



Shropshire Hills
AONB Partnership

1 July 2014

10.45 am

Item
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Public

**MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON 1 JULY 2014
10.45 AM - 1.00 PM**

Responsible Officer: Tim Ward
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Present

Councillor George Chancellor (Leader)
Councillors Tim Barker (Vice Chairman), Alison Caffyn (Vice Chairman), Heather Kidd, David Turner, Chris Turley, Harriet Carty, Edward Dugdale, Elizabeth Thomas, James Williamson, Gillian Binks, Sarah Bury, Veronica Cossons, Ian Dormer, Geoff Grimes, Sue Jones, David C. Smith and Hilary Claytonsmith

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed Mrs Claytonsmith and Mrs Bedell to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Tony Bostock (Severn Rivers Trust) Lee Chapman (Shropshire Hills Tourism), Jackie Doodson (Walford & North Shropshire College), Dawn Griffiths (Natural England), Deb Hughes (Shropshire Council), Jenny Joy (Butterfly Conservation), Marc Liebrecht (Institute of Chartered Foresters), Cllr Cecilia Motley (Shropshire Council), Phil Ridley (Walford & North Shropshire College) and Mike Williams (Butterfly Conservation).

2 Note of the last meeting

- 2.1 It was resolved that the note of the meeting held on 18 March 2014 be approved.

3 AONB Partnership Activity and Staffing Update

- 3.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager with a summary update of recent activity of the AONB Partnership staff team and a staffing update.
- 3.2 The AONB Partnership Manager advised members that the Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme was progressing well, and took them through the progress to date, outlining the many different activities that had taken place. Members were reminded that further details of the scheme were available on the Landscape Partnership Scheme website www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk.

Harriet Carty said that it was an aspiration for Landscape Partnership Schemes that other organisations would focus their projects into that area to boost activity.

- 3.3 The AONB Partnership Manager advised the meeting that £22,703 had been allocated to nine projects this year through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF). He informed members that additional funding had been received from the Jean Jackson Charitable Trust and the Millichope Foundation and that this funding, along with the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB membership fees, was the only funding for the SDF as there was no Defra funding available as in previous years.
- 3.4 The AONB Partnership Manager informed members that funding of £216,000 had been secured from WREN for a four year project focussing on Freshwater Pearl Mussel recovery sites, and reduction of sediment in the river through work on runoff pathways and rural sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). He added that the project included a Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) funded research bid working with the University of Worcester to investigate resistance to *Phytophthora* disease in alders.
- 3.5 The AONB Partnership Manager advised that team members had undertaken a case study on the Long Mynd as part of the “Better Outcomes on Upland Commons” project which was led by the Foundation for Common Land. The report arising from this work would be published shortly.
- 3.6 The AONB Partnership Manager informed members that project planning for the proposed Clee Hill Heritage Project was well advanced but that the stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been delayed to September as there were some issues around whether Shropshire Council would take on the leases for some of the Heritage sites which were still to be resolved.
- 3.7 The AONB Partnership Manager advised that the Management Board had agreed to take more time to consider the options with regard to setting up a charitable body linked to the AONB. He went on to say that the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) had recently gained charitable status, though it wasn’t anticipated that the Association would be raising money nationally which would come to individual AONBs.
- 3.8 The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members that in a restructure as a result of budget reductions, the Planning and Landscape Officer post had been made redundant at the end of March and Mike Kelly had moved to the newly created core post of Natural Environment Officer. He informed the meeting that Clare Fildes would be leaving the team to take up a post with Shropshire Council’s Outdoor Recreation Partnerships Team. He added that a further staffing review had taken place as a result of this and it had been decided not to refill the post of Development Officer directly but to create a new post of Sustainable Tourism and Business Officer. This would result in a structure where a number of more senior officers within the team would have responsibility for developing new projects, accessing external funding and managing project staff.
- 3.9 The Chair paid tribute to the amount of work that the Development Officer had done during her time working for the AONB Partnership. This was echoed by all present.

- 3.10 Mrs Kidd expressed some concern as to whether the team would have capacity for development of larger projects. The AONB Partnership Manager said that several members of staff had been involved in applying for and gaining project grants. There was not an immediate need now for a very large scale project with the LPS under way, and over time staff could build their experience, with training if necessary. The Chairman commented that there was a strong network for advice, as well as events organised on fund-raising through the NAAONB.
- 3.11 The Chair thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for his report.

4 Connecting Shropshire Broadband Programme Update

- 4.1 Members received a presentation from the Marketing and Engagement Manager for Connecting Shropshire which updated them with progress made on the Connecting Shropshire Broadband Project.
- 4.2 Mrs Kidd commented that broadband speed achieved very much depended on the condition of the copper wire running to the premises, and that she knew of instances where neighbouring properties received very differing broadband speeds. She asked what work was being done to update the copper connections. The Marketing and Engagement Manager informed her that this issue was being investigated with BT.
- 4.3 Mrs Kidd asked how much of the AONB area would not be enabled through the project, as businesses in the area were very dependent on good broadband speeds to effectively carry out their business activities. The Marketing and Engagement Manager advised that businesses could contact the project office and would be advised whether their area was included in the project and would also be given advice on the other options available to them.
- 4.4 Mrs Kidd expressed concern that the number of mobile 'not spots' was actually increasing and that mobile phone signals seemed to be deteriorating. She added that young people increasingly relied on a good 3G signal. The Marketing and Engagement Manager agreed to pass on her concerns to the relevant officer.
- 4.5 Mrs Bury asked whether the distance from the fibre-enabled box had any implications. The Marketing and Engagement Manager advised that superfast speed should be available within one mile of the box, but premises further away may receive slower speeds.
- 4.6 Mr Williamson asked how upgrade decisions on exchanges and boxes were made. The Marketing and Engagement Manager advised that decisions were based on engineering logic and value for money assessments.
- 4.7 The Chairman enquired how communities could find out further information. The Marketing and Engagement Manager stated that most information was available on the Connecting Shropshire website <http://connectingshropshire.co.uk/> or alternatively by contacting the Connecting Shropshire office.
- 4.8 The Chairman thanked the Marketing and Engagement Manager for his presentation.

5 Planning Pressures and the AONB

- 5.1 Members had received a report with information on the outcome of applications on which the AONB Partnership had commented, and on patterns regarding recent planning applications affecting the AONB.
- 5.2 The AONB Partnership Manager commented that there had been a significant increase in the number of planning applications being submitted over the past 12 months. He added that there were growing concerns that the AONB designation was not being given due weight when applications were determined. This was disappointing given the work to get the designation adequately recognised in planning policy, and the strong weight given to the designation within the National Planning Policy Framework. With loss of the parttime Planning & Landscape Officer post, the team's way of working would be different, but currently the number of consultation responses being made had actually increased. A proposal was being considered to submit a standard response on all consultations received highlighting the planning authorities' duties and relevant policies.
- 5.3 The Chair commented that the increase in applications was in large part due to a large number of speculative housing applications as a result of the lack of a 5 year land supply.
- 5.4 Cllr Kidd commented that there were many housing applications for 5 bedroom houses. She asked whether members should alert the AONB team to contentious planning applications, and the Chairman agreed that this would be helpful. Cllr Barker said that the pressure was not just from housing, but also agricultural buildings, infrastructure, etc.
- 5.5 Mr Turley commented that it was not only the AONB area which was experiencing the pressures the AONB Partnership Manager had referred to; similar pressures were being experienced across the Telford and Wrekin area.
- 5.6 Mrs Bedell commented that she believed that the publication of the SAMDev would bring an end to the pressures currently being experienced and asked whether it may be worth employing a temporary officer for 8 to 12 months to deal with the planning issues and ease the pressures on other staff.
- 5.7 Mrs Binks asked whether there was a role for the NAAONB. The AONB Partnership Manager advised that the Association did not have capacity to take on local casework. Ms Greenall observed that in some cases farmers were objecting to the scale of some poultry shed applications.
- 5.8 Mrs Clayton-Smith informed the meeting that Church Stretton Town Council had suggested that the area should be designated a National Park which would give it the powers to become a planning authority. The Chairman commented that this was unlikely to happen for a number of reasons.
- 5.9 Mr Carty commented that the National Trust along with a number of other organisations were increasingly unhappy with the current planning system and suggested that organisations should write to Shropshire Council and central

government expressing their concerns. Mrs Bury said that the Planning Committee members should be made more aware of the AONB Management Plan.

- 5.10 The Chairman commented that it may be useful if he and the AONB Partnership Manager had another meeting with the Planning Department to express the concerns raised.

6 LEADER 2015 - 20

- 6.1 Members received an update report on the AONB Partnership's bid to be a LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) for the 2015–2020 round of funding.
- 6.2 The LEADER Co-ordinator informed members that the LEADER 2009–2013 evaluation report had been produced and was undergoing final editing prior to publication on the AONB website.
- 6.3 The LEADER Co-ordinator advised members that proposed boundaries for the LAGs for Shropshire were submitted to Defra in May in order for an indication of potential available funding to be given. He added that the AONB Partnership had submitted a proposed LEADER working area which covered the whole of the south of the county south of a line along the M54, A5 and A458, including some of the rural area of Telford & Wrekin.
- 6.4 The LEADER Co-ordinator informed members that Defra had advised the AONB Partnership that an indicative budget of between £1.89 million and £2.7 million would be available for this southern Shropshire area.
- 6.5 The LEADER Co-ordinator advised members that the proposed overall purpose for the 2015-20 LEADER programme in southern Shropshire was proposed to be "To improve the economic wellbeing of the area through sustainable development, drawing on the area's environmental and cultural assets and qualities". It was noted that the LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS) would need to implement the six national LEADER priorities, and the following had been proposed as the way to convey and direct these in the most appropriate ways to the needs of the area:
- Increasing farm productivity in ways which enhance natural capital;
 - Developing sustainable micro and small enterprises and farm diversification;
 - Building rural tourism making the most of Shropshire's assets;
 - Improving rural services to support business growth and development;
 - Enhancing the natural, cultural and heritage attractions of the area;
 - Increasing woodland and forest productivity in ways which enhance natural capital.
- 6.6 The LEADER Co-ordinator advised members that the full draft LDS would be published by the end of July and would be circulated to Partnership members for their comments prior to submission to Defra by 5 September 2014.
- 6.7 The Chair thanked the LEADER Co-ordinator for his report and reminded members of the further opportunity to comment at the LEADER consultation event being held after the meeting.

7 Date of Next Meeting

7.1 Members were reminded that the next meeting of the AONB Partnership would be held on Tuesday 18 November 2014.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: