



Shropshire Hills
AONB Partnership

18 April 2016

9.30 am

Item

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Public

**MINUTES OF THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MEETING HELD ON
22 MARCH 2016
9.30 - 11.30 AM**

Responsible Officer: Tim Ward

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Present

James Williamson (Chair)

George Chancellor (Vice Chairman), Cecilia Motley (Vice Chairman), Heather Kidd, Robert Tindall, David Turner, Chris Turley, Mr Andy Boddington, Alison Caffyn, Mr John Pritchard, Mr John Woolmer, Ms Hilary Claytonsmith, Janine Hayter, Yvonne Holyoak, Mr Clive Leworthy, Steve Pennington, Mr John Tucker, Sarah Bury, Lee Chapman, Veronica Cossons, Ian Dormor, Carol Griffiths, Sue Jones, Sue Lee, Ronald Repath and Leo Smith

19 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

19.1 The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting. He advised that there was an item of urgent business that would be taken following approval of the note of the last meeting.

19.2 Apologies for absence were received from Caroline Bedell (CLBA), Deb Hughes (Shropshire Council), Donna Tavernor (Forestry Commission), Hazel McDowall (Natural England), David Mills (SASTAK) and Phil Ridley (Walford & North Shropshire College).

20 Note of the last meeting

20.1 The note of the meeting held on 17 November 2015 had been circulated.

20.2 The Committee Officer advised that Rhona Goddard had been omitted from the list of those present.

20.3 Resolved:

That, subject to the addition of Rhona Goddard to the list of those present, the note of the meeting held on 17 November 2015 be approved

21 **Proposal to Change the Management Structure of the AONB**

- 21.1 The Chair advised the meeting that he and the Vice Chair had attended a meeting with the Director of Commissioning and Local Commissioning Manager, Shropshire Council, and had been informed of proposals to change the management structure of the Outdoor Partnerships Team, which would result in the post of AONB Partnership Manager being merged with another management post within the team. He further advised that the AONB Manager had been placed under a formal 45 day consultation period as his current post was at risk and that there would be a competitive process for the appointments to the new posts within the Outdoor Partnerships Team.
- 21.2 The Local Commissioning Manager assured Members that there was no hidden agenda with the proposal and that Shropshire Council as a whole valued the work of the AONB, he reminded Members that as well as the £40,000 the Council contributed to the AONB budget there was also in the region of £55,000 worth of in kind benefits through the provision of payroll, HR and legal advice and other back office support. He advised that the changes were having to be made in light of the continuing cuts to local government budgets, and that alongside the change in the management structure the team were looking at transferring the management of green spaces and play areas to town and parish council and were also looking at increasing income generation.
- 21.3 The Local Commissioning Manager advised Members that it was proposed that the management of the AONB Partnership Team be merged with the existing Outdoor Partnerships Development Team which deals with externally funded projects such as LEADER, active youth, Walking for Health and other such schemes as there was a synergy between the work that the two teams carried out.
- 21.4 Several Members expressed concern that the AONB Partnership had not been consulted prior to the AONB Manager being placed on formal consultation and commented that they had not received sufficient information about the changes. The Local Commissioning Manager agreed to circulate a full briefing note to all members.
- 21.5 In response to a query the Local Commissioning Manager confirmed that the Council would consider any other proposals that were put forward. Several Members commented that the 45 day consultation period did not allow enough time to consider other proposals and requested that it be suspended whilst other solutions were formulated.
- 21.6 In response to a question the Local Commissioning Manager confirmed that he had had discussions with DEFRA who were of the initial opinion that the matter was an operational one between the Council and the Partnership.
- 21.7 The Local Commissioning Manager confirmed that of the current 6 manager posts, 3 including the Head of the Outdoor Partnerships Team were the subject of consultation. He added that it was proposed that there would be 4 posts and that one of these posts would also have the overall responsibility for the team.
- 21.8 A Member expressed concern with regard to workloads and loss of expertise especially with regard to responding to planning applications and also that there

may be a conflict of interest with regards to LEADER. The Local Commissioning Manager expressed the view that the AONB could maintain the independence that it already has.

21.9 The Chair confirmed that the Management Board would be meeting in early April to look at the options available to the Partnership and that it was proposed that an extra meeting of the Partnership would be held on Monday 18 April. He also confirmed that he was meeting with the Local Commissioning Manager later in the week to discuss the situation further.

21.10 The Chair distributed a proposed response. It was agreed that the following response be made: -

The Partnership is very concerned that this proposal appears not to be in the interests of the national designation of the AONB. Though there are many details that have not been provided to the Partnership by the Council, the Partnership should, as the Council's formal Joint Advisory Committee under the Local Government Act have been consulted before any action was initiated to change the AONB structure. We believe this may be in breach of the Council's statutory duties regarding the AONB and its contractual commitments.

The Partnership will put forward options, as invited, within the 45 day period, for changes in the AONB structure, including scenarios where the Council's funding support may be reduced. The Partnership will also further explore options for the AONB structure to become independent of the Council. Notwithstanding the above, to ensure that this important discussion is not constrained, the Partnership urges strongly that the formal consultation process initiated on the AONB Partnership Manager be stopped.

21.11 Councillors Mrs Motley, Tindall and Turner and Mr Chapman abstained as they were Members of the administration of Shropshire Council, all other Members present being in favour.

22 AONB Partnership Activity Update

22.1 The Meeting received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which provided Members with an update on the work of the Partnership staff team together with a summary of the future work programme and the 2016/17 budget.

22.2 The AONB Partnership Manager informed Members that he did not propose to go through the report in detail but if they had and queries they should contact him. He drew attention to the future work programme and budget and reminded Members that these documents formed the basis for the contract agreement with DEFRA for 2016/17. In response to a query he confirmed that the receipt of DEFRA funding was not dependent of the receipt of funding from Shropshire Council.

22.3 Mr L Smith reminded Members of ongoing work with the Ground Nesting Bird Recovery Project being carried out as part of the Stiperstones and Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme.

23 AONB Partnership Communications Strategy

- 23.1 Members received the report of the AONB Partnership Manager which set out an updated communications strategy for the AONB Partnership.
- 23.2 The AONB Partnership Manager informed Members that the strategy updated the one developed in 2010 and changes reflects the trend to increased use of electronic communication together with a reduction in the use of printed materials as budgets have declined.
- 23.3 In response to a query the AONB Partnership Manager confirmed that the updated Terms of Reference which had been agreed at the last meeting of the Partnership were still awaiting adoption by the two Unitary Councils

24 Stepping Stones Project

- 24.1 It was agreed that due to time constraints, this presentation would be made at a future meeting of the Partnership

25 Proposed Landscape Partnership Scheme for the Wrekin Area

- 25.1 The Partnership received a presentation from John Hughes, Development Manager. Shropshire Wildlife trust on a proposal to submit a Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Wrekin Forest Area. He outlined the proposal and advised that he would be submitting a stage 1 application which needed to be submitted by 1 June 2016. He then answered Members questions.
- 25.2 It was agreed that the Partnership would write a letter of support for the scheme which would be submitted with the stage 1 application.

26 Dates of future meetings

- 26.1 It was agreed that an additional meeting of the Partnership would be held on Monday 18 April 2016.
- 26.2 Members were reminded that future meeting of the partnership would be held on Tuesday 14 June 2016 and Tuesday 15 November 2016.