. At the same time the cumulative impact of careful enhancements made through individual agri-environment schemes, conservation projects and carefully judged development can cumulatively conserve and enhance the landscape.

### **3.1.5 The London City Region**

The Kent Downs AONB Unit led a group of organisations from 12 National Landscapes operating in the London City Region to develop a 25 year vision. The vision recognises the opportunities and threats generated by the area's predicted population growth from 12 – 20m in the period 2017 to 2042. The overall aim is to collaborate to establish London and the South East as the World's Greenest City Region, where the Protected Landscapes are treasured and the population mobilised to enjoy and care for these natural environments.

A 7 point plan of goals was created; this management plan seeks to deliver against those goals at the local level.

## **3.2 Guiding themes**

Some of the sustainability issues to be addressed in the Kent Downs AONB are of a high-level, over-arching nature which underpin much of the quality as well as character and beauty of the landscape which should inform actions and decisions in the area generally. These are natural beauty (outlined in section 1.2.1), natural capital and the provision of ecosystems services, climate change, ecological loss and nature recovery, a landscape led approach, net gain and green infrastructure provision.

### **Natural capital and the provision of resilient ecosystem services**

This plan is strongly informed by a natural capital approach; natural capital includes the air, water, soil and ecosystems that support all forms of life, the various sections of the plan contribute, where appropriate, to supporting the natural capital goals of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan: clean air, clean and plentiful water, thriving plants and wildlife, reducing environmental risk, using resources more sustainably, managing environmental pressures, mitigating and adapting to climate change, minimising waste, enhancing biosecurity and, most particularly, enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The UK government has repeatedly emphasised the importance of 'natural capital'. Natural capital offers a range of goods and services that society benefits from, called ecosystem services. These services range from crop pollination soil fertility maintenance, waste sinks to climate and water regulation. Ultimately all human life depends on ecosystem services for clean air, clean water and food production. Services have been grouped into four categories:

- Supporting services, such as nutrient cycling, oxygen production and soil formation. These underpin the provision of the other 'service' categories.
- Provisioning services, such as food, fibre, fuel and water.
- Regulating services, such as climate regulation, water purification and flood protection.
- Cultural services, such as education, recreation, and aesthetic value including beauty.

The ecosystems services of the Kent Downs are identified in Natural England's National Character Assessment for the North Downs and Wealden Greensand and are therefore not repeated here. The Kent Nature Partnership is in the process of generating a high level Natural Capital Account for Kent including the Kent Downs AONB. The Management Plan, taken as a whole, seeks to secure, conserve, enhance and make more resilient the natural capital value of the Downs and therefore the ecosystems services that the landscapes of the Kent Downs offer society.

### **Climate Change in the Kent Downs**

Climate change will affect the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The UK Climate Projection (UKCP) Programme 2018 provided a much finer grain (2.2km<sup>2</sup>) projection of climate change to 2100. Headline changes include hotter, drier summers; particularly hot summers and hot summer days are expected to become more common. While summers are expected to be drier there will be an increase in the intensity of heavy summer rainfall events. Warmer, wetter winters are also predicted with greater rainfall intensity. Sea level rise is predicted to continue (already 17cm since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), with predictions ranging from around 30cm to 90cm by 2100 depending on the emissions

scenario, these are significantly higher than the 2009 projections.

The UK Climate Impact Programme (UKCIP 2019) provides tools to establish adaptation approaches to the projections. At a Kent level the information and evidence provided by the UKCP and UKCIP has provided an evidence base for the Kent Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment (KCCRIa 2020). Key impacts are consistent with the UKCP predictions. Several key characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs are predicted to change these include introduction of new pests and diseases, sea level rise and coastal erosion, wild fire, both drought and flooding affecting water bodies, water scarcity, soil erosion, air quality issues, changes in species distribution and abundance and changes in land management practice.

In recognition of the very serious threats climate change places on society the UK Parliament has declared an environment and climate emergency. Many of the local authority partners to the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee have either declared or recognised an emergency or have plans to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. There are a number of nature-based responses to climate change, some of which are mentioned in the Committee on Climate Change report on land use (2020) these include wilding, tree and hedgerow establishment, permanent grassland creation and management and soil carbon enhancement for instance through regenerative farming, all of which would be coherent with the Kent Downs AONB landscape character and qualities and which increase resilience and reduce the impact. New energy crops are promoted along with a shift in consumption from (and therefore production of) the most carbon intensive foods these approaches are reflected and promoted elsewhere in the plan.

There is an important role for both the AONB landscape and partnership in helping to achieve carbon sequestration and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Ecological loss and nature recovery.**

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, intergovernmental and national reports demonstrate that the current response to the effects of human impact on nature is insufficient, along with the clear guidance from the Government's Landscape Review – there is a clear and pressing need to increase the scale and pace of nature recovery activity in AONBs. This is recognised in the National AONB Declaration on Nature in AONBs, the Colchester Declaration, which sets out a strategy for change. Nature recovery is an essential guiding theme of the Management Plan and the local implementation of the Colchester Declaration an important priority in order that we restore functioning ecosystems and extend and return lost habitats and species to the landscape.

### **A landscape led approach, local character and qualities**

Section 4 of the Plan demonstrates that landscape is made up of many component factors; it is complex and all the more wonderful for that. The primary purpose of an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, this must take into account all of the factors identified in this plan and in relevant guidance. The landscape of the Kent Downs AONB extends beyond administrative boundaries and is a strategic matter which should be specifically considered in local authority's duty to cooperate in plan making.

A landscape led approach to design, resource management and development means starting with an understanding of the landscape as a framework for evidence. In a nationally protected landscape the purposes of the designation have to be the driving force when considering or undertaking change. The starting point of achieving landscape led approach is an understanding of the site and its setting, the local landscape character, supporting this it is the landscape elements, context, special character and qualities, distinctiveness, sense of place, patterns and sensitivities; how it is perceived by people and for what reasons it is valued by people are key to the approach. Applying best practice and an iterative approach are key in practice to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

A landscape led approach does not mean simply imposing an intervention within an existing landscape pattern. In a landscape led development, a site's landscape capacity will not be exceeded. For policies, plans and projects in or affecting the Kent Downs AONB delivering the purposes of the designation should be a primary consideration from start to finish, taking a landscape led approach is essential to achieving this.

Local characteristics and qualities are the triumph of the distinctive and the diverse over the uniform. Each section in this management plan explains what that means in the Kent Downs. Many aspects of local characteristics and qualities are specific to the designated area, such as the landform and landscape of the scarp and dip slope, the woodland and biodiversity which thrive on the steep scarp slopes, the sights and scents, the ecosystems services provided by the landscape, the time depth, access routes, patterns of settlement and farming practices which respond to them all.

Many more local characteristics are distinctive to individual places or small localities, from building materials to traditional events, fruit trees to dew ponds and dene holes. These provide variety around different parts of the AONB, in addition to the sense of place which comes from being within the designated area. These qualities, features and experiences should not be seen in isolation but as vital components of a landscape led approach to AONB management which reveres and therefore conserves and enhances what is locally special.

As part of the statutory review of this Management Plan a revision of the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment has been taken forward; Landscape Character Assessment is covered in more detail in section 4. Landscape Character Assessment is an important tool for taking a landscape led approach and the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment forms an integral component of this plan.

## **Intended Net Gain**

The intention of achieving a net gain, initially for biodiversity and eventually for the environment as a whole, through development is a key principle in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. It is expected that biodiversity net gain will become mandatory during the plan period. Net gain is also required by national planning policy in the National Planning Policy Framework para 170 and 174. Biodiversity Net Gain is covered in more detail in section 5 (Biodiversity).

Net Gain provides the potential to generate substantial new investment streams to achieve the sustainable development and biodiversity objectives of the AONB Management Plan. While this is important and welcome for the AONB whether a net gain can be achieved is yet to be proven.

## Green infrastructure provision

The Kent Downs AONB is recognised as a strategically important component of the Green Infrastructure of Kent and the south east of England. Green Infrastructure provision is embodied in the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance and is an essential component of good planning for urban and rural areas. Green infrastructure is a key tool to create a resilient environment in the face of climate change supporting biodiversity and access opportunities.

### 3.3 Recurrent themes

Some topics arise so frequently when seeking to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs that they should be understood for their strategic importance to the landscape management of the AONB. These cross-cutting topics are usually one of a number relevant to any action or decision affecting the AONB. They are assembled here to highlight their overall importance and should be viewed as matters to address first whenever this management plan is relevant, before turning to specific topics in each of the following sections. This does not mean that each one will necessarily be significant to every decision or action, but that their possible applicability should always be considered.

#### Tranquillity and remoteness

The perception of being away from the noise, sights and smells of modern life is a much valued feature of many parts of the AONB where people can refresh body and soul. In the south east of England absolute tranquillity is an increasingly rare resource. The Landscape Institute's overview on Tranquillity (2017) recognises the importance of relative tranquillity which is relevant in the case of a busy county like Kent:

*A distinction is made between absolute tranquillity and relative tranquillity. When we refer to tranquillity in the UK, it is therefore almost always relative tranquillity that we are referring to, but in differing degrees. For instance, the tranquillity promoted by a summer sunrise on a calm day on top of a high mountain may be close to absolute, with almost no disturbance of any kind detracting from that state of mind. Yet the benefit to people of the relative tranquillity .... may be very high, despite intrusion from background traffic noise or the presence of many other people. Both sorts are important to recognise and value...'*

Research by the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has shown that since the 1960s England has lost over 20% of its tranquil areas to urban sprawl, traffic and light pollution. The average size of our tranquil areas has reduced by 73%. As Kent's population increases, this resource will become more important and increasingly under threat. National tranquillity mapping carried out by the CPRE and more recently by Winchester University has confirmed that the Kent Downs offers important areas of relative tranquillity.

A 2016 CPRE survey documents the loss of dark night skies through badly designed and sited night lighting, it also identifies the areas of England with pristine night skies; the report suggests a series of recommendations to protect and enhance dark skies. An accepted and often valued part of living in or visiting the countryside has always been dark, star-filled skies. These qualities are increasingly difficult to enjoy outside the AONB, while there are parts of the Kent Downs which benefit from truly dark skies it is important to seek to both protect and extend these.



The importance of tranquillity has been noted in the National Planning Policy Framework which requires (paragraph 180 (b)) that planning policies and decisions should aim to 'identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason'. One way that tranquillity within the Kent Downs is currently impacted is as a result of several main flight paths passing over the AONB; the impact of overflying airplanes on landscape tranquillity can be significant, especially where background noise is otherwise low.

The erosion of tranquillity is an issue that has been emphasised in the public engagement stage of this AONB Management Plan, it is an important issue for the public and local authority partners and a part of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs.

*Tranquillity mapping will be inserted*

## Setting

The setting of the Kent Downs AONB is broadly speaking the land outside the designated area which is visible from the AONB and from which the AONB can be seen, but may be wider when affected by intrusive features beyond that. The setting of the Kent Downs is not formally defined or indicated on a map. The setting of the AONB landscape should be distinguished from the setting of listed buildings and other heritage assets (on which there is legislation and also policy in the National Planning Policy Framework and elsewhere).

Proposals which would affect the setting of the AONB are not subject to the same level of constraint as those which would affect the AONB itself. The weight to be afforded to setting issues will depend on the significance of the impact. Matters such as the size of proposals, their distance, incompatibility with their surroundings, movement, reflectivity and colour are likely to affect impact. Where the qualities of the AONB which were instrumental in reasons for its designation are affected by proposals in the setting, then the impacts should be given considerable weight in decisions.

The Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee has prepared a 'Setting Position Statement' which provides helpful further advice supporting the vision, aims and principles of the Plan.

## Design and materials

The special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs include the quality of the built heritage and settlement patterns. To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the scale, extent and design of new development, re-development and restoration is critical. The NPPF places considerable focus on the importance of good design, stating that 'Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions' while the Planning Practice Guidance advises that all development in AONBs 'will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects their status as landscapes of the highest quality'.

To support the statutory Duty of Regard towards the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty placed on public bodies and statutory undertakers the Kent Downs AONB Partnership has produced a series of design guidance documents:

- The Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook

- The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook
- The Kent Downs AONB Farmsteads Design Guidance
- Managing Land for Horses – a guide to good practice in the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- The Kent Downs AONB Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development
- A Buildings and Settlement Design Guide is planned.

The Kent Downs has a rich tradition of half-timbered and weather-boarded buildings. There is also a legacy of locally distinctive architecture in locally derived building materials such as Ragstone, flint and chalk. Soft red bricks and peg-tiles lend colour and here and there long-straw thatching can be seen. The predominance of local materials helps to establish the distinctive character of the built environment. The conservation and enhancement of these diverse buildings requires local sources of building materials, as well as skilled craftsmen who understand and respect the building traditions of the past and the architectural vernacular. High quality modern design can draw from the past. New development should use available, sustainably sourced traditional as well as appropriate new materials and a design approach which fits neatly with and complements the valued traditions, forms and patterns of the past, while securing environmental efficiency and affordability.

### Mitigation

This plan promotes the use of the mitigation hierarchy so that first adverse impacts on any of the sustainable development goals should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where adverse impacts are unavoidable, measures to mitigate the impact should be applied. Where adequate mitigation measures are not possible, compensatory measures should be adopted.

This approach is supported in para. 32 of the National Planning Policy Framework; this management plan follows the priorities set out in the NPPF by focusing on the avoidance of damage to the characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB. However, mitigation is also important. Reducing the impacts of unavoidable change from infrastructure and growth and a growing population close to the AONB, changing land management, the needs of the AONB population and access and enjoyment, for instance, is an on-going challenge. Likewise, infrastructure and growth in the setting of the AONB can challenge the qualities of the AONB itself. Mitigation will also be needed where schemes which have benefits for the AONB also themselves have adverse effects, for example where:

- affordable housing to sustain local AONB communities is needed but must be constructed in ways which minimise impacts on their surroundings;
- infrastructure to reintroduce woodland management (with benefits including biodiversity, wood products, renewable energy, and employment) may also need road access, harm local amenities or erode tranquillity; and
- improved recreational access to enjoy the qualities of the AONB could erode those very qualities.
- Farm management and diversification activities

In addition, the AONB must play its part in appropriately mitigating the impacts of climate change, which demands responses by all sectors. This should be achieved in a way which supports rather than harms the character and qualities of the AONB.

Given the anticipated pace and scope of growth it is increasingly likely that impacts on the AONB may not be mitigated satisfactorily. In these circumstances the AONB partnership will seek compensatory measures to enable conservation and enhancement of the landscape elsewhere in the AONB.

### **3.4 Sustainable development – main issues, opportunities and threats**

- a. The predicted scale and pace of growth in Kent and the London City Region is unprecedented; to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and to create benefit for existing and new communities significant new efforts and investment in the enhancing the green infrastructure, landscape, its natural capital and ecosystems services will be required. Through landscape scale restoration, conservation and enhancement the Kent Downs has a key role in mitigating and balancing any negative environmental impacts of the significant growth that Kent has (and continues to) experience and should be a target for net gain investments in Kent.
- b. There is a rapidly changing context in which the management, conservation and enhancement of the Kent Downs AONB landscape is conducted.
- c. Cumulative loss of landscape features, biodiversity, tranquillity and character and suburbanisation has been experienced in the AONB due to incremental poorly located, designed and badly screened development, visitor pressure and leisure uses, intensive agricultural and forestry and woodland management practices, pressure from traffic and significant levels of urban growth and development.
- d. The expected impact of climate change is clear, being felt and will be substantial; mitigation and adaptation responses supporting decarbonisation of the economy and focusing on nature based solutions should be implemented that are urgent, evidence based and enhance landscape character, qualities and resilience.
- e. There is a need to work at a community level to support project-based sustainable development initiatives and exemplars in the AONB and to increase the scale, integration and impact of activity.
- f. Despite a significant loss and continuing pressure, the Kent Downs still provides important relatively tranquil areas; the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to identify tranquil areas.
- g. Dark night skies are a feature of some parts the Kent Downs and are a valued part of the experience of tranquil rural areas.
- h. The quality of the setting of the AONB particularly in the experience of views is recognised as important in the original designation and in the enjoyment of the landscape today.
- i. The choice of design and materials in restoration, new development and landscape management are recognised as critical when seeking to conserve and enhance the landscape of the Kent Downs AONB.

- j. By applying the Sustainable Development Goals to the management principles of the Kent Downs AONB the partnership can bring forward environmental, social and economic benefits for existing and new communities.
- k. Biodiversity net gain and eventually environmental net gain provide major opportunities to take forward the conservation and enhancement of the landscapes of the Kent Downs AONB
- l. The Kent Downs AONB landscape and partnership is well placed to take an appropriate role in supporting efforts to recover from the economic and societal impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, including supporting the rural and visitor economy, supporting the resilience of farming and food production and the health and well-being of communities.

### 3.5 Sustainable development – aims

A landscape in which:

1. AONB conservation and enhancement, sustainable development goals and the vision aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan are the starting point of net gain and green infrastructure investments, plans, projects and policies affecting the Kent Downs.
2. The character and distinctiveness of villages, farmsteads and individual buildings are conserved and enhanced by combining the best traditions of the past with the best technologies of the present to create environmentally sustainable and locally enhancing development.
3. A positive, proactive and urgent approach is taken to the implications of climate change and intelligent and effective mitigation and adaptation responses are chosen which support landscape character, resilient ecosystem services and drive rapid greenhouse gas reductions and increase in sequestration.
4. All development achieves landscape enhancement, biodiversity gain and supports carbon neutrality; conservation and mitigation is delivered in every case.
5. A comparatively tranquil environment is protected, conserved and enhanced.
6. The setting and views in and out of the AONB are conserved and enhanced.
7. The detrimental impact of existing infrastructure on the qualities of the AONB is significantly reduced.
8. Individual and cumulative development and change contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB rather than detracting from it.
9. The AONB partnership takes an active and appropriate role in supporting the economic and societal recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 3.6 Sustainable development – principles

- SD1 Ensure that policies, plans, projects and net gain investments affecting the Kent Downs AONB take a landscape led approach are long term, framed by the Sustainable Development Goals appropriate to the Kent Downs, cross cutting and recurrent themes, the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.
- SD2 The local character, qualities, distinctiveness and natural resources of the Kent Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in the design, scale, siting, landscaping and materials of new development, redevelopment and infrastructure and will be pursued through the application of appropriate design guidance and position statements.
- SD3 Ensure that development and changes to land use and land management cumulatively conserve and enhance the character and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB rather than detracting from it.
- SD4 A strategic, evidence led approach to both the adaptation to and mitigation of the impacts of climate change on the natural beauty and historic character of the Kent Downs, and its human consequences, will be pursued with an urgent focus on supporting greenhouse gas emission reduction and sequestration through nature based solutions.
- SD5 Renewable and sustainable energy initiatives and energy efficiency measures will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people and ensure proposals conform with the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement and resisted where they do not.
- SD6 Activities to increase understanding of the importance and the extent of tranquillity, remoteness and dark night skies within the Kent Downs will be pursued.
- SD7 New projects, proposals and programmes shall conserve and enhance tranquillity and where possible dark night skies.
- SD8 Ensure proposals, projects and programmes do not negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the Kent Downs AONB.
- SD9 The particular historic and locally distinctive character of rural settlements and buildings of the Kent Downs AONB will be maintained and strengthened. The use of sustainably sourced locally-derived materials for restoration and conversion work will be encouraged. New developments will be expected to apply appropriate design guidance and to be complementary to local character in form, siting, scale, contribution to settlement pattern and choice of materials.
- SD10 Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of existing infrastructure and

growth on the natural beauty and amenity of the Kent Downs AONB will be pursued.

- SD11 Major development should avoid the Kent Downs AONB in line with NPPF guidance. Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character, characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation and or compensatory measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained. The removal or mitigation of identified landscape detractors will be pursued.
- SD 12 Transport and infrastructure schemes and growth areas are expected to avoid the Kent Downs AONB. Unavoidable developments will be expected to fit unobtrusively into the landscape, respect landscape character, be mitigated by sympathetic landscape, buffering, land bridges and design measures and provide compensatory measure through benefits to natural beauty elsewhere in the AONB.
- SD13 A strategic, landscape led approach to green infrastructure and net gain investments is taken to ensure the recovery, conservation and enhancement of the special characteristics and qualities of the Kent Downs AONB and its setting. The Kent Downs AONB takes a key role in accommodating net gain investments derived from growth elsewhere where the intended gain cannot be delivered locally.
- SD14 The Kent Downs AONB partnership will support efforts to achieve an economic and societal recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic in a way that supports the vision, aims and principles of the AONB Management Plan.