



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
18 October 2011
9.30am

<u>Item</u>
2
Public

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2011

9.30am – 12.00pm

Responsible Officer Tim Ward
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Present

Local Authorities

Shropshire Council	Cllr Tim Barker (Vice Chair)
Shropshire Council	Cllr James Gibson
Shropshire Council	Cllr Cecilia Motley
Telford & Wrekin Council	Cllr Chris Turley

Statutory/Voluntary Agencies & Individual members

Individual member	George Chancellor (Chair)
Individual Member	Alison Caffyn (Vice Chair)
Individual Member	Lee Chapman
Individual Member	Tom Eyre
Individual member	David Francis
Parish Council representative	Dr Keith Bartlett
Parish Council representative	Bob Welch
British Horse Society	Ronald Repath
Butterfly Conservation	Mike Williams
Caring for God's Acre	Michael Whithouse
Campaign to Protect Rural England	Clare Cox
Hereford Diocese	Rev. Nick Read
Institute of Chartered Foresters	John Voysey
Long Mynd & District Bridleways Association	Sue Lee
National Farmers Union	David Watson-Jones
Natural England	Jeff Edwards
	Hazel McDowall
SASTAK	Caroline Whiteman
Shropshire Geological Society	David C Smith
Upper Onny Wildlife Group/Shropshire	
Ornithological Society	Leo Smith
Walford & North Shropshire College	Jon Parry

Observers/Officers

Shropshire Council	John Harrison (Head of Environment & Sustainability)
	Tim Ward (Committee Officer)
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership staff team	Pete Banford (LEADER Co-ordinator)
	Phil Holden (AONB Partnership Manager)

Welcome and Apologies for Absence

1. The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting. He welcomed Cllr Chris Turley, Mike Williams, Caroline Whiteman, Jeff Edwards and Hazel McDowall to their first meeting of the Partnership. He also advised members that this would be Rev Nick Read's last meeting of the Partnership as he was leaving the Hereford Diocese to take up a position with the Bulmer Foundation. The Chair congratulated Rev Read on his new position and thanked him for all his input to the Partnership over many years.
2. Apologies for absence were received from Tony Bostock (Severn Rivers Trust), Pete Carty (National Trust), David Gibbon (Individual Member), Bill Hodges (Ramblers Association), Steve Price (Group Manager Environment, Shropshire Council), Rachel Taylor (Environmental Projects Manager, Telford & Wrekin Council), Elizabeth Thomas (Individual Member), Michael Watney (Country Land & Business Association), Simon West (Forestry Commission) and Veronica Cossons (Shropshire Wildlife Trust).

Note of Last Meeting

3. It was resolved that the note of the meeting held on 14 February 2011 be approved.

AONB Partnership Activity Update

4. The meeting received a report giving a brief summary of current activity and progress of the AONB Partnership's staff team. The AONB Partnership Manager highlighted some key points from the report.
5. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that Helen Kent had been appointed to the post of Farming Officer and Vicky Wood to the post of Farming Community Officer and that they had been busy setting up a programme of visits, establishing contacts and generally publicising the project.
6. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that the application to the SITA Trust for over £100k of funding for work in support of Freshwater Pearl Mussel on the River Clun had been successful, and that the Project Delivery Plan had been submitted. The Chair congratulated the AONB Team on gaining this funding.
7. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the Partnership that work was ongoing on the 'Walking with Offa' cross-border project, and a number of events and training sessions for walks leaders had been held.
8. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the Partnership that the new AONB website recently launched had been put together for the very modest cost of £800. He urged members to have a look at the new site if they had not already done so.
9. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that the Team had been instrumental in setting up a new Clee Hill Partnership made up of a variety of local representatives, and it was hoped that it would run in a similar way to the Wrekin Forest Partnership.
10. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that progress was being made with the formation of a committee for the Friends of the Shropshire Hills and the development of a formal constitution. He added that following consultation with existing members, the subscription rate had been raised to £20 for individuals, with the group membership going to £50. He had written to all 100 Parish Councils in the AONB and LEADER areas inviting them to join. Mr Eyre asked whether the Friends of the Shropshire Hills was a registered charity. The AONB Partnership Manager informed him that it was planned that at some

stage it probably would become a charity as this could enhance charitable donations but that the constitution would be agreed first. Ms Caffyn commented that if any member of the Partnership wished to be involved with the development of the Friends Committee then they would be more than welcome.

11. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that due to the increased number of projects and resulting workload of the Development Officer, he had taken over line management of the Rivers and Woodlands projects.
12. The AONB Partnership Manager then highlighted the list of projects that had received funding from the Sustainable Development Fund. He commented that the majority of the funding had been allocated for this Financial Year.

LEADER in the Shropshire Hills Update

13. A report giving an update on the progress of the Shropshire Hills LEADER programme had been circulated. The LEADER Co-ordinator informed the meeting that the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) had so far approved £649,335 of LEADER funding, which had attracted an additional £486,116 of match funding. He went on to say that there were three other approved projects awaiting contracts pending match funding being found.

The LEADER Co-ordinator informed the meeting that Defra had notified the AONB Partnership that the budget for 2011–12 would be cut by 20%, and that the budget had been revised accordingly. Subsequently a letter had been received informing of a review of LEADER budgets and that Ministers wished to see additional funding allocated to LAGs where capacity exists to maximise its use, based on current performance. He went on to say that the Shropshire Hills LAG had higher than average spend and that it was envisaged that we would receive full reinstatement of budget for the current year. He added that the Shropshire Hills should be well placed, as Ministers wished to give priority to well performing LAGs that are in upland areas, in line with the recent Defra Uplands Policy Statement.

14. Mr Eyre asked how performance of the schemes was monitored. The LEADER Co-ordinator informed him that the LAG was responsible for monitoring project outputs and that this was done by Shropshire Council's External Funding team who had significant experience of European funding.
15. Ms Caffyn paid tribute to the LEADER Co-ordinator's work, especially in getting claims processed and paid, which had ensured the good performance rating which was important to future budget levels.

Brief Verbal Updates from Partners

16. The Chair explained that this new item had been included to give members an opportunity to update the Partnership on their activities. It was intended that a number of partners be invited to update at each meeting on a rotational basis. He then introduced representatives of Natural England, Shropshire Council and The Butterfly Conservation Trust, who had been asked to update the Partnership on their recent activity.

Natural England

Ms McDowall informed the meeting that Natural England was going through a time of change with a cut in budgets and resulting significant cut in staff numbers. The Regional tier within the organisation had gone, with officers now in functional teams. She herself retained a link role for AONBs within a Landscape and Biodiversity team which covered the West Midlands, the East Midlands and the East of England. There were Area Managers whose job was to pull all activity together, and for Shropshire and neighbouring counties this was Roger Owen.

Mr Welch asked what funding was available from Natural England. Ms McDowall informed him that there was very little funding available at present.

Mr Repath asked what was going to happen to National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Ms McDowall informed him that they would still remain with Natural England but would be subject to the same budgetary cuts. She went on to say that the NNRs had a dedicated team within Natural England.

Mr D Smith asked whether Natural England was liaising with other agencies with a desire to present one voice on certain issues. Mr Harrison informed the meeting that he had attended a meeting with Roger Owen and representatives of the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission and it had been agreed that Shropshire Council would work with all parties to look at how the organisations could work together to achieve their aims.

Shropshire Council

Mr Harrison informed the meeting that the Council had recently undergone restructuring and that the corporate team had been reduced to three – the Chief Executive, a Corporate Director for Places and a Corporate Director for People. He went on to say that in his position as Environment and Sustainability Manager he managed four teams – the Natural Environment team, the Historic Environment team the Sustainability Team and the AONB Partnership team. He worked under Steve Price, Head of the new Environment Group which included also Development Management, Housing and Environmental Health. On planning, Mr Harrison informed the meeting that the Core Strategy had passed public examination and that work was ongoing on the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev). His teams were working on Supplementary Planning Documents on the Natural Environment and the Historic Environment.

The Chair asked whether from a Shropshire Council perspective the AONB was important. Mr Harrison replied that the AONB was important on a number of levels such as bringing in funding to the area and trying new ways of doing things which were being adopted in other parts of the county.

Butterfly Conservation

Mr Williams informed the meeting the Butterfly Conservation was a national organisation with its head office in Dorset and that it had in the region of 16,000 members and around 50 staff both full and part time. The Regional Officer for the West Midlands was Dr Jenny Joy. Mr Williams commented that the organisation relied heavily on volunteers and was looking to increase its volunteer base in Shropshire. They had recently received funding from the Shropshire Hills AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to run a series of workshops locally, all of which were fully booked. He said Shropshire was incredibly important for butterflies, holding 37 species, over half of those found in the UK.

Mr Williams then outlined two major projects that were being undertaken in the AONB. The first was the Midlands Fritillary Project which was funded by Natural England and several charitable trusts. This aimed to improve habitat for five fritillary species on 168 individual sites in the eight most important areas in the West Midlands, plus the Forest of Dean. The second, the South Shropshire Woodland Project was a joint project with the Forestry Commission funded through the SITA Trust, which was aimed at increasing populations of the Wood White butterfly through targeted management in a network of Forestry Commission owned woodlands between Clun and Craven Arms.

Ms Caffyn commented that the South Shropshire Woodland project may fit with the AONB Woodlands Project.

Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Shropshire Hills and Ludlow

17. A report had been circulated which gave a summary of the Strategy and Action Plan currently out for consultation. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded the meeting that following a joint grant application, the AONB Partnership was managing a contract for the preparation of Sustainable Tourism Strategies for both the Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley AONBs. Consultants had just completed work on the Shropshire Hills Strategy

which was now out for a three month period of public consultation. Work had just started on the Wye Valley Strategy.

18. The AONB Partnership Manager reiterated that the Strategy covered the wider Shropshire Hills and Ludlow Destination Development Partnership (DDP) Area, not just the AONB. He explained that the DDP was a structure set up by Shropshire Council to co-ordinate strategic aspects of tourism at a sub-county level. This wider area brought in the surrounding market towns, including Ludlow, Craven Arms, Bishop's Castle, Much Wenlock, etc. He went on to say that it was significant that the sustainable tourism approach had been adopted as the mainstream strategy for tourism in the area. The AONB Partnership Manager informed members that following the completion of the Strategy it was hoped that an application would be made to the Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, though a fee of 5,000 Euros would have to be found to support this.
19. Ms Caffyn, who was a sub-contractor for part of the work, commented that the process had generated some useful new insights. For example, in the past target markets had focussed on older couples. While this was still valid, it had become apparent that other markets such as families were also important. She also highlighted that consultation feedback from businesses had been very supportive of a strong sustainability emphasis in the Strategy.
20. Mr Chapman welcomed the inclusion on the market towns surrounding the AONB in the Strategy. He expressed concern however regarding the potential low levels of funding available for Actions arising from the Strategy.
21. Mr Eyre questioned the whole idea of 'sustainable tourism', as people still needed to travel to the area. The AONB Partnership Manager said that the definition of sustainable tourism used was 'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities'. The AONB Partnership was not supporting specific promotion of the area to distant audiences encouraging long distance travel.
22. The Chair commented that the Strategy was a very important document.

Natural Environment White Paper and what it means for us

23. A report had been circulated giving a summary of the recently published Natural Environment White Paper.
24. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that, following a period of consultation in 2010, Defra had launched the White Paper on the Natural Environment, titled 'The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature'. Defra had also made a response to the Lawton Review which stated that nature in England is highly fragmented and unable to respond to new pressures such as climate and population change. He went on to say that the National Association for AONBs had been working hard to ensure that the national importance of AONBs as 15% of the land area was recognised, along with the role of AONB Partnerships in taking forward the aspirations contained in the White Paper.
25. Mr D Smith commented that geology was not mentioned once in the White Paper and this was a major omission. The AONB Partnership Manager agreed and said that our response to the earlier consultation document had highlighted this.
26. The Chair asked about Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs). Mr Harrison commented that they would need a joint approach to bring key organisations together to create a strong case with good delivery on the ground. The AONB Partnership Manager commented that the new Partnerships would fit with AONBs in different ways according to the local geography and needs, but that the AONB Partnership would contribute to whatever new arrangements were made in Shropshire.

27. There was also discussion of the new Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) and the opportunity to bid for funds. Mr Edwards said that more information on the criteria was expected shortly.
28. Mr Welch commented that he was unsure how this White Paper fitted with town and parish councils in light of the forthcoming Localism Bill.

Other Matters

29. Mr Voysey raised the matter of the future of the Public Forest estate. He referred to the fact that the threatened sale of the public forest had been deferred and that an independent Forestry Panel had been established to advise government on a new approach to forestry policy in England. He said that the Panel was gathering views and would report to government in the autumn. It was agreed that the AONB Partnership should respond to this.

Dates of Next Meetings

30. The date of the next meeting of the Partnership was confirmed as Tuesday 18 October 2011.