



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
14 February 2011
9.30am

<u>Item</u>
2
Public

## Minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2010

9.30am – 12.10pm

**Responsible Officer** Tim Ward  
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### Present

#### Shropshire Council

Shropshire Council  
Shropshire Council  
Shropshire Council  
Shropshire Council

Cllr Tim Barker (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr James Gibson  
Cllr Heather Kidd  
Cllr Cecilia Motley

#### Statutory/Voluntary Agencies & Individual members

Individual member  
Individual member  
Individual member  
Individual member  
Individual member  
Parish Council representative  
Parish Council representative  
Parish Council representative  
Advantage West Midlands  
British Horse Society  
Butterfly Conservation  
Country Land & Business Association  
Campaign to Protect Rural England  
Institute of Chartered Foresters  
National Farmers Union  
National Trust  
Natural England  
Offas Dyke Association  
Ramblers Association  
Shropshire Geological Society  
Shropshire Wildlife Trust  
Upper Onny Wildlife Group/Shropshire  
Ornithological Society  
Walford & North Shropshire College

George Chancellor (Chair)  
Lee Chapman  
Tom Eyre  
David Gibbon  
David Francis  
Dr Keith Bartlett  
Vivienne Parry  
Bob Welch  
Amanda Cunningham  
Ronald Repath  
Nick Williams  
Michael Watney  
Clare Cox  
John Voysey  
David Watson-Jones  
Pete Carty  
Sally Powell  
Sophie Andreae  
Bill Hodges  
David C Smith  
Lady Veronica Cossons  
  
Leo Smith  
Jon Parry

#### Observers/Officers

Shropshire Council

Jake Berriman (Head of Strategy & Policy)  
Mark Blount (Countryside Development Manager)  
John Harrison (Head of Environment)  
Tim Ward (Committee Officer)  
Glynn Barratt (Planning & Landscape Officer)  
Clare Fildes (Development Officer)  
Jodie Griffith (Sustainable Business Graduate)  
Phil Holden (AONB Partnership Manager)

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership staff team

## **Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and asked new members of the Partnership to introduce themselves.
2. Apologies for absence were received from Tony Bostock (Severn Rivers Trust), Julia Brereton (SASTAK), Alison Caffyn (Individual Member), Jenny Collingridge (Parish Council rep), David Francis (Individual Member), Bill Klemperer (English Heritage), Sue Lee (Longmynd & District Bridleways Association), Rev Nick Read (Hereford Diocese), David Shelley (Ramblers Association), Rachel Taylor (Telford & Wrekin Council), Simon West (Forestry Commission), and Michael Whithouse (Caring for God's Acre).

## **Note of Last Meeting**

3. It was resolved that the note of the meeting held on 22 June 2010 be approved.

## **Election of Chair and Vice Chairs**

4. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that one nomination had been received for the position of Chair.
5. It was resolved that Mr George Chancellor be elected Chair of the AONB Partnership for the forthcoming year.
6. The Chair informed the meeting that two nominations had been received for the two positions for Vice Chair.
7. It was resolved that Cllr Tim Barker and Ms Alison Caffyn be elected Vice- Chairs of the AONB Partnership for the forthcoming year.

## **Election of Members to the Management Board**

8. The Chair informed the meeting that six nominations had been received for the six positions on the Management Board.
9. It was resolved that Lady Veronica Cossons, Mr David Francis, Cllr Heather Kidd, Cllr Cecilia Motley, Mr Jon Parry and Mr Leo Smith be elected to sit on the Management Board for the forthcoming year.

## **AONB Partnership Activity Update**

10. The meeting received a report giving a brief summary of current activity and progress of the AONB Partnership's staff team.
11. The AONB Partnership Manager talked members through key points in the work programme. He informed the meeting that a seminar about the AONB had been held with Planning Officers from Shropshire Council. The Planning Department would later be holding a series of seminars for members of Planning Committees and the AONB Partnership officers would be running one of these on the AONB.
12. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that revised tourism structures were in place with a new area-based structure of Destination Development Partnerships. He went on to say that in order to avoid duplication of work the AONB Tourism and Products Development Group would be dissolved and would merge with the new group.
13. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that the Agricultural Buildings Design Guidance was nearing completion. Mr Eyre asked what this consisted of. The AONB Partnership Manager advised him that the guidance focussed on the landscape and visual aspects of buildings and also on sustainability, and concentrated mostly on new

- buildings although there was a section on use of older buildings. He went on to say that the document would be published electronically, and therefore updates and refinements could be made relatively easily.
14. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that funding for the Sustainable Tourism Strategy had been secured and that an invitation for tenders was currently being prepared. The funding bid had been made jointly with the Wye Valley AONB, and the contract was for strategies for both areas. Mr Eyre asked whether there was a preference for the use of local companies within the tender process. Mr Chapman questioned whether putting to work out for tender was the best use of resources when a lot of the work could be done in house. The AONB Partnership Manager informed him that the inquiries had been made about other options for completing the Strategy, but Natural England had confirmed that it did have to go out to consultants.
  15. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that the LEADER Approvals Panel had allocated grants totalling £647,811 to date, and that a further £160,431 worth of grants were due to be considered by the Panel in the near future. He then ran briefly through the projects that had been funded through LEADER to date. Mrs Kidd commented that there were a lot of "good news" stories and that they needed more publicity. The AONB Partnership Manager that there was scope to do more but there was a resource issue with this, with the Promotions Officer on maternity leave.
  16. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that in the current Financial Year Natural England had asked all AONB Partnerships to surrender 5% of their agreed grant, which for us amounted to £12,443. He had taken the opportunity to reduce spending further in order to reduce the requirements for earned income within the budget and enable more to be carried forward in reserves. Savings had been achieved by not filling the vacancies created by the retirement of Ian Dormor and Stephanie Hayes' maternity leave, and by freezing most other expenditure at the levels committed in the budget. He went on to say that at its last meeting the Management Board had considered budget projections up to the 2013-14 Financial Year in order to aid forward planning in relation to spending cuts, and that this process would be updated when the implications for the Partnership of the Comprehensive Spending Review became clearer. The Chair commented that this had been a very useful exercise and had brought a lot of information together.
  17. The Chair thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for the update.

### **Natural Environment White Paper Consultation**

18. A report outlining the draft AONB Partnership response to the current government consultation on a new Natural Environment White Paper had been circulated.
19. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded the meeting that protecting the environment and enhancing biodiversity was one of Defra's top three defined priorities, and that a key commitment under this priority was the publication of the White Paper. He then talked through some key points in the proposed response.
20. Mr Leo Smith commented that it was not stated in the response to question 3 that species loss in large parts of the AONB was due to the failure of agri-environment schemes to date. He went on to say that there was a need to make the case that the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) contributed to sustainable farming within the AONB and that the HLS was a valuable way of achieving the creation of wildlife habitats. He stated that the response should stress the need for more investment in all agri-environment schemes. Mr Watney commented that the complexities involved with the HLS put off a lot of people from applying and stated that making the scheme easier and more targeted would achieve a lot. Mr Voysey commented that the same was true for forestry grants.
21. Mr Hodges commented that he agreed with the responses but felt that the tone needed to be tailored to who might read it.

22. John Harrison felt it was interesting that the consultation document openly says that the balance between the economy and the environment needs to be redressed so that the environment is not always the loser. Ms Cox agreed, saying that Natural England needed to stick up for itself.
23. Mr Carty stressed the value of linking agri-environment agreements over wider areas to achieve landscape-scale conservation, as well as access improvements. Lady Cossons agreed and said that more content was needed on landscape-scale working in the response to Question 4. Mr Repath said that with oil declining, there was a need to look more at natural systems to maintain fertility on farms.
24. Mr Chapman commented that an opportunity had been missed in the response to Question 11, as the subject of the waste hierarchy was not picked up. Ms Andreae said that 'natural beauty' should be mentioned in relation to our role.
25. The Chair thanked members for their input. He mentioned that links should be made with the response of the National Association for AONBs, and asked that if members had any further comments they should feed them back to the AONB Partnership Manager.

### **Discover Local project**

26. The meeting received a presentation on the Discover Local Project from the AONB Partnership's Sustainable Business Graduate. She reminded members that Discover Local was a three year project funded by LEADER, and that the focus of the project was on local and traditional produce, crafts and skills which help to conserve and enhance the Shropshire Hills AONB. The aims of the project are to encourage people and businesses to make the link between the landscape and local products, improve the understanding and use of these products, increase the local supply chain to get more businesses using and marketing local produce, improve sales of local produce in retail outlets and develop a sustainable package of events and activities. She then outlined the activities that had taken place to date and those that were planned, and answered questions. Mr Voysey suggested the inclusion of wood products including charcoal and firewood, and Mr David Smith said that local rock and stone was also important for renovation of vernacular buildings.

### **Update and Progress Report on the AONB Management Plan Actions**

27. A report had been circulated which laid out the draft of the annual update of the AONB Management Plan Actions.
28. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members that the Management Plan Actions were generally updated on a yearly basis although this was the first update since the publication of the Plan in May 2009. He went on to say that overall good progress had been made, although it was clear now that the future implementation of many actions would be dependant on funding cuts and the restructuring of public sector organisations.
29. Several members made comments about progress made on particular projects. Mr Gibbon felt that there was a need for participatory monitoring, and offered to help with this.
30. The Chair felt there were opportunities for other people to contribute, and mentioned fixed point photography as an example. He thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for the update, which would be finalised and published shortly.

### **Planning Update and Discussion**

31. A report giving a brief review of recent links between the AONB and planning matters had been circulated. A discussion followed on planning policy and links with the AONB.
32. The Head of Strategy & Policy commented that the AONB Partnership needed to constantly campaign for the AONB and for the Management Plan to be recognised and

elevated in consideration in planning. He went on to say that the Council was trying to move on from the old Local Plans and to develop a new vision for Shropshire and that the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) had given increased recognition to Parish Plans and Town and Village Design Statements. He informed the meeting that the LDF was using a 'place-based' approach, based on the hierarchy of: Shrewsbury, other market towns and then the rural areas. This was preferred to using 'false' boundaries such as wards, AONB, etc., and the LDF has been less bold about the status of the AONB Management Plan, as it was less clear to see how the place-based approach can be overlaid with the AONB boundary.

33. The Head of Strategy & Policy explained that the main components of the LDF so far were the Core Strategy and the Site Allocations & Management of Development Development Plan Document (SAMDev). At a later stage 18 Place Plans would be developed for the market towns and their hinterlands, including self-defined Hubs and Clusters but that it was difficult to see how the AONB boundary fitted with all this. He went on to say that the LDF's approach fitted with the government's Localism agenda, but that a broader view was also necessary and that there was a gap left by the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). He added that the evidence in support of the RSS was still there and could be used in different ways.
34. The Head of Strategy & Policy informed the meeting that as part of the SAMDev there would be further work on the various settlements, including issues such as whether they have a defined boundary. Early feedback on the summer consultation showed quite positive numbers of communities interested in having more development or being Hubs/Clusters in return for community benefits. He went on to say that there was a push for high quality design and that within the AONB, where community benefit projects are taken forward, the common threads with AONB activity should be looked for.
35. A discussion followed regarding the legal duty regarding AONBs, and concerns members had about whether the AONB was being adequately differentiated in planning policy. The Head of Strategy and Policy mentioned that a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on type and affordability of housing was currently being prepared which would cover better design of housing and would mention the AONB. The Head of Environment said the main hook for the AONB would come under an SPD for the Natural Environment which his team was currently working on, and that there would also be one on the Historic Environment. Jon Parry expressed concern about putting the AONB just under 'natural environment', when the broader view of it encompassing communities and the economy had such good support. The Chair stressed the importance of a high level 'hook' in policy to enable differentiation of the AONB to be made. The AONB Partnership Manager asked the Head of Strategy & Policy to clarify if there was scope in the 'Management of Development' part of SAMDev for a policy on the AONB, and he agreed that there was. He said that it was one of the most cherished areas of the county, along with Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, etc., but that unlike these other designations there was less national policy on which to draw when developing policy.

### Dates of Next Meetings

36. The dates of the next meetings of the Partnership were confirmed as Thursday 10 February 2011 (date amended after the meeting to **Mon 14 Feb**), Tuesday 21 June 2011 (with the Annual Tour), and Tuesday 18 October 2011.