

Planning in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

**Putting the purpose of AONB
designation at the heart of the
planning system**

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Cotswolds Conservation Board**

Presentation

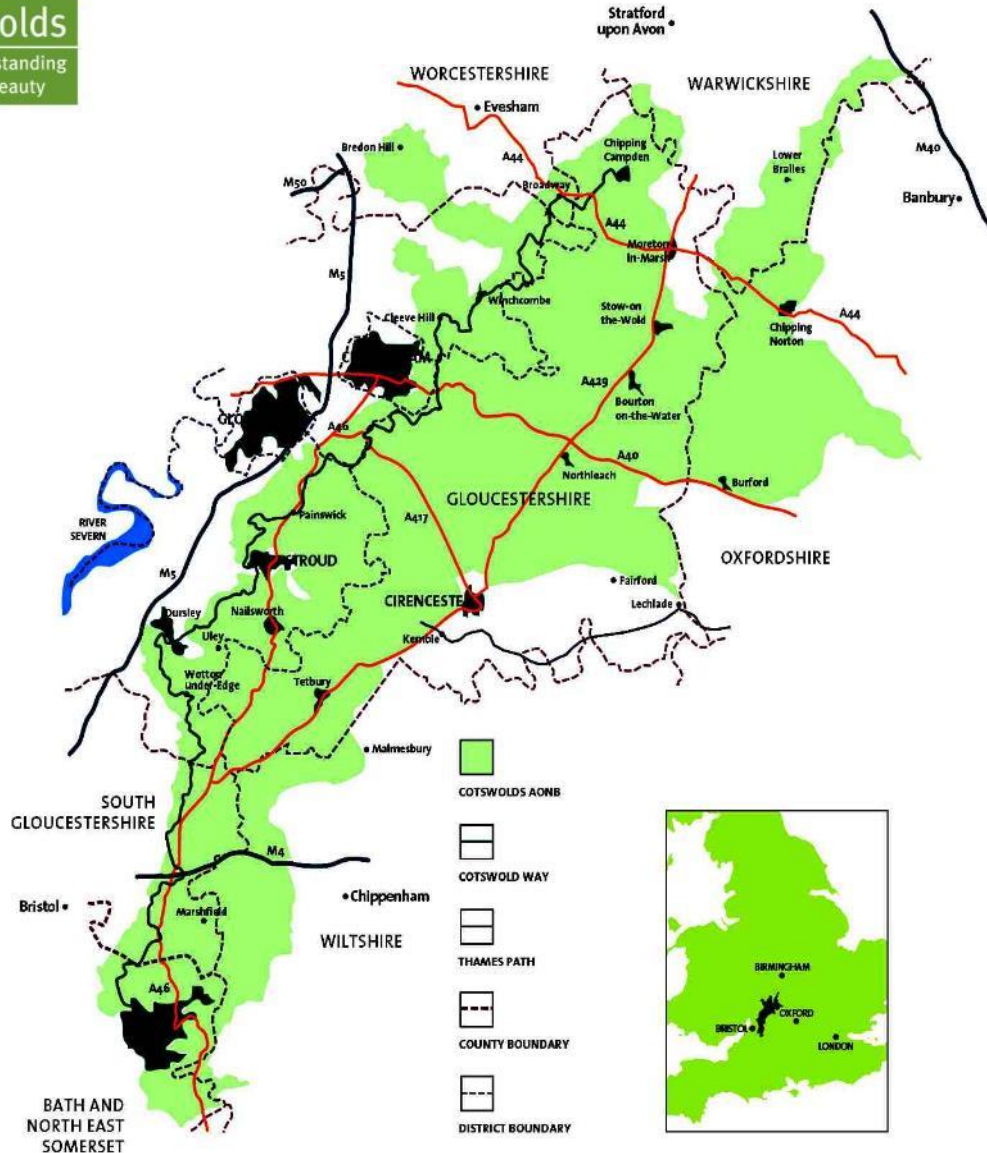
- Cotswolds AONB / AONBs
- Cotswolds Conservation Board
- Development pressure
- Positive change – ‘Three Point Plan’
- Designated Landscapes Review
- Conclusions









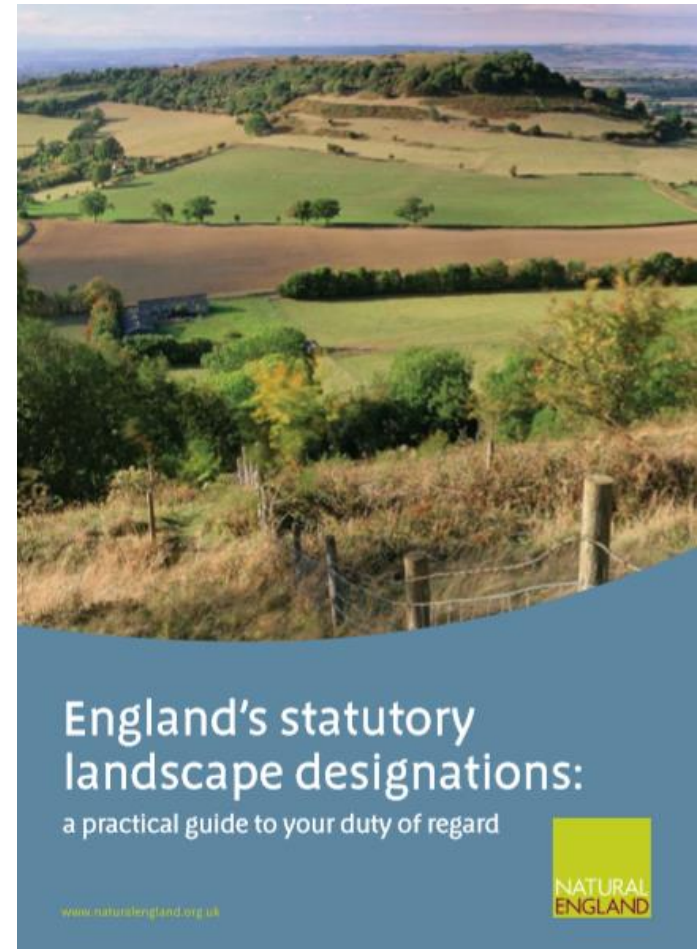


- 1966 & 1990
- 790 sq miles / 2,038 sq kms
- largest AONB
- 3rd largest protected landscape
- 15 local authorities
- 280 parishes
- 150,000 residents
- 23 million day visitors

AONBs



- So outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them
- Purpose: conserving and enhancing natural beauty
- Duty of regard (S.85 of the CRow Act 2000)
- S.84 of the CRow Act – take all such action as appears expedient
- NPPF (e.g. paragraphs 11 and 172) and PPG



Natural Beauty

- Cornerstone of protected landscapes legislation
- Natural England criteria:
 - landscape quality
 - scenic quality
 - relative wildness
 - relative tranquility
 - natural heritage features
 - cultural heritage
- Special qualities
- Widely accepted that natural beauty is, in part, due to human intervention

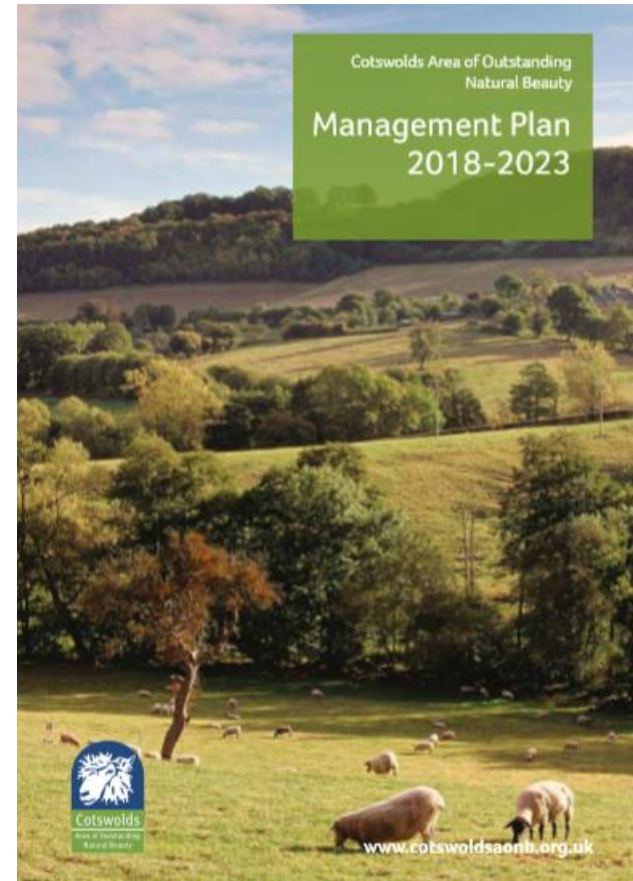
Cotswolds Conservation Board

- Independent statutory body
- Established 2004
- Two purposes:
 - Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB
 - Increase public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Cotswolds AONB
- Duty:
 - Seek to foster economic and social well being (in delivering the two purposes)

Cotswolds Conservation Board

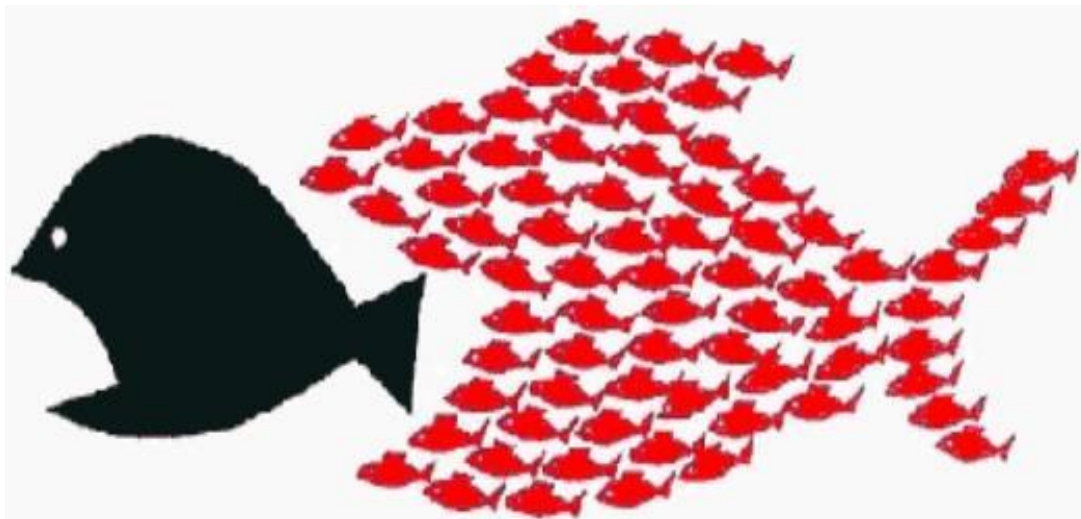


- 37 Board members
- 13 officers (1 planning officer!)
- 400 voluntary wardens
- Not a land owner, land manager or regulator
- Consistent and coordinated approach
- Share, promote, develop and advocate best-practice
- Work in partnership



Pressures on AONBs

- Development pressures inc. housing targets
- Changes in – and intensification of – land management
- Erosion of natural beauty, including special qualities
- ‘Death by 1,000 cuts’
- Undermining purpose of AONB designation



Housing in England's AONBs

- Growing number of planning applications of all sizes
- Larger number of units and larger sites
- Step change increase in market housing approvals
- Social housing approvals at a five year low (2015/16)
- Growing number of appeal cases



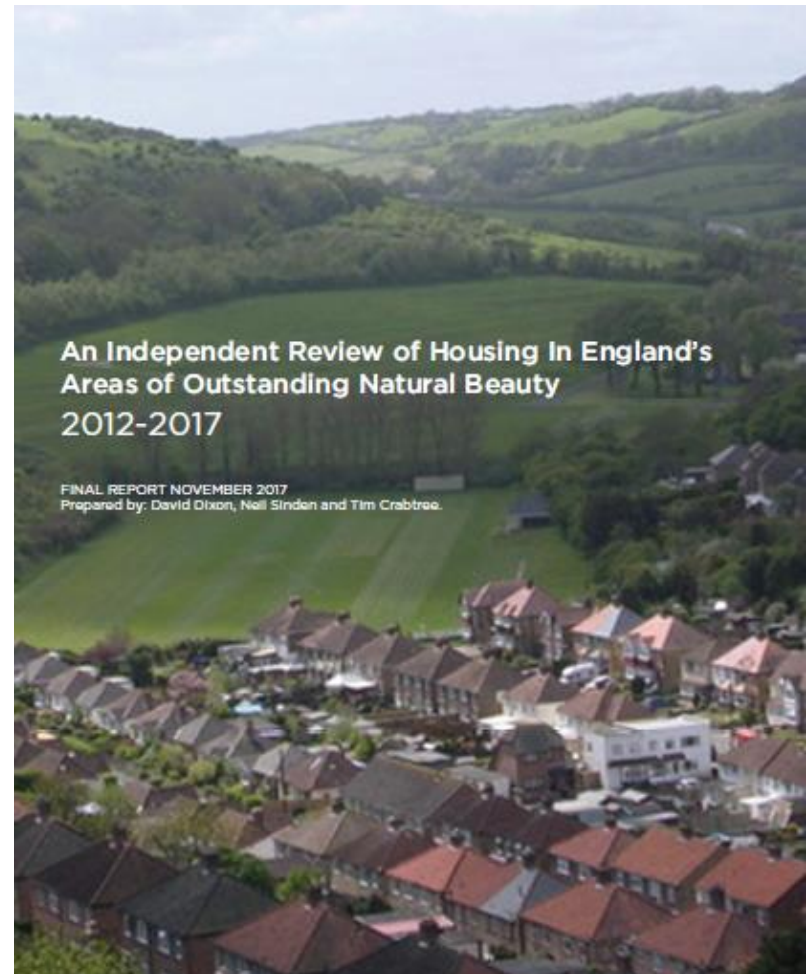
Housing in Cotswolds AONB

- Highest number of schemes approved (62)
- Highest number of housing units approved (2,869)
- Three-fold increase in average number of units built per year (217 to 635) – 3rd largest
- 3rd highest increase in new dwellings completions per 1,000 population (5.08)



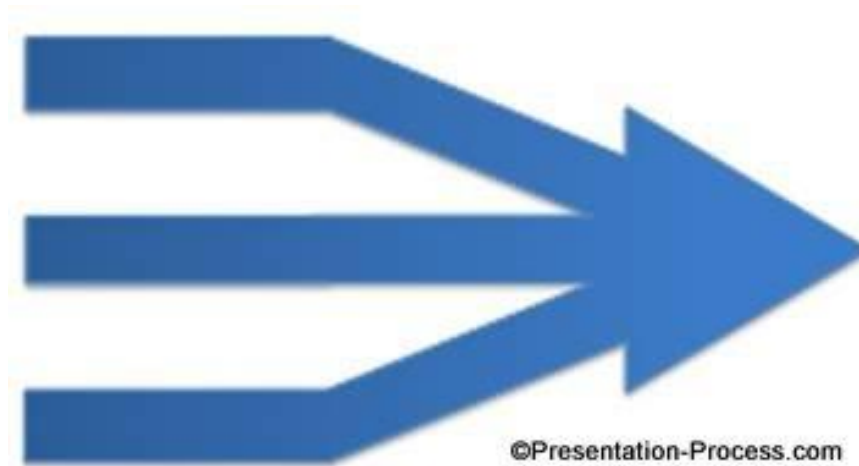
Housing in England's AONBs

- *‘Our research clearly points to a shift in the emphasis of planning practice from landscape protection to addressing the housing shortage and boosting supply’*



Positive Change – Three Point Plan

1. Landscape-led approach
2. Robust evidence of affordable housing need
3. Conserving and enhancing natural beauty



Landscape-led approach

- **NPPF:**

- Provide for OAN unless strong reason for restricting scale, type or distribution of development (e.g. in AONBs)
- The scale and extent of development in AONBs should be limited

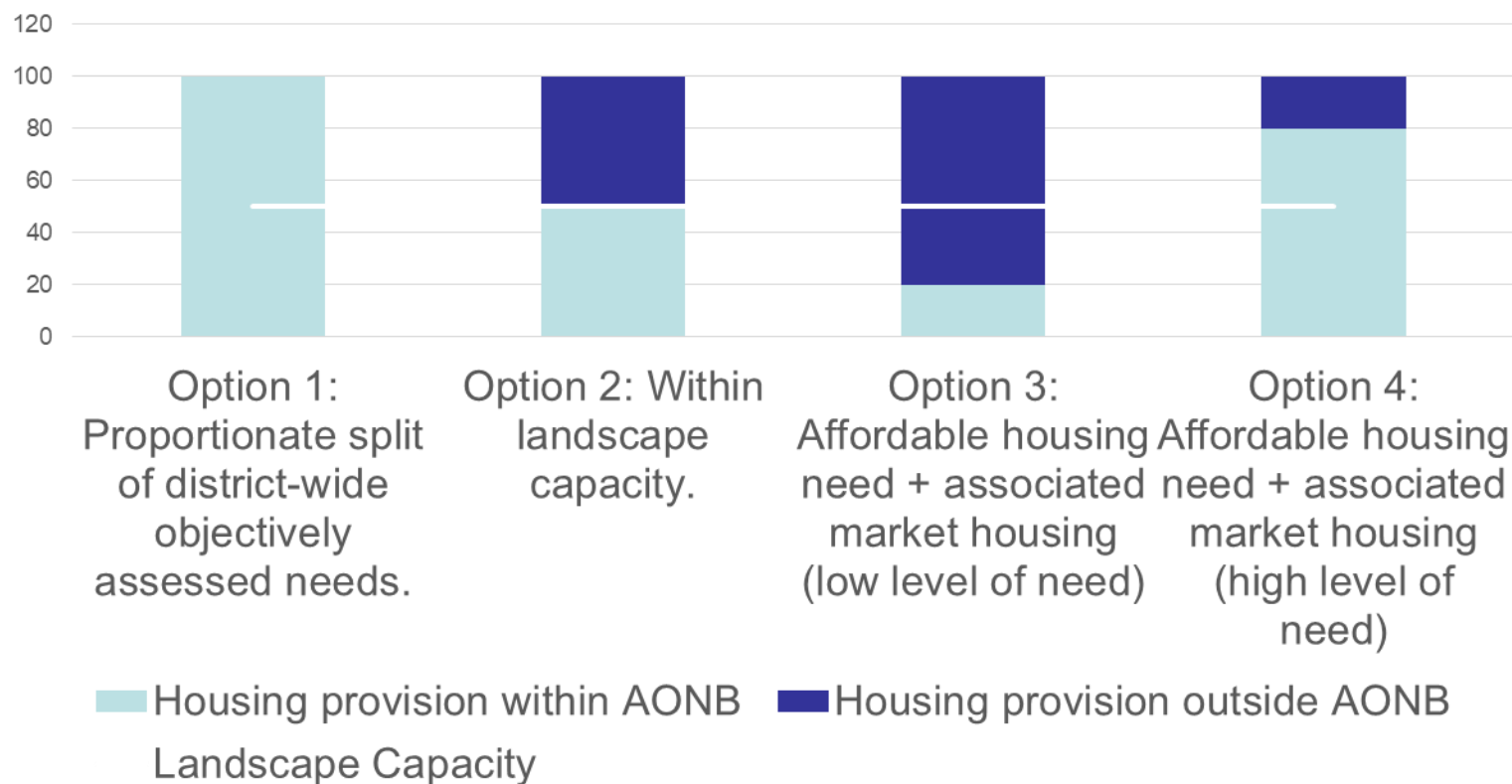
- **PPG:**

- AONB policies in NPPF '*may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for development in full through the plan-making process, and they are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs from adjoining (non-designated) areas*'

Landscape-led approach

- Landscape sensitivity study - exclude high / medium-high sensitivity
- Landscape capacity
- Major development assessment – exclude major development
- Shortlist of potential sites
- Don't fully utilise landscape capacity in one go
- Use duty to cooperate

Options for allocating housing in an AONB



N.B. The number of houses shown on the y axis is just for demonstration purposes.

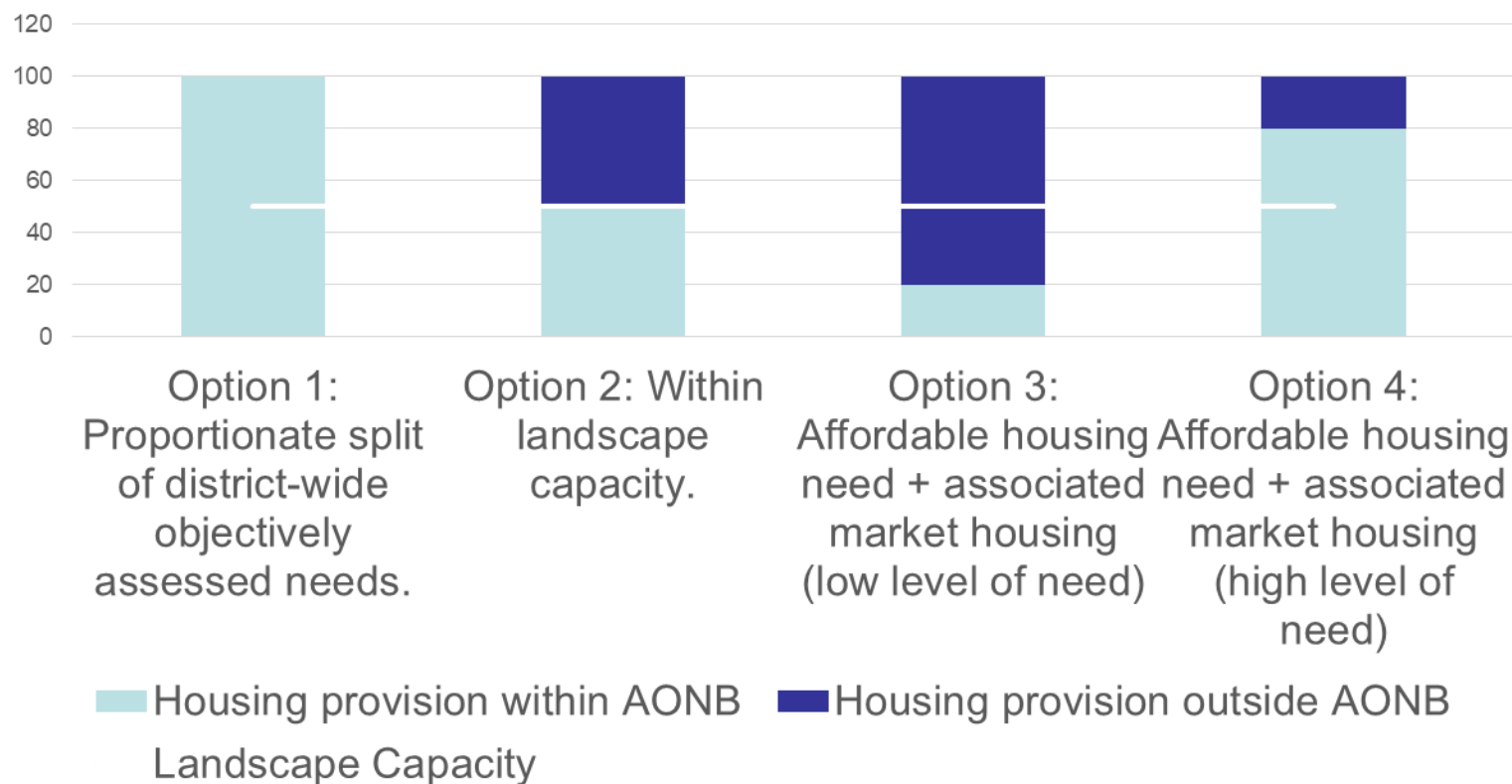
Affordable housing

- Cotswolds AONB Management Plan (Policy CE12)
 - Robust evidence of local need arising from within the AONB
 - Priority given to the provision of affordable housing
- West Oxfordshire Local Plan (adopted September 2018)
 - Draft site allocations not sound – lack of evidence of need specific to the AONB sub-area
 - Windfall housing proposals '*will only be supported where there is convincing evidence of a specific local housing need such as needs identified through a neighbourhood plan or affordable housing needs specific to a particular settlement*'

Affordable housing

- Rural Housing Needs Survey (HNS) specific to the particular parish where housing is being considered
- HNS up-to-date: repeated on rolling five year cycle
- Prioritise HNS in AONBs
- Robust justification for exceeding need identified in HNS
- Choice based letting systems (e.g. Homeseeker Plus) – not a measure of housing need
- HNS data v landscape capacity

Options for allocating housing in an AONB



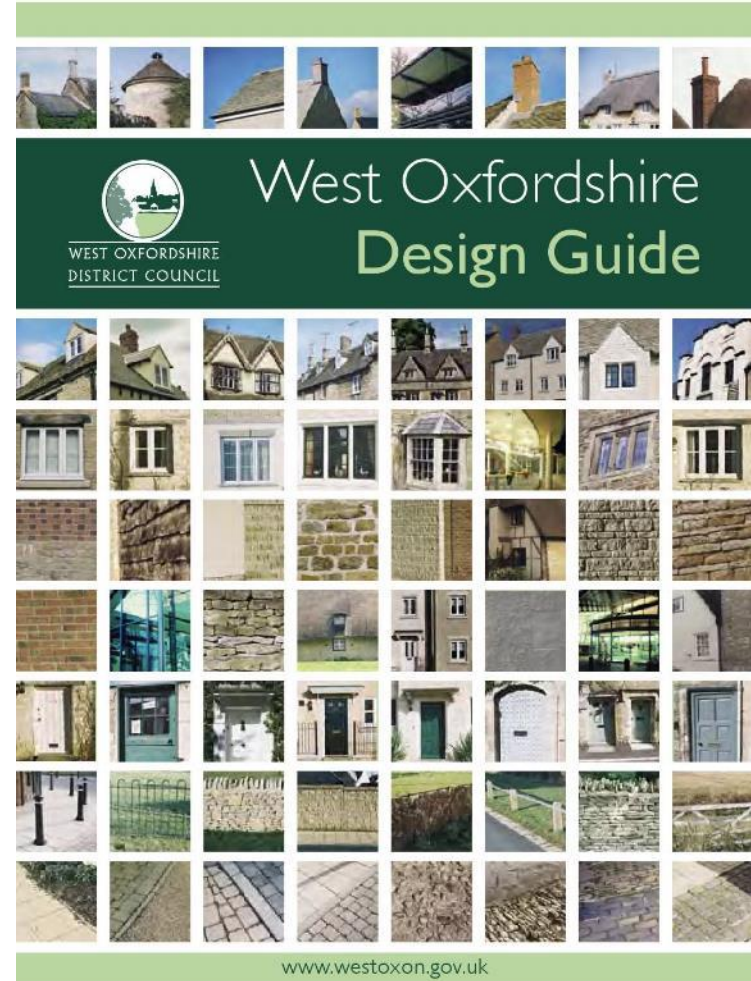
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Conserving and Enhancing

- Current focus = mitigate adverse impacts
- Need more emphasis on conserving and enhancing

Conserving

- Highest standards of design inc. AONB special qualities
- Cotswolds AONB Landscape Strategy & Guidelines



Conserving and Enhancing

Enhancing

- 25 Year Environment Plan – first generation to leave [the natural beauty of our protected landscapes] in a better state than we inherited it
- LVIA guidelines
 - improve landscape resource and visual amenity
 - the site and its setting
 - over and above the baseline conditions
 - should not be confused with ‘offset’ and ‘compensation’
- Environmental Management Plans / planning conditions / CIL

Designated Landscapes Review



- AONBs should be strengthened, with ... a greater voice on development
 - statutory consultee?
 - duty of special regard to furthering the purpose of AONB designation?
- National Landscape Service
 - network of protected landscapes 'more than the sum of its parts'
 - AONBs more explicitly on par with National Parks?
- Potential for new designations
 - Cotswolds National Park?

Designated Landscapes Review



‘The national zeal for the founding mission of landscape protection has been eroded ...

We need to reignite the fire and vision which brought this [protected landscape] system into being in 1949.’

Conclusion – Three Point Plan

1. Landscape-led approach
2. Robust evidence of affordable housing need
3. Conserving and enhancing natural beauty

