

**Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Management Board
Minutes of Meeting 4th September 2007
Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms**



Present :

Peter Norman (Chair)	Individual member
Jenny Collingridge (Vice Chair)	Parish Council representative
Cllr Denis Allen	Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Cllr Tim Barker	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Cllr Lee Chapman	South Shropshire District Council
Cllr James Gibson	Shropshire County Council
Ian Kemsley	South Shropshire Tourism Association
John Povall	National Farmers Union
Cllr Elizabeth Thomas	Parish Council representative
John Turner	RSPB/Shropshire Ornithological Society

Officers:

Jane Bushell	Borough of Telford & Wrekin
David Francis	South Shropshire District Council
Libby Harper	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Karen Sinclair	Bridgnorth District Council
Neil Willcox	Shropshire County Council
Phil Holden	Shropshire Hills AONB Team
Alison Scimia	Shropshire Hills AONB Team (minute taker)

1. Apologies

Sally Powell	Natural England
Colin Preston (Vice Chair)	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Dave Wallace	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Cllr William Parr	Bridgnorth District Council

Peter Norman welcomed Cllr Denis Allen and Cllr Lee Chapman to their first meeting of the Management Board.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

- 2.1. Correction to previous minutes of 26th April 2007 – Jane Bushell was present at the meeting.
- 2.2. Action Para 2.5 – Peter did not write to the SCC Committee requesting more prompt writing of minutes, although the point has now been understood.
- 2.3. Para 3.4 – A useful meeting took place with Mark Pearce of AWM on 16th May.
- 2.4. The Blue Remembered Hills Project celebration event took place on 23rd August at the Discovery Centre. The multi-media display will become a permanent feature, although will be moving to Ludlow Resource Centre when the Discovery Centre is temporarily closed for refurbishment.
- 2.5. Para 7.3 – Response to DCLG consultation on microgeneration was sent.

3. Update on 2007-8 AONB Team Work Programme and Budget

- 3.1. Phil advised the Board that Jon Kean has started in his role as Blue Remembered Hills Project Co-ordinator. Stephanie Hayes returned from maternity leave today. He also advised that the closing date for applications for the Development Officer post is 4 September.
- 3.2. Work Programme Phil drew attention to the presentation given to the Shropshire Partnership Environment Forum which was well received, and to the Annual Review 2006/7 which will go to design and print shortly.
- 3.3. David Francis commended the AONB Team for the work on the Church Stretton Town Design Statement and was thankful for their input. Jenny Collingridge added that design statements are becoming increasingly difficult for local groups to do, and professional help is almost essential.
- 3.4. Neil Willcox said that he finds the E-bulletins a very useful way of keeping informed of current issues.
- 3.5. Budgets: Phil summarised that the staffing costs are different to the original budget due to changes. Office costs are significantly higher due to increases in service costs. Office equipment and maintenance are up by £10,000 due to cost of past window repairs. However, with adjustments elsewhere, the budget can be met.
- 3.6. Tim Barker queried the £5k on the Landscape sensitivity contract. Phil advised that when the budget was written it had been expected in last year's budget, but had in fact been carried forward.
- 3.7. Ian Kemsley asked about the office move and if there had been any progress. Phil said that no action had been taken to seek new accommodation. SCC Estates have carried out a condition survey of the building to assess potential future liabilities under the lease. The transfer of the remaining five years of the lease to another party was likely to be difficult. It was suggested that better terms be negotiated closer to the time of the lease expiring. Neil Willcox confirmed that discussions are ongoing with BT and that the bill for the window repairs has still not been paid, although money has been set aside.
- 3.8. Projects: Phil informed members that the Wood Fair may take place in Spring 2008. A small Feasibility Study contract has been let to Heartwoods on wood energy development, as well as looking at supply chains to the Bishop's Castle biomass power plant. Peter queried whether the AONB will be able to retain Mike Kelly in the team. Phil confirmed that although Mike finishes his BRH role in December 2007, we have project funding for his post to the end of March 2008, and Phil was confident that there will be further work for Mike for another year thereafter.

4. Core Funding

- 4.1. Phil summarised that the core budget will be losing the financial contribution from the Blue Remembered Hills project at the end of this year and he is therefore seeking an increase from local authority contributions to offset this loss. Although

we receive some earned income, e.g. from sub-letting the car-park and from the sale of the Shropshire Hills books, Phil mentioned that providing earned income as part of the core budget is not standard among AONBs.

- 4.2. Tim Barker supported the principle. Libby Harper added that SABC could possibly justify increasing their contribution. Lee Chapman stated that SSDC cannot set budgets yet and he does not believe they would be able to increase their contribution. David Francis added that it is a struggle to provide adequate budget, but could possibly provide assistance in the interim from planning delivery grants. This would only be a temporary measure as these grants are being phased out. Jane Bushell said that Telford & Wrekin do not have a separate budget for the AONB and it would be difficult to find additional money. Karen Sinclair stated that any additional amount would have to be considered as a growth item, but may not gain the support of management – could possibly provide from delivery grants though.
- 4.3 Neil Willcox agreed with the principle of Phil's request, but would find difficulty in taking funds away from other services to put more into the AONB. The possibility of raising the seat fee (currently £1,231) was also discussed.
- 4.3 Peter summarised that given the complexity of the situation because of the new unitary council and future changes, it is not possible to make a recommendation yet. He suggested that Phil meet with several council representatives of the Board and develop a workable approach, which will be discussed further at the Partnership meeting on 18th October.

5. Bid to act as Leader Local Action Group

- 5.1. Correction to para 2.4 of the paper, should read "There remains some concern that AWM's proposed approach will **not** meet..."
- 5.2 Phil recommended to the Board that the AONB pursue a bid to be Leader Local Action Group. The process remains a little unclear, but it should be pursued if favourable terms can be obtained. Phil has been in touch with other AONBs to see if any had been involved with Leader - one has been a deliverer and some others are preparing bids. Phil emphasised that if no other provider will bid to deliver Leader in this area, then both ourselves and the area will miss the opportunity to benefit from the funding.
- 5.3 Peter said that the process is difficult to understand, with the added disadvantage of being bound into European bureaucracy. Phil confirmed that the host authority's role to provide financial administrative support and assistance would be important. Ian Kemsley queried why the AONB would want to bid for Leader, as opposed to the County Council. Neil Willcox replied that the work has to be carried out in partnership and the Council would therefore not be able to do so.
- 5.4 Phil said he would be uneasy if we were pushed to operate Leader in a different area to the AONB. There was also potential for it to detract from AONB core work, although ideally it would help to develop good working relationships with communities as well as raise the profile of the AONB. It could also assist in developing European trans-national partnerships. Peter said we should approach with caution. Phil commented that we would have to ensure that Leader was linked

with our current work (see Appendix 1 of paper) and the bid would relate to our remit.

- 5.5 Lee Chapman said that the business plan proposal for unitary has a number of sub-structures proposed, which will be delivered under Northern, Central and Southern areas. Attached to each will be a partnership body (replacing the District level local strategic partnerships), which will have a broader remit than the AONB and could be a deliverer of Leader. These new bodies may not be in place in time to bid for leader, but there may be scope for the AONB to work with them.
- 5.6 Peter summarised that the AONB profile has substantially increased due to the Sustainable Development Fund, and a Leader project area was likely to promote the AONB positively. The recommendation to support an expression of interest and to bid was therefore accepted by the Board.

6. Wrekin Conservation Plan and AONB Governance

- 6.1. Peter said that Jane Bushell of Telford & Wrekin had expressed concern that this paper had been circulated without adequate earlier discussion. He clarified that the paper was exploratory and that comments were welcome at the meeting but that no firm decision was sought.
- 6.2. Phil summarised that he sought to link the draft Wrekin Conservation Plan with the AONB Management Plan. The issues for the Wrekin were long term and a structure to reflect this was necessary. An area working group has been formed for the Long Mynd – Stiperstones part of the AONB and is progressing well. A similar arrangement may be appropriate at the Wrekin, linking with the AONB in addition to the current work of the Wildlife Trust. Peter clarified that the Wildlife Trust are presently drafting the Conservation Plan, although neither the Borough of Telford & Wrekin or SABC had been formally consulted.
- 6.3 Jane Bushell added that she had obtained a copy of the Draft Plan, and felt it had some positive ideas. John Povall queried whether landowners were sympathetic to the Conservation Plan. It was confirmed that they are generally happy to move forward and support the plan. Jenny Collingridge felt that the Wrekin is in need of a body to carry out conservation work.
- 6.4 Peter asked the Board if all were in agreement with the vision stated in last sentence of para 2.6 in the paper "The long term vision..." etc. This statement was met with general approval by Board members. The ideas would be discussed in more detail among relevant partners.

7. Local Government Reorganisation and AONB Governance

- 7.1. Peter said that the AONB will need to carry out a governance review linked to the transition to a unitary council in Shropshire.
- 7.3 James Gibson said there will be a "caretaker" authority in place from early 2008 and all existing agreements will be inherited. By 2009 elections will take place, so that from June 2009 there will be a newly constituted Authority.

7.3 The AONB needed to establish how local authority representation on the Partnership will work. A more significant issue however could be the difficulty in getting the Management Plan approved by March 2009, as this is likely to be exactly the time of transition. Approval through the individual authorities before then would be difficult and not very meaningful for the future of the plan. The new authority would almost certainly not be able to approve the Plan until later in 2009.
Action: Phil to consult Defra regarding the implications of this.

7.4 Peter suggested that the next Management Board meeting in December should consider again the timetable for when a governance review should be carried out.

8. Brief Verbal Update Items

(i) Management Plan Review

- Phil informed the Board that progress has been slow, but once the Development Officer post has been appointed, he will be able to devote more time to the Plan.
- The Working Group meetings in September will be used to progress the Management Plan.
- Supporting documents – the State of the AONB Report is fairly close to publishing and work is continuing on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report..

(ii) Project Development

- The Leader proposal discussed earlier is currently the top priority.
- Mike Kelly is developing a woodlands project, and the Forestry Commission have indicated their support.
- A Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the 'Friends of Shropshire Hills' has been temporarily shelved until the Development Officer is in post.
- A bid has been made for a food links co-ordinator post (largely prepared by Tish Dockerty of Ludlow 21).

(iii) AONB Partnership Membership Review

An advert for membership application was published in the Shropshire Star and also sent out on the recent E-bulletin. Sarah Bury has indicated that she will not be re-applying for membership.

(iv) National AONB Conference 2008 in Shropshire

The conference will be hosted jointly by ourselves and Cannock Chase, and is taking place on the 9-11 July 2008 at Harper Adams University College. It will consist of two and half days of workshops, field trips and various speakers, attracting approx. 150 people. Phil asked for Partnership members to get in touch with him if they are interested in getting involved.

(v) Regional AONB Liaison

This item was not discussed.

9. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 5th December 2007, Craven Arms Community Centre.

There was no other business.