

#### **Item 4. Engagement with key organisations and public on Conservation Board proposal**

##### **1. Summary**

This paper outlines a process for engagement beyond the AONB Partnership on the proposed formation of a Conservation Board.

##### **2. Background**

The wide membership of the AONB Partnership has been fully involved in the development since March this year of the firm proposal to create a Conservation Board. Engagement beyond this has however been more limited. There were a couple of press articles and a public statement from the AONB Partnership back in the spring about the Council's restructure proposals, and one newsletter article has since then covered the Conservation Board proposal (see Appendix 1).

The main purpose of wider engagement at this stage is seen to be raising the likelihood of a positive decision from Defra, by winning support about the merits of the proposal from the bodies likely to be consulted by Defra. The 2008 Defra guidance on Conservation Boards states the following regarding consultation on the formation of a new Board:

*The establishment process will include one formal consultation, in which only the constituent local authorities and Natural England are consulted, and prior to that, one informal consultation to ensure the Establishment Order is acceptable. The informal consultation should be much wider than the formal one and should include Natural England, the constituent local authorities, parishes, and any interested parties such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association, local wildlife trusts and relevant community groups, depending on circumstances. An AONB committee may well have liaised or consulted with local partners throughout the establishment process, but this would be no substitute for the informal consultation on the statutory instrument undertaken by Defra.*

It is not entirely clear whether Defra would carry out consultation prior to making a decision on the proposal and then draft a statutory instrument, or perhaps as implied from "*informal consultation on the statutory instrument*", draft the legal order first. It seems unlikely however that they would go to the work of drafting the order before making the main decision, and this needs to be clarified.

The essence of the proposed process of engagement over this autumn is:

1. Sending a summary leaflet and covering letter to all organisations expected to be included in the Defra consultation (including Parish & Town Councils, and in some cases possibly letters going to both to a local rep and to a national office). See draft of leaflet at Appendix 3. The wording of this assumes its use after agreement by both Council's Cabinets.
2. Following up the letter and leaflet for selected priority organisations with a request to meet and discuss the proposal, with the most appropriate member of the AONB team, Partnership or Transition Board.
3. Broader public engagement using the summary leaflet or material from it in e.g. the AONB Partnership's e newsletter (due out early October, see draft article at Appendix 2), social media outlets, website, etc and possibly through the National Association for AONBs.

##### **3. RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Transition Board is recommended to comment on the process of engagement set out, and on the draft leaflet.**

This paper has been prepared by Phil Holden, AONB Partnership Manager. For further details contact 01743 254741/ [phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk).

## **Appendix 1 June 2016 Newsletter article on independence proposal**

### **Progress towards a new AONB structure**

In late April, agreement in principle was reached between the AONB Partnership and Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to develop a new independent structure for the Shropshire Hills AONB. In the ongoing climate of local government restructuring and service cuts, it is felt that this option gives the best prospects of stability and sustainability for a staff team in the Shropshire Hills dedicated to AONB purposes. A 'Shadow Board' is now being set up to involve volunteers and representatives in a more hands on role to help develop the new organisation. The preferred model is a 'Conservation Board', a structure specific to AONBs set out in the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. Informal discussions have begun with Defra on this, but there remains much detailed work to do over a transition period of up to two years, with some formal decision stages along the way. We look forward to bringing you more news on this as things develop. For further information please contact Phil Holden on 01743 254741 or at [phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk).

## **Appendix 2 Draft newsletter article on Conservation Board for October 2016 newsletter**

### **Firm proposal to create a Shropshire Hills Conservation Board**

The AONB Partnership has unanimously backed a proposal to create an independent 'Conservation Board' as the new governing body for the AONB. A detailed business case supporting this is being submitted during October 2016 to the Cabinets of both Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council to approve a formal request to be made to Defra.

If then approved by national Government, the new body would be created by a legal order, and would take on from Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council the legal duty to produce an AONB management plan every five years. It would also assume a second statutory purpose of increasing public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities.

A simple, streamlined and efficient structure with a relatively small executive, the Conservation Board would involve a nationally prescribed balance of members from the two local authorities, parish and town councils and individual appointees. It would be supported by an advisory partnership group to ensure the continuing involvement of existing and new stakeholders, and it would remain funded through Defra, the two Councils and an increasing variety of other sources.

The AONB Partnership believe that a Conservation Board would achieve better outcomes for the AONB, through:

- A stronger, independent voice
- An unequivocal focus on AONB priorities
- Wider local involvement & engagement
- Greater volunteering & fund-raising abilities
- More resilient and flexible management
- Simpler, lower cost administration

For further information please contact Phil Holden on 01743 254741 or at [phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:phil.holden@shropshire.gov.uk).

## Appendix 3

### Creating the Conservation Board

Based on the detailed business case made by the AONB Partnership, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils are making a formal request to Defra for its creation this winter.

Defra will then undertake a consultation and, if it approves the change, a legal order will have to go through both Houses of Parliament.

Following Parliamentary approval, a commencement date would be set and arrangements made for the creation of the new independent Board with the necessary transfer of staff and funds.

This process could take around two years.

### Securing the Broadest Community Involvement

The proposal to create the Shropshire Hills Conservation Board has the unanimous backing of all 41 organisations and individuals making up the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as well as both Councils.

However, intense workload pressures at Defra arising from Brexit mean the broadest community support will be essential if officials are to look favourably on the request and the extra time input it will require of them.

At the same time as seeking this support from as many individuals and organisations as possible, the Partnership wishes to involve and engage its many communities in planning the way ahead for the new body, its priorities and activities.

**Please help us in this exciting development by registering your support for this move at [www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk](http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk) and joining in the active consultations we plan over the coming few weeks.**

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Logos: Shropshire Council Telford & Wrekin Council



## Moving ahead as a Conservation Board

*A proposal to build on 60 years of  
The Shropshire Hills AONB  
to meet its changing needs with*

**A stronger, independent voice**

**An unequivocal focus on local priorities**

**Wider local involvement & engagement**

**Greater volunteering & fund-raising abilities**

**More resilient and flexible management**

**Simpler, lower cost administration**

October 2016

