



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
19 June 2012
9.30am

<u>Item</u>
2
Public

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2012

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 Heather Kidd

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

Caring for God's Acre

Michael Whithouse

Campaign to Protect Rural England

Clare Cox

Defra

Jo Jury

Institute of Chartered Foresters

John Voysey

Land, Life and Livelihoods

Gill Binks

Long Mynd & District Bridleways Association

Sue Lee

National Farmers Union

David Watson-Jones

Natural England

Jeff Edwards

Severn Rivers Trust

Emma Buckingham

Mike Morris

Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Veronica Cossons

Walford & North Shropshire College

Jon Parry

Observers/Officers

Shropshire Council

John Harrison (Environment & Sustainability Service Manager)

Tim Ward (Committee Officer)

Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership staff team

Pete Banford (LEADER Co-ordinator)

Claire Fildes (AONB Development Officer)

Phil Holden (AONB Partnership Manager)

Welcome and Apologies for Absence

1. The Chair welcomed Mike Morris and Emma Buckingham from the Severn Rivers Trust, Gill Binks from Land Life and Livelihoods and Jo Jury from Defra to their first meeting.
2. Apologies for absence were received from Sophie Andreae (Offa's Dyke Association), Tony Bostock (Severn Rivers Trust), Dr Jenny Joy (Butterfly Conservation), Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council), Leo Smith (Upper Onny Wildlife Group/Shropshire Ornithological Society), Michael Watney (CLA), Caroline Whiteman (SASTAK) and Steve Price (Group Manager Environment, Shropshire Council).

Note of Last Meeting

3. It was resolved that the note of the meeting held on 18 October 2011 be approved subject to the addition of Sophie Andreae to the list of those who had give their apologies for absence.
4. The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that as part of the biennial review all the individual members had been reappointed with the exception of David Gibbon who had stood down before the last meeting. He went on to say that Oliver Goode had expressed an interest in filling the vacant seat but had been prevented so far from formally applying due to ill health. Land, Life and Livelihoods had been appointed to one of the organisation seats on the Partnership.

AONB Partnership Activity Update

5. 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, as set out below:
6. Clare Davies had been employed as the new Farming Officer and had started work in January. Computer workshops had proved successful in the Clun area and more were planned in the Cleobury Mortimer area, one specifically for the Young Farmers Club. Work was ongoing with the formation of a Commoners Association for Stapeley Common with the aim of entering into a Higher Level Stewardship agreement for the common.
7. Joy Howells and Helen Fairweather had been employed as Landscape Partnership Co-ordinators for the Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme and were currently in the process of bringing together the Landscape Partnership Board, Steering Group and Special Advisory Groups and were collating information already gathered. Mr Watson-Jones asked why the holly trees on the Stiperstones had been fenced in. Lady Cossons advised him that this was work being carried out by the Wildlife Trust in an effort to protect and rejuvenate specific veteran trees.
8. The Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan had been formally approved and the application for Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas had been submitted and the next stage would be a 'verification' visit which would take place in April.

LEADER in the Shropshire Hills Update

9. A report updating the Partnership on the progress of the Shropshire Hills LEADER programme had been circulated.
10. The LEADER Co-ordinator informed the Partnership that technically all the LEADER funding had been allocated, but that it was likely that all Local Action Groups (LAGs) would receive extra funding due to fluctuations in exchange rates and that there may be extra funding due to underspend in other LAGs. He went on to say that this money would be available at the earliest in the first quarter of the 2012-13 Financial Year and would be allocated by Defra according to LAG performance.
11. The LEADER Co-ordinator informed the Partnership that the EU had published proposals for the new Rural Development Regulation which placed great importance on the continuation of the LEADER approach in the next programme period. He went on to say that it was proposed that the current Approvals and Appraisal Panels would develop into a LEADER Management Group which would look at making the most of the opportunities for the Shropshire Hills from future rounds of LEADER.
12. The LEADER Co-ordinator reminded the meeting that the Shropshire Hills LAG was contracted to deliver two cooperation projects under Measure 241 – development of cross border co-operation. He went on to say that the first of these was the Walking with Offa project, and that other projects were being investigated in order that the LAG met its contractual obligations. The LEADER Co-ordinator informed the Partnership that Colin Richards the Historic Environment Manager at Shropshire Council had submitted an expression of interest (EOI) for a co-operation project with the Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET) in Romania. This was to continue historic restoration training for local people in order that they learnt the trade necessary to carry out the restoration of the unique buildings in the area, and the project involved taking skilled tradesmen and also building students to Romania to help with the work. He went on to say that the project was seen to have great potential, and in order to assess the benefits and practicalities of co-operation, he and the AONB Development Officer had visited MET in Romania with Colin. Mr Eyre questioned the benefit to the Shropshire Hills area from the proposals. Mr Harrison informed him that South Shropshire District Council and Shropshire Council had had a 25 year relationship with this area of Romania all funded by external funds which had led to all sorts of spin offs in terms of skill development and knowledge transfer. Mrs Kidd commented that Colin Richards had produced a DVD on his work in the area and that it may be worth linking this to the AONB website. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members that co-operation projects were an essential part of the £1.2M LEADER programme in the Shropshire Hills.
13. Ms Caffyn, the Chair of the LEADER Approvals Panel, advised members of a recently approved project on the Tickwood Estate which concerned the development of a Forest School area for disabled and able-bodied people, the grant being used for the capital costs of creating suitable access paths.
14. The Chair thanked the LEADER Co-ordinator for his presentation and all the work he had done.

2012 – 13 AONB Partnership Work Programme and Summary Budgets

15. A report giving a summary of the AONB Partnership's staff team's work programme for 2012-13 and summary budgets had been circulated.
16. The AONB Partnership Manager informed the Partnership that the coming year would see a slightly reduced overall turnover, with the new Landscape Partnership Development work offset by the end of the current phase of Walking with Offa and cuts to LEADER. He went on to say that the DEFRA 'single pot' AONB funding had been reduced by a further 5.4% in line with the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement. Outline budgets for future years were shown on the basis of further cuts of 5.4% in each year although indication had been received from DEFRA that further cuts may be necessary. The AONB Partnership Manager further advised the Partnership that it appeared in future that there would be more flexibility in the way the DEFRA Single pot could be used, in that there may be no distinction between core, project and Sustainable Development funding but issues needed clarification such as the current different grant rates applying to the three elements, and there may be implications such as eligibility for grant of redundancy costs which were currently covered under certain conditions for core but not project staff. The AONB Partnership Manager then highlighted some key points in the proposed budgets.
17. Mr Welch welcomed the introduction of the new Wenlock Wanderer Shuttle service as this would link in with the development of the Wenlock Edge Quarries. He asked what the situation was with the funding for this service. The AONB Partnership Manager advised him that funding had been secured for 2 years.
18. Mrs Kidd made reference to reserves held and asked whether the AONB Partnership received any interest on the reserves held by the Council. The AONB Partnership Manager informed her that no interest was received. The Environment & Sustainability Service Manager commented that the Council bankrolled considerable sums for the AONB Partnership claimed in arrears in grants, and that no charges were made for this.

DEFRA Consultation on Common Agricultural Policy Reform Post 2013

19. A report giving information on an important consultation by DEFRA on proposed changes to the Common Agricultural Policy, and containing the draft response of the National Association of AONBs had been circulated. The AONB Partnership Manager commented that the Partnership needed to comment on proposed changes to agricultural support and also changes to the Rural Development Programme (RDPE) including LEADER.
20. Jo Jury said that on LEADER there was a lack of clarity in the proposed changes, but also exciting possibilities which might have implications for the LAG. She said some of the farming organisations felt the proposed changes on agricultural support were not very robust, and that the greening proposals may not be very effective while at the same time damaging competitiveness. She said that due to the timescale of the proposed changes, the new RDPE programme would not be in place by 2014, and that while farm payments would continue, there was a risk of a gap in funding on community and LEADER aspects.
21. George Chancellor said that the farming industry felt there was a need to balance food production and environmental protection, and that there was perceived to be a lack of flexibility in the proposals, for example on the number of crops grown.

22. The question was raised as to whether conservation bodies might still be eligible for agri-environment payments under the 'active farmer' definition. The young farmers scheme was seen as valuable, and while special consideration of smaller farmers was also welcomed, there was doubt over exempting small farmers from the all of the greening measures.
23. There was discussion about whether the proposals on LEADER might affect the likelihood of the AONB Partnership continuing to act as a LEADER Local Action Group in future rounds. If LEADER was used to deliver other things such as EU Structural Funds, there might be pressure to change the areas of LEADER operation in Shropshire. It was agreed that continuing the current area and arrangement would be the best for the Shropshire Hills and for the AONB Partnership, but it would be some time before things became clearer. Clare Fildes said that Local Action Groups were being advised to be clear what they wanted to deliver in their areas, and to start preparing a new round of Local Development Strategies.
24. George thanked members for their input, which would be worked into a final response from the AONB Partnership to the consultation.

Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB Constitution

25. A report setting out the proposed draft constitution for the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB had been circulated.
26. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members that two meetings of volunteers from the Friends had been held in the spring of 2011 with the aim of developing the group further. One action out of these meetings was to draft a constitution for the group which would enable greater volunteer participation, enable it to receive subscriptions directly and progress toward charitable status. He went on to say that the roles of Friends groups for other AONBs varied greatly, but that three years ago the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB had been established principally to support the work of the AONB Partnership. It was important that this principle remained clearly established, and the draft constitution had been developed with this aim in mind.
27. Mr Welch commented that it was not clear from the constitution what the Friends do. The AONB Partnership Manager said that the group was principally there to provide a way for people to support the AONB Partnership and feel a sense of belonging to the AONB. Benefits of membership were set out in the Friends leaflet. The constitution did however make clear that the Friends was not intended to become a lobbying group. The Chair commented that the constitution was a framework within which the Friends would work.
28. Mr Eyre asked whether the long term aim of the Friends was to achieve charitable status. The AONB Partnership Manager replied that it was and that appropriate advice was being sought. Mr Eyre asked whether a membership rate for schools had been considered. The AONB Partnership Manager informed him that it hadn't but that schools were involved with the AONB in a number of ways. Mrs Kidd commented that individual school budgets were being squeezed and that a better way of getting schools to buy in may be through the Schools Development Groups.
29. It was **resolved** that subject to minor amendments which may be necessary, the AONB Partnership endorse the draft constitution as laid out in appendix 1 to the report.

Brief Verbal Updates from Partners

30. The Partnership received a presentation from Emma Buckingham and Mike Morris of the Severn Rivers Trust. Ms Buckingham informed the meeting that the Trust had recently started the Teme Catchment Pilot Project which was looking at the river system and water and land management issues. She went on to say that a steering group had been set up comprising representatives of the local community, Natural England, the Wildlife Trust and the AONB. The AONB Manager commented that this was an exciting project and fitted in well with some of the work that Mike Kelly was doing. Mr Morris commented that the Trust was keen to work with all partners to maximise the funding opportunities that the project would bring.

Walking With Offa

31. A report giving a summary of the recently completed phase of the Walking with Offa Project had been circulated. The AONB Development Officer reminded the Partnership that the project, which was funded principally by a Natural Assets grant from Natural England, was a joint project with the Wye Valley AONB and that there was some continuity with the Walking with Offa LEADER co-operation project. She then outlined the four distinct elements of the project and took members through the outcomes for each element.
32. Mr Chapman congratulated the Development Officer on the delivery of a very worthwhile project in a very short time. Several other members echoed these sentiments.

Dates of Next Meetings

33. The Partnership was reminded that the date of the next meeting of the Partnership was Tuesday 19 June 2012.
34. The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members of the Annual Tour, which was likely to be focused on the LEADER programme.