

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Management Board
Minutes of Meeting 26th April 2007
The Gateway, Craven Arms

Present :

Peter Norman (Chair)	Individual member
Jenny Collingridge (Vice Chair)	Parish Council representative
Colin Preston (Vice Chair)	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Ian Kemsley	South Shropshire Tourism Association
Cllr James Gibson	Shropshire County Council
John Povall	National Farmers Union
Sally Powell	Natural England
John Turner	RSPB/Shropshire Ornithological Society
Cllr Tim Barker	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Karen Sinclair	Bridgnorth District Council
Neil Willcox	Shropshire County Council
Dave Wallace	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Team
Alison Scimia	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (minute taker)

1. Apologies

David Francis	South Shropshire District Council
Cllr Phil Robinson	Bridgnorth District Council
Cllr Elizabeth Thomas	Parish Council representative
Cllr Nick Bews	South Shropshire District Council
Libby Harper	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council

Peter Norman welcomed Cllr Tim Barker to his first meeting of the Management Board.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

- 2.1. The minutes from the last meeting on 5th December 2006 were accepted.
- 2.2. Governance re possible move to unitary authority. Phil has made contact with SCC Legal department, who felt it was too early to consider properly until a decision on the unitary proposal has been made. If it goes ahead, a new authority is expected in 2009, with a shadow authority in 2008, so it would affect approval of the new Management Plan. Peter felt that different options for councillor representation should be considered, and not necessarily just allocate the four seats of merging councils to the unitary authority. We can continue to consider any other changes to governance the Partnership may wish to make. It was agreed that the AONB Partnership would not make a response to consultations on the unitary proposal.
Action : Phil to seek further advice from SCC Legal department if a decision is made to go ahead with the unitary authority, and report to a future meeting.
- 2.3. Planning protocol This was currently going around the local authorities for signature, and has been held up for a long time with SCC. Phil requested that it is signed as soon as possible, but said the Partnership was already working to procedures in the protocol.

- 2.4. Undergrounding of electricity cables A second regional panel meeting took place last week, with a further 10 schemes proposed by the AONB. Central Networks have confirmed that of the previous 10 proposals, only 3 are feasible in practical terms and are still being considered. Negotiations with landowners is the next stage.
- 2.5. Draft minutes of the AONB Partnership meeting in February have not yet been received from SCC Committee section. **Action – Peter to write requesting more prompt writing of minutes.**

3. Update on AONB Team Work Programme

- 3.1. Core staff Phil noted that the report only covered work by the AONB Team, and thanked Peter for the considerable amount of work he was putting in as Chair, especially regarding liaison with Advantage West Midlands (AWM). Phil felt that the influence of the Team was improving, and through project, planning and SDF, the AONB Partnership was now involved in many of the key initiatives in the area. After a phase of having to go to others to tell them about the AONB, people were increasingly coming to us. He circulated some examples of recent publications by others in which the profile of the AONB was good, and others where it was disappointingly absent.
- 3.2. Phil said that the report from the noise monitoring contract had been received, which showed very variable levels of noise within the AONB, with traffic and the A49 in particular showing the highest levels. A summary of the findings will be produced.
- 3.3. Neil Willcox complimented AONB team on the level of work achieved.
- 3.4. Peter emphasised the importance of AWM, who now control budget for the Rural Development Programme. A meeting is arranged with Mark Pearce (head of AWM's rural programmes) for 16th May to discuss this and other AWM rural measures in relation to the AONB.
- 3.5. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Phil informed the Board that it was now clear from Natural England that the SDF grant would only be for 70% of the £100,000 bid. This meant that £9,000 would have to be cut from the grants provisionally approved by the Panel in March. On the projects just completed, Phil mentioned that the Church Stretton station gardens project also included new signs at the station indicating the AONB.
- 3.6. Peter expressed concern that several of the 2006-7 grants show zero paid to date. Phil confirmed that many of the final claims were being paid at present. Phil also confirmed that the £5k SDF grant for Shropshire Highland Services had not been paid as the applicants had withdrawn from the scheme.
- 3.7. John Povall commented that the uncertainty over funding did not help with running the SDF. Phil informed the Board of Natural England's position on our project grant bids. A week ago Natural England had no budget for AONB projects at all, but through intervention of Helen Phillips, The Chief Executive, £750,000 was found for division between 40 AONBs. We would receive offers for two of our six projects. Sally Powell explained how competitive the project panel had been, and

how AONBs account for 30-40% of Natural England's budget in the West Midlands (excluding agri-environment schemes).

- 3.8. John Turner asked about the Bulmer Foundation and leaflets on this were passed around to Board members.
- 3.9. Blue Remembered Hills Phil said that the project had reached the 5 year project targets on many elements, and so staff were able to spend some more time on project development. Mike Kelly had been invited to bid for fee-earning river habitat survey work by the Environment Agency. Phil drew attention to the BRH exhibition, in which artists are capturing people's views and thoughts on the landscape through pictures, words, video clips, etc. This will be brought together in a multi-media exhibition which will form part of the new permanent display at the Discovery Centre.

4. 2007-8 Budget and Staffing Proposals

- 4.1. Phil informed Board members of the need for a core Development Officer post to develop and implement projects, seek funding and deputise for the AONB Manager. This is based on reallocation of resources rather than extra funding, and will inevitably mean a shift in the Team away from more specialist roles. The overall balance of staff costs to other budgets would be similar to the current situation. Phil said that Ian Dormor intended to retire at the end of 2007 and Stephanie Hayes will be returning part-time in September from maternity leave. Peter suggested that Ian and Steph be asked to confirm in writing their intentions.
- 4.2. The Management Board supported the creation of the new Development Officer post.
- 4.3. Peter noted Diane Monether's return to work after long-term sick leave and wished her well.

5. Project Development

- 5.1. Phil explained a recent shift as outlined in the paper away from trying to develop one large project towards exploring a number of smaller projects. He said that in the short term, a good range of activities were taking place with regard to local products – through SDF and Natural England project grants. Our lobbying on RDPE should help to ensure that the Shropshire Hills area benefits from the programme, whether or not the AONB is closely involved. AWM are still debating with DEFRA how to implement the Leader element of the Programme. Peter mentioned that the Regional Implementation Plan highlighted Rural Hubs as a delivery mechanism, but felt that the possibility of us becoming a Leader Local Action Group should be explored. **Action – Phil to brief Peter on Leader and build this into discussions with AWM.**
- 5.2. Dave Wallace mentioned the AWM's Annual Conference for the Rural Regeneration Zone was taking place in Ludlow in July. Peter has booked to attend this.

6. Office Accommodation

- 6.1. Peter drew attention to key points in the paper, including that under the terms of the lease there appeared to be nothing to prevent BT from repeating an upgrade to the office premises and making further large charges. Neil informed the Board that the Estates Department at Shirehall have been negotiating with BT regarding the necessity of the work undertaken. He also briefly summarised the history of the AONB office accommodation, and emphasised that the current location has provided a considerably better base than previous offices, with a good profile for the AONB Partnership in the centre of Craven Arms.
- 6.2. Peter suggested that as we have no forewarning of future building repairs, it may be appropriate to get an agreement from BT which would give us the ability to scrutinise costs of any future works before further money is spent. The lease is due to end in 2012, although there was a 3 year break clause which is now past.
- 6.3. It was agreed further developments and budget implications would be reported to the Management Board. Neil commented that it would be helpful to have the support of the Board in being proactive in looking for alternative locations. This was agreed.

7. National Consultation on Changes to Permitted Development Rights for Electricity Microgeneration

- 7.1. The paper recommends that the AONB Partnership generally supports the government's proposals to relax planning controls on small scale renewable energy installations, with minor amendments regarding stand-alone wind turbines. Phil said he had received two responses from Partnership members, generally supporting the proposed response.
- 7.2. The height and spacing of wind turbines was discussed. Ian Kemsley suggested that every case had to be taken into account individually. Peter felt that the idea should be supported of defining a threshold below which development did not need scrutinising individually. Phil felt that the AONB policy needs to be as supportive as possible towards smaller scale schemes, since our policy is opposed to large scale windfarms.
- 7.3. The Board agreed with the general principles of the proposed response, but did not feel confident to recommend the distance criteria mentioned in the paper.
Action: Phil to send finalised response to DCLG consultation, without recommending specific distance criteria.

8. Management Plan Review

- 8.1. The results of the evaluation questionnaire from the Management Plan survey were noted by the Board. A draw was held for the incentive prize for the questionnaire, and a bottle of organic wine was won by Neil Willcox.

9. Information Papers

(i) Working Groups Update

The trip to Worthen School (SDF project) was highlighted, and the excellent knowledge and interest of the children.

(ii) Proposals for 50th Anniversary Activities

Beacon lighting was supported.

Hosting the National AONB Conference – Harper Adams was suggested as possible venue.

Celebration Events – leading up to 29th July 2008. Peter asked that the Board assist with developing ideas - needs to be firmed up by December.

(iii) AONB Tour

This will be separate from the next Partnership meeting (taking place on 20th June). The date is yet to be decided and will be advised to the Board in due course.

(iv) Regional AONB Liaison

The background to this issue was noted, along with the fact that the proposal for a Regional Co-ordinator was unlikely to progress in the short term.

10. Date of next meetings

Tuesday 4th Sept 2007 and Wednesday 5th Dec 2007.

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1 Dave Wallace mentioned a project to create a steam railway to Snailbeach along the old mineral line, which the AONB Team may wish to find out more about.