



Shropshire Hills
AONB Partnership

Item

Public

**MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON
18 NOVEMBER 2014
9.30 - 11.45 AM**

Responsible Officer: Tim Ward

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Present

Councillor George Chancellor (Chair)

Councillors Tim Barker (Vice Chairman), James Williamson (Vice Chairman), Heather Kidd, David Turner, Chris Turley, Alison Caffyn, Harriet Carty, Fiona Pidduck, Elizabeth Thomas, Sarah Bury, Lee Chapman, Veronica Cossons, Ian Dormor, Sue Lee, Marc Liebrecht, Vivienne Parry, Ronald Repath and David C. Smith

8 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

- 8.1 The Chair welcomed Nigel McDonald, who had recently been appointed as Sustainable Business Officer for the AONB Partnership staff team.
- 8.2 Apologies for absence were received from Gill Binks (Caring for God's Acre), Keith Bartlett (Parish Council Representative), Tony Bostock (Severn Rivers Trust), Edward Dugdale (Individual Member), Joy Greenall (Land Life & Livelihoods), Sue Jones (Ramblers Association), Jo Jury (DEFRA), Hazel McDowall (Natural England), Leo Smith (Upper Onny Wildlife Group/Shropshire Ornithological Society) Michael Vout (Telford & Wrekin Council Officer) and Michael Whithouse (Land Life & Livelihoods).

9 Election of Chair, Vice Chairs and seats to the Management Board

- 9.1 The AONB Partnership Manager reported that there had been one nomination for the post of Chair of the AONB Partnership.
- 9.2 **RESOLVED:**
That George Chancellor be elected Chair of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership for the forthcoming year.
- 9.3 Mr Chancellor thanked the Partnership for re-electing him and reiterated that he would be looking to stand down in the near future.

- 9.4 The Chair informed the meeting that there had been two nominations for the two posts for Vice Chair of the Partnership.
- 9.5 **RESOLVED:-**
That Cllr Tim Barker and Mr James Williamson be elected Vice-Chairs of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership for the forthcoming year.
- 9.6 The Chair reported that there had been six nominations for the six seats on the Management Board.
- 9.7 **RESOLVED: -**
That Mrs Caroline Bedell, Lady Veronica Cossons, Cllr Heather Kidd, Cllr Cecilia Motley, Mrs Elizabeth Thomas and Cllr David Turner be elected to serve on the Management Board for the forthcoming year.
- 9.8 The Chair thanked Ms Caffyn for all the work she had done on behalf of the AONB Partnership during her time as Vice-Chair and on the Management Board. These sentiments were echoed by all those present.

10 Note of the last meeting

- 10.1 Mrs Lee pointed out that she had proffered her apologies for absence for the last meeting.
- 10.2 **RESOLVED:-**
That subject to the addition of Mrs Lee to the list of the apologies for absence, the note of the last meeting be confirmed as a true record.

11 AONB Partnership Update

- 11.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which provided an update of recent activity. The AONB Partnership Manager highlighted some key points:
- 11.2 Within the Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme, work was progressing on many of the projects. Since July the LPS team had organised 24 events and training activities.
- 11.3 The three year River Clun Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project funded by SITA had come to an end in August. A four year project funded by WREN (a landfill tax fund) would be starting in April 2015 which would focus on freshwater pearl mussel recovery sites. A part time project officer would be recruited for this in the near future.
- 11.4 The Shuttles services for 2014 had carried slightly more passengers than in 2013 and contributions from partners, along with income from tickets and concessionary fare had covered the cost of running the service. The contribution from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund was vital for the continuation of the Shuttles, but funding was in place to enable the same service to be offered in 2015.
- 11.5 It had not been possible to proceed with the proposed stage one application for the Clee Hill Heritage Project, as Shropshire Council had made a decision not to take

on the leases for the Heritage Sites involved. The possibility of carrying forward a different project was currently being investigated.

- 11.6 Meetings of the Wrekin Forest Partnership had been held, and a survey prepared to help inform the development of a new management plan for the Wrekin Forest area.
- 11.7 The Partnership had made submissions on six planning applications, including proposals for solar farms at Acton Scott and Whitton, both of which had been turned down by the planning committee because of their effect on the AONB. Mrs Bury commented that the CPRE had been very disappointed that Planning Inspectors did not appear to take into account local opinion when considering appeals for renewable energy schemes.
- 11.8 The Chair asked whether the Partnership Team had sufficient capacity to respond to planning applications. The AONB Partnership Manager commented that a standard response was now made to all applications on which the Partnership was asked to comment. This reminded the planning department of the national and local planning policies which applied to the AONB designation and stated that the absence of a detailed response should not be interpreted as suggesting that the application raises no issues with regard to the AONB designation. He went on to say that the Partnership had recently responded to more planning applications than previously but there was still a need to be very selective in making responses. Mrs Kidd suggested that Partnership members could be called on to provide local knowledge to aid the preparation of responses. Several members commented that it was important that where detailed responses were made, they referred to all the relevant policies. The Chair commented that too often the AONB was interpreted as only about visual issues and there was a need for a broader consideration of landscape. Mr Barker commented that it was important to make a balanced response to applications as in some cases there may be some effects on the AONB which may be outweighed by the benefits to the area. Mr Dormor informed the meeting that a member of the Strettons Civic Society, who was a retired planning inspector, had offered to advise the Partnership in relation to planning matters. This offer was warmly welcomed. Mrs Bedell asked if the team provided pre-application advice. The AONB Partnership Manager replied that this was not currently provided. It was acknowledged that people would accept paying for this service, as this was becoming more the norm.
- 11.9 The Chair informed the Partnership that he and the AONB Partnership Manager would be meeting with planning officers to discuss matters of concern.
- 11.10 The AONB Partnership Manager informed members that discussions were taking place with regard to the possibility of moving the AONB offices to the building currently used by the library in Church Stretton. Consultations were ongoing on the reorganisation of council services in Church Stretton and the possible move of the library to the school.
- 11.11 The Chair thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for his report.

12 LEADER 2015-20 Bid

- 12.1 Members received a report which provided an update on the AONB Partnership's bid to be a LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) and presented draft Terms of Reference for the new LEADER Approvals Panel and Appraisal Panel.
- 12.2 The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that the AONB Partnership had submitted a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for Southern Shropshire to DEFRA as its bid to deliver the 2015 – 2020 LEADER programme, and that subsequent to the submission it was learned that a competing bid had been submitted by the Intelligence Foundation CIC (IFCIC).
- 12.3 The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that a decision by DEFRA had been expected in early November but this had been put back and the Partnership's ability to plan ahead was currently very constrained. He added that it was possible that Defra may accept the AONB Partnership's bid in part or with significant conditions, with implications for the Partnership. The LEADER Development Group had agreed that the final choice of how to respond in this scenario was an operational responsibility which should lie with the AONB Partnership Manager and the Chair. The Chair commented that he felt that this was essential as decisions would need to be made quickly. The Partnership supported this, and the AONB Partnership Manager commented that Partnership Members would be kept informed all stages.
- 12.4 The AONB Partnership Manager stated that work had been done on the governance arrangements and took the meeting through the draft Terms of Reference for the Approvals Panel and the Appraisal Panel. He said that these may need to be refined following the publication of the LEADER Operating Manual expected in the new year.
- 12.5 Ms Caffyn commented that a requirement for declarations of interest needed to be included in the Terms of Reference.
- 12.6 The AONB Partnership Manager advised the Meeting that as soon as DEFRA approval was received it was proposed that the recruitment process for the panels should begin in order that the programme may start as soon as possible.
- 12.7 **RESOLVED:** - That the Partnership
- a) note the current position and are aware of the possible outcomes
 - b) approve the Terms of Reference of the Approvals and Appraisals Panels.

13 **Proposed Amendments to the AONB Terms of Reference**

- 13.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which provided details of proposed revisions to the AONB Partnership's own Terms of Reference. The AONB Partnership Manager informed members of key points:
- 13.2 The Terms of Reference needed updating to take account of changes required by the new round of LEADER, and updates regarding how funding was received. The changes included a proposal that the appointment of Chair & Vice-Chairs, and of members of the Management Board should be made biennially rather than annually as present. This would provide for better continuity as well as reducing administration.

- 13.3 The paper also proposed that representatives of Town and Parish Councils would be recruited by the Partnership directly, in the same way as the Individual Members seats were filled, rather than being appointed by the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) as presently. The AONB Partnership Manager explained that it was felt that this change would help the Partnership to develop its direct relationship with Town and Parish Councils, and that there would also be the opportunity to draw on a larger applicant pool for these seats. Members supported the proposal and welcomed the opportunity for more direct engagement with Town and Parish Councils. Mrs Kidd commented contact should not be just writing to the Parish Councils, and it was agreed that a public advert would be desirable also. The Chair commented that there was a role for all Partnership members in engaging with their local Councils about the AONB.
- 13.4 The AONB Partnership Manager informed the meeting that the revised Terms of Reference would need formal approval from Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council. Mrs Thomas asked what the timescales for this would be. The AONB Partnership Manager advised that approval would not be sought until the decision on the LEADER bid had been received, since if the LEADER bid was unsuccessful, references to LEADER would need to be removed from the Terms of Reference prior to the submission of the other revisions for approval.
- 13.5 **RESOLVED:**
That (subject to the DEFRA decision on the LEADER application, and to compliance with LEADER guidance expected early in 2015) the Partnership endorse the amended Terms of Reference to go forward for approval by the two Local Authorities.

14 Development of Charitable Structure for Friends and a Small Grants Scheme

- 14.1 Members received a report which provided an updated proposal for the development of a charitable structure incorporating the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB and a new small grants scheme focussed on conserving and enhancing the AONB.
- 14.2 The AONB Partnership Manager reminded members that the AONB Partnership had been considering a number of options for developing the Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB. Some of the options had for varying reasons been discounted, although the benefits of gaining charitable status were still applicable.
- 14.3 The AONB Partnership Manager informed members that the team had been discussing realigning the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), or indeed winding this up and launching a new grants scheme. He reminded members that the SDF had formerly been funded entirely by government money and since this had been lost from the Fund, the only sources of income were the membership subscriptions of Friends and donations from the Millichope Foundation and the Jean Jackson Trust. He believed that the Shropshire Hills was the only AONB which had managed to continue its SDF with no DEFRA funding by finding other sources.
- 14.4 The AONB Partnership Manager informed members that it was now proposed to create a charity which was first and foremost a 'fund' rather than a group. This would bring in money from the Friends, through a proposed visitor giving scheme,

and hopefully raising funds from businesses and other charitable trusts. Money would be distributed from the Fund in grants. He went on to say that further work would be required to establish the best form for this charitable organisation. Friends members would be kept informed.

- 14.5 Members welcomed the proposals, and the intention to retain a small grant scheme.

15 **Planning Application for Housing and Tourism at New House Farm Church Stretton**

- 15.1 The AONB Partnership Manager updated members on the outline planning application for the erection of 85 dwellings and use of land for the siting of 16 holiday units at New House Farm. He reminded members that the site had originally been included in the SAMDev preferred sites but had been removed following objections from the Town Council and other organisations. He advised members that paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework stated that planning permission should be refused for major developments in AONBs except in 'exceptional circumstances' and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. The AONB Partnership would be objecting to the application as it was felt that there were no exceptional circumstances to allow the development.
- 15.2 Mrs Claytonsmith advised the meeting that Church Stretton Town Council would be objecting to the application grounds that the site was unsustainable as there were other sites identified for development in the town, access for both motorists and pedestrians was dangerous, due to issues with drainage and the sewage system, and impact on the AONB.
- 15.3 Mr Carty clarified that the National Trust would be objecting to the application on the grounds of effect on the AONB including views from the Long Mynd, on the heritage value of the landscape and regarding the tourism proposals.
- 15.4 The Chair thanked the AONB Partnership Manager for the update.

16 **Dates of Next Meetings**

- 16.1 Members were advised that future meetings of the Partnership would be held on
- Tuesday 17 March 2015
Thursday 25 June 2015 (note change from 2 July as earlier scheduled)
Tuesday 17 November 2015

Signed (Chairman)

Date: