

# SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT BOARD MINUTES OF MEETING 7<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006

## Present:

Peter Norman (Chair)	Individual member
Jenny Collingridge (Vice Chair)	Parish Council representative
Colin Preston (Vice Chair)	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Cllr Nick Bews	South Shropshire District Council
Cllr James Gibson	Shropshire County Council
Cllr Phil Robinson	Bridgnorth District Council
Kelda White	Countryside Agency
Ann Hamlyn	Campaign to Protect Rural England
John Povall	National Farmers Union

## Officers in attendance:

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

## 1. Apologies

David Francis	South Shropshire District Council
Elizabeth Thomas	Parish Council representative
John Turner	RSPB / Shropshire Ornithological Society

Peter Norman welcomed all to the meeting. He noted with regret that Jill Chaplin had recently passed away, adding that her contribution to the Board had been greatly appreciated. Libby Harper was deputising for Dave Wallace.

## 2. Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

2.1 The minutes from the last meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2006 were accepted.

2.2 Previous Actions:

*Action 3.6 – Phil to reconsider with Joy the categories for planning applications in planning protocol.* The categories were reconsidered, but no change was made. The protocol went to the Partnership in June, and is now being circulated around the individual authorities for signature.

*Action 4.3 – Phil with Joy to update and make the AONB's formal submission to the consultation.* Submission has been made. Action complete.

*Action 5.4 – Phil to update the draft position statement to go to the Partnership meeting in June.* Action complete.

*Action 7.2 – Phil to update and make the AONB's formal submission to the consultation.* Action complete.

## 3. Blue Remembered Hills Exit Strategy / New Project Development

3.1 In summarising information from the paper circulated, Phil drew attention to the resources that would be required to support a formalised brand in the longer term, and of the importance of environmental accreditation to ensure that local products do

actually benefit conservation. He also drew attention to the intention to look at other project areas such as the Free Trees scheme and Wildlife Sites.

- 3.2 Peter Norman queried if the focus had moved away from encouraging uptake of Environmental Stewardship. Phil responded that this was a priority across all work of the AONB and not necessarily just within this proposed project. Also, it seemed increasingly likely that uptake of the Scheme would be limited by the money available rather than efforts to promote it.
- 3.3 Jane Bushell asked what criteria would be used for accreditation and whether the quality of products would be included. Phil mentioned that the Peak District scheme use their own accreditation system, but this is resource intensive and it may be possible to use existing criteria such as agri-environment schemes. Product quality would have to be included in some way, again possibly through existing schemes.
- 3.4 Colin Preston said that it didn't matter too much what the product was if the landscape can be promoted. John Povall commented that there were a number of branding schemes around, but they tended to be small scale. He felt that setting the standards right was important, but that achieving a year round supply e.g. for lamb and grazing beef, was very difficult. Peter was wary of the complexities of a branding scheme and felt that emphasising localness was the most important thing. Neil Willcox said that the Shropshire Hills identity was already well known. He felt that health and well-being should be added more prominently into the project, and proposed a framework illustrating how this could be done.
- 3.5 Jenny Collingridge queried whether some products are already being marketed under a 'Shropshire Hills' brand. Phil was aware of spring water under this name, and mentioned a bee-keeping project supported by the Sustainable Development Fund that will market its product as 'Shropshire Hills honey'. The legal implications of a controlled brand were touched on. Peter Norman summarised that the branding and accreditation system may not need to be established before a project began, but could be developed within it.
- 3.6 The possible working area of a project was discussed, and a map was circulated showing the Joint Character Areas (JCAs) of Shropshire Hills and Clun & NW Herefordshire. It was clarified that this might form the basis for where 'on the ground' support to producers was given, but that activity relating to supply chains, markets and awareness raising may need to extend much further. James Gibson mentioned the issue of cross-border links with Wales, and that the Welsh Assembly Government was very keen to promote this. There was support for a working assumption that the JCAs would form the delivery area for the project.

#### **4. South Shropshire Affordable Housing Interim Planning Guidance**

- 4.1 Peter Norman introduced the topic by raising the question of whether developers would in fact go along with this policy, and if they did not the effect might be to slow down development of affordable housing. James Gibson said that he had attended a planning conference in Kent where it was suggested that this approach could be legally challenged, and that there was a general view that developments of fewer than 5 houses should be exempt from affordable housing levies.
- 4.2 Nick Bews felt that overall the draft response to the consultation was rather negative. He pointed out an error in the population figure quoted, which should be just over

40,000. He said that there is a definite need for affordable housing in South Shropshire as key workers (police, nurses, etc) cannot afford to live within the area (with average income £24k and average house price £170k). Last year 67 affordable homes were built in South Shropshire, with a target of 170 this year. He said that at present there are interested developers and he remains confident that the policy is sustainable.

- 4.3 Phil Robinson commented that Bridgnorth District has a similar problem; affordable homes are necessary if you want to keep the community and their working area alive. He also found the general tone of the draft response rather negative and questioned the need for detailed comments on wording. Phil responded by saying that since the draft was written he had read the report of the national Rural Affordable Housing Commission and also felt that the general comments could be made more positive. It was however necessary to approach the issue from the point of view of the AONB's remit and consider its connection to the landscape. He said that the planning officers did value detailed comments on wording of policy documents. It was agreed that these could be separated in the response.
- 4.4 Colin Preston queried the extent to which the AONB should engage with this issue, and raised the question of design. Phil drew attention to the AONB's requirement to have regard to the social and economic needs of the community. Peter Norman felt that just considering labour to maintain the landscape was too narrow.
- 4.5 Phil drew attention to the point that many settlements were split by the AONB boundary and that planning policies should address this directly.
- 4.6 John Povall supported the general thrust of the draft response, saying that there must be a limit to building and balance with the needs of the landscape. He felt that people's consciences needed to be stirred.
- 4.7 Peter Norman summarised that the response should say that we recognise the social and economic value of the District's planning guidance. The guidance should however state commitment to maintaining the landscape of the AONB and the need to balance these two issues. The intentions in the guidance with regard to design and quality of buildings should be welcomed.

## **5. Undergrounding of Cables**

- 5.1 Phil gave a brief presentation illustrating the short-listed schemes that will be put forward to the Regional Panel on 13<sup>th</sup> September. In para 2.5 he clarified an error – the Wrekin lines were managed by the National Grid and therefore unlikely to be eligible. Members felt that this proposal would not give such good value for money anyway. The short-list of possible schemes was endorsed.

## **6. Strategic Approach to Engaging with Communities**

- 6.1 Phil said that this paper had been prepared for work planning within the Team, but he felt that it would be useful to share with the Board. Neil Willcox supported the approach outlined, adding that it would be useful to add the 'outcomes' of the work, e.g. wellbeing, engagement. Colin Preston said that the approach was clear and very useful. He added that the Wildlife Trust had recently reviewed their education activity through the Blue Remembered Hills project, and circulated some information on this.

- 6.2 Phil Robinson welcomed the attention in the paper to under-represented groups, and the recognition that communities are important. Peter Norman felt that this kind of activity was important to make the AONB meaningful and well known within the local community.
- 6.3 Representation of farmers and land managers on the Partnership was mentioned, and Phil said that in the membership review of last autumn some had unfortunately dropped out. He added that representation had been improved on the Farming Working Group. The approach outlined in the paper was endorsed by the Board.

## 7. Information Papers

- (i) Update on AONB Team 2006-7 Work Programme and Core Budget  
Phil highlighted the distribution of the last newsletter to all farmers within AONB (some 1,400), and the comments made to Highways regarding the Clun Bridge scheme and the unsatisfactory response received back.

Peter queried why office equipment and maintenance costs were projected to be nearly double the original budget estimate. *[Post-meeting clarification of this – the projection makes an allowance for minor improvements in the office]*. It was confirmed that though there were a number of alterations to staffing costs and adjustments necessary, the budget overall was on target.

## 8. Brief Verbal Update Items

- (i) Annual Review and Action Plan Update  
Phil explained that the Annual Review was about to go to print. It had been designed as a poster this year, which had halved production costs. The Action Plan Update would not be published as a printed document this year, but a more concise version distributed electronically.
- (ii) DEFRA Funding and Natural England  
It was confirmed that impacts were likely to be felt next year on projects and SDF funding, but that the indications were that core funding was secure. Kelda White said that Natural England's delivery in the West Midlands would be split into north and south area teams, though the arrangements for dealing with AONBs were not yet decided. Natural England would come into being on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2006.
- (iii) Working Groups Update  
Access, Recreation & Tourism Group – the remit and membership had been expanded to encompass tourism, a meeting was scheduled for 4 October.  
LongStones Area Working Group – the Terms of Reference for the new group had been discussed at the recent steering group. It had been decided to retain the 'LongStones' title rather than 'Upper Onny'. Individuals had been identified to invite to join the new group representing farming and community interests.  
Farming Working Group – had been renamed from 'Land Management' and new members invited. Meeting scheduled for 27 September.
- (iv) Review of Memorandum of Agreement and longer term potential implications of local government reorganisation  
This would be revisited at the next meeting in December.

- (v) BRH Project best practice dissemination event  
It was noted that this event is taking place on 20 October and will be aimed at other practitioners in the region and beyond.

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at 10am - Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre.

**10. Any Other Business**

Phil briefly informed the Board of some controversy regarding a proposed gasifier power plant at Brockton. A grant had been offered from the Sustainable Development Fund towards a feasibility study for the plant, on the basis of potential green energy benefits. However a group had formed in the local community in opposition to the plant, which they saw as a waste incinerator. The planning implications and balance of impacts and benefits of the proposal would have to be looked at in detail.