



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	<u>Item</u>
21 June 2011	2

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2011

9.30am – 12.00pm

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
British Horse Society

Caring for God's Acre
Campaign to Protect Rural England
English Heritage
Hereford Diocese
Institute of Chartered Foresters
Long Mynd & District Bridleways Association
National Farmers Union
National Trust

Offa's Dyke Association
Ramblers Association
Shropshire Geological Society

George Chancellor (Chair)
Alison Caffyn
David Gibbon
David Francis
Elizabeth Thomas
Dr Keith Bartlett
Vivienne Parry
Ronald Repath
Jane Kerswell
Michael Whithouse
Clare Cox
Bill Klemperer
Rev. Nick Read
John Voysey
Sue Lee
David Watson-Jones
Pete Carty
Marcus Halliwell
Sophie Andreae
Bill Hodges
David C Smith

Observers/Officers

Shropshire Council

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership staff team

John Harrison (Head of Environment)
Tim Ward (Committee Officer)
Clare Fildes (Development Officer)
Phil Holden (AONB Partnership Manager)

Welcome and Apologies for Absence

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting. Marcus Halliwell and Jane Kerswell were introduced and welcomed as organisation Deputies attending the Partnership for the first time.

2. Apologies for absence were received from Tony Bostock (Severn Rivers Trust), Lee Chapman (Individual member) Jenny Collingridge (Parish Council rep), Veronica Cossons (Shropshire Wildlife Trust), Jon Parry (Walford & North Shropshire College), Leo Smith (Upper Onny Wildlife Group/Shropshire Ornithological Society), Simon West (Forestry Commission), and Caroline Whiteman (SASTAK).

Note of Last Meeting

3. The Committee Officer advised the meeting that Mr Francis' name had been included on both the lists of attendees and of apologies for absence, when in fact he had tendered his apologies.
4. It was resolved that subject to the above the note of the meeting held on 19 October 2010 be approved.
5. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that he had submitted the revised response to the Natural Environment White Paper, and that both this and the Update of the Management Plan Actions had been published on the AONB website.
6. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that he had recently been in touch with the Head of Strategy & Policy at Shropshire Council with regard to the suggestion made at the last meeting regarding a specific planning policy on AONB, and had received a positive reply.

AONB Partnership Activity Update

7. The meeting received a report giving a brief summary of current activity and progress of the AONB Partnership's staff team.
8. The AONB Partnership Manager talked members through key areas of progress. He advised members that good progress was being made with LEADER, with around 70% of available money had been allocated to projects, and that work was progressing well with the cross-border initiative Walking with Offa. Ms Andreae welcomed this project. The Development Officer then gave an update on the work that had taken place with the project and also what was planned. Mr Whithouse paid tribute to the amount of work done by the LEADER Co-ordinator on the projects that had already been funded and with those that were being planned, and also the Development Officer for the work that she was doing.
9. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that the contract had been let for the development of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy and that extra funding had been secured in order that the whole area of the new Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership would be covered. Councillor Kidd commented that half her ward did not fall within the AONB area and often got missed. She asked whether the area would go right to the Welsh border. The AONB Partnership Manager advised her that it would.
10. Mr Voysey asked what progress had been made with establishing a Woodland Forum. The Development Officer advised him that it was now thought that the Woodland Forum as it had been envisaged was not viable, and the idea was being reviewed.
11. Mr Francis thanked the AONB team for the work they were doing with schools, and cited a trip that he had been involved with where the whole of Corvedale Primary School had visited Acton Scott. The Development Officer advised the meeting that this had been through some one-off funding from Natural England's Farm Advice team, but that the new Shropshire Hills AONB Farming Project would include further similar work with schools.
12. The Chair drew members' attention to recent coverage in the Shropshire Magazine of Jodie Griffith's work on the Discover Local Project, and felt that this was very good publicity. The Development Officer acknowledged the support of Keith Pybus with both this project and publicity more generally.

Budgets

13. A report presenting budgets for the current year and 2011-12, and outline budgets for 2012 to 2015 had been circulated. The Chair thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for the forward budgets and commented that it was the first time that the Partnership had received this level of detail regarding budgets.
14. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members that the budget was divided into two main parts – the Natural England/Defra ‘single pot’ which was broken down into Core, Projects and the Sustainable Development Fund, and other than projects outside of Natural England/Defra AONB funding which were listed separately. He went on to remind members that a 5% cut in the Natural England funding had been made in the current Financial Year, and that the settlement had arrived just before Christmas, bringing cuts of 5.4% for the next four years. He then talked through other key points of the budgets.
15. Mr D Smith commented that there seemed to be a great discrepancy between the contributions of the two councils, given the population of Telford & Wrekin that gained access to the AONB. The AONB Partnership Manager said that the proportion was higher than the % of the AONB within Telford & Wrekin by area, and said that the funding formula had been developed a number of years ago. The amount contributed by Telford and Wrekin Council had recently been increased slightly to support the local work of the Wrekin Forest Partnership. Mr Harrison commented that the amounts for Shropshire Council’s core contribution were uncertain beyond the coming Financial Year.
16. Mr Whithouse asked why earned income in the 2012-13 budget was lower than in the budget for 2011-12 as bid. The AONB Partnership Manager advised him that the 2012-13 figure was based on an earlier estimate, and when updated with management fees for projects, etc would undoubtedly be higher. Mr Repath wondered whether the Reaching Communities funding could be tapped into further for walking projects.
17. The Chair commented that there were three areas which would be important:
 - Achieving an increase in project funding,
 - Developing a Committee of the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB group as a mechanism for fundraising,
 - Increasing the level of earned income.

Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership

18. The meeting received a presentation on the Stiperstones – Corndon Landscape Partnership Project. The Development Officer explained that there was funding available from the Heritage Lottery Fund for schemes for the conservation of distinctive landscapes of local, regional or national importance, and that there were four key outcomes required:
 - ✦ To conserve or restore the built and natural features that create the landscape
 - ✦ To increase community participation in local heritage
 - ✦ To increase access to and learn about the landscape and its heritage
 - ✦ Increase training opportunities in local heritage skills.

She went on to say that the proposed area for the project centred on the Stiperstones, and extended into Wales around Corndon Hill, and was themed principally around the mining heritage of this area and its influence on the landscape. Originally the proposed area had extended east as far as the Long Mynd, but following guidance from HLF to reduce the size of the area and make the theme more cohesive, the eastern boundary had been drawn back to the Onny Valley.

The Development Officer informed the meeting that the Stage One application had to be submitted by 28 February, and that a decision on the application would be received in July. She then outlined the timetable for the remaining stages of the bid, informing members that if successful the project would be delivered between 2013 and 2018.

19. Mr D Smith commented that this was a very important area geologically, with several features that were not to be found elsewhere in the county. The proposed cycle route from Pontesbury to Minsterley was mentioned, and Cllr Kidd observed that there were sensitivities about earlier ideas to extend this to Snailbeach. It was clarified that this was not proposed as part of the project.
20. Mr Klemperer commented that this was an excellent project which brought out the landscape context of heritage features in the area, and that English Heritage would be writing a letter of support for the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. He also mentioned the recent Farmsteads Survey which had been carried out which may be relevant.
21. Mr Repath commented that both the Wildlife Trust and Natural England at the Stiperstones National Nature Reserve had teams of volunteers working for them, and that there was need for close co-operation to avoid duplication. Mr Gibbon commented that there may be lessons from this on the methods of community consultation which could be picked up by other initiatives.

Consultation on the Future of the Public Forest Estate in England

22. A report had been circulated which gave a summary of the current consultation on the future of the public forest estate in England.
23. The AONB Partnership Manager commented that the consultation appeared not to be asking whether the forestry estate should be sold off, but rather how this should be done. He said that some of the potential implications had been seen in local recent sale proposals, such as Pontesford Hill. The government's reassurance that it was leasehold rather than freehold for sale carried less weight in practice where the leases involved were very long. He said that much of the public comment had focussed on concerns about public access and biodiversity, but he felt there was very little about heritage and archaeology in the document, and in many Forestry Commission woods there were undesignated heritage features which could become at risk. He concluded that the consultation may be difficult to respond to solely in relation to the AONB's landscape remit, as the issue at heart was a very political and ideological one about the role of government.
24. Cllr Barker said that if forests were sold off it should be for the true commercial value. Several members expressed concern regarding continuing public access to forests. Mr Repath commented that horse riders enjoyed in practice considerable freedom to ride in Forestry Commission woods, and this would likely be lost if the ownership entered private hands. He also commented there were often difficulties with access where the shooting rights were let. Ms Andreae said that who uses the woods should be looked at and why they had been chosen. In some cases improvements could be made, and it was how they were managed which mattered more than who owned them. Mr Klemperer emphasised broader values such as archaeology within the forests. He said that English Heritage had worked well with the Forestry Commission, and that there was a danger of fragmentation.
25. Mr Carty mentioned the dedication of most Forestry Commission for open access, the likelihood of local opposition to any felling proposals, and the value of public forests in landscape scale conservation. Mr Gibbon observed that there were many examples from overseas of successful community management of forests. The Chair said that changes or conditions should be put in for specific sites.
26. Mr Voysey commented that the Institute of Chartered Foresters did not have a brief on this issue, being concerned with professional standards. He did comment that earlier proposals to sell of public forests had been overturned, and said that though the original strategic reasons for establishing the Forestry Commission had gone, the industry needed a guaranteed supply. He said that if the forest estate went into multiple ownership, it could lead to sites being broken up with different objectives of management and fragmentation.
27. Mr Hodges commented that his understanding was that CROW Act open access dedication could not be altered. He went on to say that maintaining access to the forest car parks was

also very important, as without these some sites would become inaccessible for a lot of people. Cllr Kidd commented that if greater reliance were made on rights of way, Shropshire Council would have difficulty with enforcement action as it now only had one Enforcement Officer to cover the whole of the county.

28. Rev Read asked whether the AONB Partnership would consider setting up a consortium to manage some of the woods? The AONB Partnership Manager felt that the AONB Partnership not having a direct role in managing any land was often an advantage. Mr Halliwell said that there were areas in which the National Trust was interested, especially from the point of view of public engagement. Mr Harrison commented that National Nature Reserves and Council-owned land may in addition come up for transfer of ownership. In areas such as the Stiperstones – Corndon project area, this could in total amount to significant areas.
29. Ms Caffyn said it was a strength of the current situation that that the Forestry Commission were assessed for sustainability, and that the levels of access they provided went beyond the legal minimum. She reiterated the importance of heritage features, mentioning Bury Ditches, and agreed that continued parking was crucial and that conditions should be written in for particular sites. Mr Whithouse commented that there was the issue of the input of forestry to carbon management and that this must be considered as part of the future management of woodland.
30. The Chair thanked members for their comments, observing that the community right to buy mechanism was in practice not very good, often not allowing enough time for community groups to get together a bid. The AONB Partnership Manager agreed to circulate a copy of the draft response to Partnership members.

Planning Protocol and Update

31. A report had been circulated giving an update on the Planning Protocol. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded the meeting that the Planning Protocol had been established with the local authorities in 2007, and that it was currently being updated and renewed Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils. He said that a lot of work had gone into this to clarify roles, and he felt that it would be useful for members to be familiar with its contents.
32. The AONB Partnership Manager went on to advise the meeting that Shropshire Council was developing Place Plans, based on the market towns but now with rural hinterlands defined. Input from the AONB Partnership had been requested on things to include relevant to the AONB remit. A map showing the Place Plan areas and the Hub and Cluster settlements defined in the Local Development Framework was shown. The Chair commented that we should seek a consistent approach to distinguishing the AONB across all the relevant Place Plans. Cllr Barker commented that the all of the Place Plans affecting the AONB also covered areas outside the boundary, and that distinguishing the AONB may therefore be difficult. Mr Hodges felt that many problems with planning stemmed from the Council not adopting the AONB Management Plan as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Mr Harrison said that Supplementary Planning Documents were being developed on the Natural Environment and Landscape, and these would be important for the AONB. He said that the Hubs and Clusters approach was quite innovative and not common across planning authorities.

Dates of Next Meetings

33. The dates of the next meetings of the Partnership were confirmed as Tuesday 21 June 2011 (with the Annual Tour), and Tuesday 18 October 2011.
34. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that the Shropshire Hills Events Guide would be published shortly.