

**Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership Management Board**  
**Minutes of Meeting 5<sup>th</sup> December 2007**  
**Craven Arms Community Centre**

**Present :**

Peter Norman (Chair)	Individual member
Jenny Collingridge (Vice Chair)	Parish Council representative
Colin Preston (Vice Chair)	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Cllr Denis Allen	Borough of Telford & Wrekin
Cllr Tim Barker	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council
Cllr James Gibson	Shropshire County Council
Ian Kemsley	South Shropshire Tourism Association
John Povall	National Farmers Union
Sally Powell	Natural England
Elizabeth Thomas	Individual member
Leo Smith	Upper Onny Wildlife Group/Shropshire Ornithological Society

**Officers:**

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

**1. Apologies**

Cllr William Parr	Bridgnorth District Council
Cllr Lee Chapman	South Shropshire District Council
Karen Jones	Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council

Peter Norman welcomed Leo Smith to his first meeting of the Management Board.

**2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising**

- 2.1 Correction to previous minutes – para 7.3 should read “early 2008” instead of “early 20008”.
- 2.2 Para 3.2 – Phil confirmed that the Annual Review has been printed and distributed.
- 2.3 Action Para 7.3 - Phil has not yet consulted Defra on this.
- 2.4 Para 8 (iv) – Cllr Denis Allen expressed an interest to get involved with the National AONB Conference in July 2008.

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

- 3.1 Staffing - Phil advised the Board that Clare Fildes has officially started today in her appointment as Development Officer and will normally be attending Management Board and Partnership meetings.

### 3.2 Work Programme

- Phil drew the Board's attention to the Church Stretton Town Design Statement which should go to print today. Courtesy letters had been sent to owners of a number of properties in Church Stretton which are mentioned in the Statement.
- A DVD is being produced to illustrate the outcome of Down to Earth projects.
- A Mature student has been on placement with the AONB looking at transport issues.
- It is intended that the 'Friends of the Shropshire Hills' group will be launched during 2008 linked to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.
- Beacon lighting on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2008 – will not be a large public event, but rather to raise awareness and mark the start of events taking place throughout the year.
- Peter congratulated the AONB on their successes.

3.3 Peter asked why work on the AONB Management Plan is behind schedule. Phil explained that he had not been able to devote sufficient time to this in the second half of the year. With Clare now in post, more of his time would be available to enable progression of the Management Plan.

### 3.4 Funding

£3M Defra budget cuts were discussed. Sally Powell said there is a Natural England Board meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December to discuss this. Elizabeth Thomas asked if SDF funding is vulnerable and if we would make a case to state how important this is for the AONB. Sally said that the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> December will be discussing this as well as deciding which areas will be cut back.

**Action: Partnership to write a letter to Natural England nationally stressing the importance of SDF and implications of any cutbacks to the AONB.**

### 3.5 Budget

Office costs have increased due to window repairs. This has had a knock-on effect resulting in the postponing of various other actions. The survey carried out by Shropshire County Council Property Services has given an early warning system of possible future liabilities. **Peter requested a copy of the survey report – Action Phil.**

Leo Smith asked if the two actions cut this year would be reinstated in next year's budget. Phil clarified that the volunteer support budget was created alongside Cath's role and had not proved to be necessary. The Economic Study would still be valuable, but it is not clear how this can be progressed. **Leo asked to be sent a copy of previous papers on reallocation of budget – Action Phil.**

## 4. **Bid to Deliver LEADER under the Rural Development Programme for England**

4.1. The paper requested the Board to support the submission of an Expression of Interest for LEADER, which would mean six years of funding potentially worth over £1M). A meeting was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November with key partners. Clare Greener (from SCC) and Phil have been working on the bid, and are aiming to submit it by Christmas. Phil said it has been helpful to bring in the expertise of other local authority partners on areas where our expertise is weaker (i.e. access to services). Phil said it was intended that there would be a full-time LEADER Co-ordinator, and that it was important that the AONB's core activities did not suffer.

- 4.2 Clare Fildes said that LEADER is a good opportunity to help engage communities (as seen with the Blue Remembered Hills Project) and to improve relationships between market towns and the AONB.
- 4.3 Phil explained the proposed structure for LEADER linked to the AONB Partnership. Friends of the Shropshire Hills could have a valuable role to support community activity, and could gain funding through LEADER. It is also proposed to link the LEADER grant appraisal panel with the already operating for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).
- 4.4 Peter asked how LEADER will help to maintain the health of farming which sustains the landscape. It was clarified that although this is an overall aim of RDPE, LEADER in the West Midlands is focussed on social and community priorities. Clare added that we need to ensure farmers are included in community work (such as in the Land, Life & Livelihoods project). There needs to be a more inclusive nature which would engage the rest of the community.
- 4.5 Phil circulated a map showing the proposed project area. It is similar to the Blue Remembered Hills Project area, and includes market towns that lie just beyond the AONB boundary. There are some risks with having a wider boundary, as the AONB will need to maintain the integrity of its work.
- 4.6 The Board approved the submission of the Expression of Interest for LEADER.

## **5. Wrekin Forest Partnership**

- 5.1 Phil informed the Board that a meeting took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> December to launch the Wrekin Forest Conservation Plan, which was attended by 40 members of the public. The draft Terms of Reference for the Partnership were introduced for the first time and principles discussed, although they were not circulated. It was a successful meeting with a good deal of support for this new body. Jane Bushell and Cllr Denis Allen expressed support and that it is a very good time for the creation of this Partnership.
- 5.2 Clare queried how farmers/landowners had responded to this. It was confirmed that their response has been positive, and some key people have agreed to be involved.
- 5.3 Dave Wallace commented on para 3.10 in the Terms of Reference stating that Shrewsbury & Atcham have been commissioning Greenspace Strategy for the Borough, which should include the AONB and wider area. Phil agreed that there is a need to liaise with Shrewsbury & Atcham as well as Telford & Wrekin.
- 5.4 Peter asked whether an adjustment to the AONB Partnership would be required because of new organisations being represented on the Wrekin Forest Group. Phil felt that the point of a more local body was that groups specific to the Wrekin area could get involved without having to be on the AONB Partnership.
- 5.5 The proposed new visitor centre mentioned in Para 2.3 was briefly discussed and the issues that need to be addressed in terms of traffic and parking at Forest Glen.

5.6 The recommendation to support the formation of the Wrekin Forest Partnership was approved by the Board.

## **6. Bishop's Castle Biomass Power Plant, Draft Response to Planning Application**

6.1 Phil informed the Board that the planning application for the Biomass plant had been withdrawn and will be re-submitted in the New Year. Phil had had a meeting with John Evans and other partners in the proposal on 4<sup>th</sup> December to discuss the draft response by the AONB Partnership. John Evans had said that there were some errors within the paper, but they were interested in the views put forward.

6.2 Peter clarified that the AONB Partnership was concerned about fuel supply and its implications for farming and land management practices, and about inefficient use of heat.

6.3 Cllr Tim Barker expressed a concern over the lack of fuel within the area and was also sceptical of the economic viability of the project. Ian Kemsley mentioned the use of the energy crop *Miscanthus*, and that land around Bishop's Castle could be used for its growth. Leo Smith asked whether an ecological study had been carried out on the effects of growing *Miscanthus*. Ian confirmed that some research had been carried out.

6.4 David Francis informed the Board that SSDC had asked for the planning application to be withdrawn, and thanked Joy Tetsill for the constructive paper she had put together. He added that SSDC were concerned about fuel sources and heat loss, but would be meeting the applicants next week to discuss further. In general SSDC are in favour of this development, but some issues need to be resolved before the application can be approved.

6.5 Peter summarised that the Board would not endorse the objection as the application had been withdrawn. Further consideration would be deferred until the application was resubmitted, probably in February 2008. He hoped that the new application would resolve our present concerns.

## **7. Undergrounding of Electricity Cables**

7.1 The Board supported the recommendation set out in the paper distributed to members.

## **8. Brief Verbal Update Items**

### **(i) Core Funding**

Peter wrote to Local Authority Officers on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2007 requesting an increase in their seat fee contribution. To date he has received one reply from Telford & Wrekin confirming they are able to meet the increase. Representatives reported that Shrewsbury & Atcham are going through a process to approve the increase and should be able to provide the amount requested. Bridgnorth District Council are also processing the request, which will be going to committee in January and signed off in February. Shropshire County Council are not able to meet the increased contribution requested. South Shropshire District Council are only able to increase their contribution for inflation, but it could be possible to obtain more funding from planning delivery grants.

Phil reiterated that the increase was to cover the loss of contribution from the Blue Remembered Hills project, rather than being a real increase in the overall budget, and he was grateful for what each local authority is able to provide.

- (ii) Management Plan Review  
Phil informed the Board that more time will be put into this once the LEADER bid has been submitted and now that Clare has taken on the Development Officer post.
- (iii) Local Government Reorganisation and AONB Governance  
Cllr James Gibson confirmed there is no change to the current schedule for reorganisation.
- (iv) National AONB Conference 2008 in Shropshire  
The Conference is taking place on 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> July 2008 at Harper Adams University College, and will be jointly hosted by ourselves and Cannock Chase AONB. The overall theme of the conference is on partnership working. On the first day, there will be keynote speakers and workshops. Field trips will take place on the second day to the Wrekin, Clun Forest/Offa's Dyke and the Long Mynd/Stiperstones. There is a fee for Partnership members to attend, but there will be a day rate.  
**Action: Phil to circulate the draft programme.**

## 9. Date of Next Meetings

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008 – Craven Arms Community Centre

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2008

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2008

## 10. AoB

- 10.1 Colin Preston notified the Board that the Shropshire Wildlife Trust are looking to acquire the Hollies, and are seeking donations as well as applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 10.2 Jenny Collingridge mentioned that Defra's 'Outdoors for All' Action Plan had recently been published.
- 10.3 Landscape Sensitivity Study - Jane Bushell mentioned that Telford & Wrekin have just commissioned the same consultant (used by the AONB) to carry out a similar study.
- 10.4 Phil said that the South Shropshire Tourism Guide has been re-branded as "Ludlow and the Shropshire Hills", with an article written by Keith Pybus entitled "The Hills of Heaven".