

### Item 3 Update on AONB Team 2007-8 work programme and 2008-9 budgets

#### STAFFING

The contracts of Blue Remembered Hills Project staff have ended. At the end of December 2007 John Tucker retired and Diane Monether left to take up a job with Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Jon Kean, Blue Remembered Hills Project Co-ordinator, was employed until March 2008 and has now left. Mike Kelly has accrued a permanent contract through years of service and remains with the team. From Jan – March 2008 his post was funded by a Natural England project grant. He is currently being funded from earned income, but indications are that a further project grant will support his post in 2008-9. Ian Dormor, Landscape Conservation Officer, has dropped from 3 days to 2 days/week.

#### 2007-8 WORK PROGRAMME SUMMARY PROGRESS UPDATE, AT 31 MARCH 08 (YEAR END)

##### Successes

- The **Blue Remembered Hills project** has been successfully completed with all outputs achieved, and the £1.37m five year budget met to within 0.2%. Further input has been provided by the Team to national HLF events on Landscape Partnership Schemes. The Blue Remembered Hills project team won Shropshire County Council's Community Services Outstanding Contribution Team Award.
- Our bid to deliver the **LEADER** element of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) in the Shropshire Hills was accepted by Advantage West Midlands. The high score given to our bid will secure a higher level of funding for the Shropshire Hills. Development of a full strategy and delivery of the programme will forge valuable new links within the local authorities and local strategic partnerships.
- The **Shropshire Hills 'buy local' website and Sustainable Business Scheme** were launched in March. This takes our work on local products of recent years to a new level, with an accreditation scheme which will both raise the profile of the Shropshire Hills and drive sustainability.
- Activities linked to the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the AONB in 2008 are under way. A beacon was lit in January, a celebration beer recently launched and a programme of events has been established for the year. There has been press and radio coverage. Planning for the national AONB Conference in Shropshire in July 2008 is well under way.
- The **Church Stretton Town Design Statement** has been launched.
- An expanded **2008 Shropshire Hills Events programme and visitor guide** has been published, in conjunction with the National Trust and SCC Museums service.
- A successful **Partnership training event and Management Plan workshop** was held.

##### Challenges and Issues

- Work on review of the **AONB Management Plan** is progressing, but much remains to be done to allow time for necessary consultation and approval. The transition to a unitary authority for Shropshire is likely to make these processes more difficult. The combination of this with LEADER, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the AONB Conference make the coming few months a particularly challenging time.
- **Funding** remains tight, and the AONB Partnership is heavily committed to staff costs with some income targets for 2008-9. While Natural England funding is decreasing, in the context of the circumstances they face, the priority given to AONB funding has been reassuring.

- Some controversial **planning casework** has created new issues within the AONB Partnership's procedures. Though requiring careful handling, these offer the opportunity to improve and refine our approach. The amount of development control work appears to be increasing.
- Further work is needed to raise the profile and make the most of the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary**. A plethora of other celebrations and activities in the area this year has meant our own activities have been less prominent. A funding bid needs pursuing to develop the 'Friends of the Shropshire Hills' group.
- The Partnership's **communications** strategy needs updating and refining, with some gaps addressing. The printed newsletter has lapsed due to shortage of funds and staff time, and the E-bulletin has not been issued since August 2007. The Team's contacts database has been improved but IT issues are still a limiting factor. A review questionnaire with Partnership members of their involvement did not generate enough replies to be successful.
- **Management of the office premises** remains difficult, with repeated loss of heating causing considerable disruption to staff. Issues remain of rising costs, uncertainty regarding future maintenance liabilities and complexity of procedures between the landlord, their agents and departments of the Council.

#### UPDATE ON 2008-9 BUDGETS

Below is a summary of the core budget for 2008-9. Points to note include:

1. Formal offer of Natural England's core grant has not yet been received, but indications are that this will be made shortly, although with a 2% rise for inflation rather than the 2.95% budgeted. This would create a shortfall of £1,584.
2. Natural England grant towards the Sustainable Development Fund is also not confirmed, but provisionally will be £61,666. The available 10% contribution to the Community Officer post would therefore be £834 below that budgeted.
3. Income targets for the Development Officer post and office costs contribution are new this year, and at present sources are not identified. There is potential for LEADER to provide a contribution to office costs, but the level of this is not yet known.
4. Income shown allows for the requested rise in local authority contributions being made by all except Shropshire County Council.

#### Project Budgets

Though also unconfirmed, it appears that Natural England will be making a project grant offer for a Freshwater Pearl Mussel project which incorporates Mike Kelly's salary for 2008-9, using earned income and landowner in-kind time as match funding. Mike has also recently won another fee-earning contract worth £3,500, this time for River Habitat Survey.

**2008-9 Core budget Summary**

<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>	Estimated cost	Subtotal
<b>Staff costs (inclusive of NI, pension, training, T&amp;S)</b>		<b>£183,705</b>
AONB Manager	48,904	
Development Officer	38,325	
Development Officer income target	-6,000	
Community Officer	33,700	
SDF contribution to Community Officer	-7,000	
Promotions & Recreation Officer	20,400	
Planning & Policy Officer	20,300	
Landscape Conservation Officer	13,600	
Administrative Assistant	20,694	
Cleaner	782	
<b>Office costs</b>		<b>£34,576</b>
Rent & Services	15,000	
Rates	7,976	
Cleaning	750	
Office equipment & maintenance	4,000	
Printing & stationery	6,550	
Postage & telecommunications	6,300	
Income target for projects contribution to office costs	-6,000	
<b>Promotional Activity</b>		<b>£5,550</b>
Newsletter/ Events publicity	1,900	
Website development	650	
Annual Review	2,000	
Promotion, including coverage in others' publications	1,000	
<b>Strategic Policy &amp; Guidance</b>		<b>£3,000</b>
Agricultural Buildings Design Guidance Management Plan	1,000 2,000	
<b>Meeting and Partnership costs</b>		<b>£2,108</b>
<b>TOTAL ELIGIBLE COSTS</b>		<b>£228,939</b>

<b><u>Income</u></b>	2008-9	%
Natural England	171,705	75.0%
Shropshire County Council	22,333	9.8%
South Shropshire District Council	20,922	9.1%
Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council	4,875	2.1%
Bridgnorth Borough Council	4,180	1.8%
Telford & Wrekin Council	3,005	1.3%
Earned income/donations	1,919	0.8%
	<b>£228,939</b>	100.0%

For further information please contact Phil Holden on 01588 674088 or by email at phil.holden@shropshire-cc.gov.uk.