

(23 March 2006)

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership held in Ubley Village Hall, Ubley on Thursday 23rd March 2006 at 1.30pm

Present

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Andrew Burns	Countryside Agency
Amy Coulthard	Rural Development Service
Paul Harley	Mendip Society
Mark Coutiour	National Trust
Kate Lawrence	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Cllr David Joslin	Sedgemoor District Council
Cllr Alvin Horsfall	Somerset County Council
Dr Brian Robinson	Parish Representative
Gill Hogarth	Parish Representative
Richard Bartlett	Parish Representative
Ros Wyke	Parish Representative
Cllr Ann Harley	North Somerset Council
Cllr Shirley Steel	Bath and North East Somerset Council
James Bateman	CLA

Associate members

Mary Johnson	Flax Bourton Parish Council
Tony Settrington	Council for British Arch South West
Bryony Close	The Gorge Outdoors
Graham Price	Mendip Society
Mary de Viggiani	CPRE
Timothy Raines	North Somerset Local Access Forum
Lisa Schneidau	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Andrew Brown	Burrington Conservators
John Wilson	Mendip Hills AONB Rangers
Geoff Luckett	Winscombe and Sandford PC
Krysia Truscoe	Somerset County Council

Officers Working Group Representatives

Sarah Diacono	Somerset County Council
Sue Murtagh	Bath and North East Somerset
Gareth Withers	North Somerset Council
Rob Morgan	Sedgemoor District Council

AONB staff

Jonathan Richards
Sarah Jackson
Les Davies
Tina Bath

Other

June Cummings

Apologies were received from Simon Crutchley (English Heritage), Cllr Roy Wills (Mendip District Council), Cllr Harvey Siggs (Somerset County Council), Sonia Davidson Grant (Somerset County Council), Ian Cooksey (City of Bristol College), James Blair (James Blair Associates), Jim Hardcastle (Somerset County Council), Janetter Burton (Sedgemoor District Council), John Smith (AONB Heritage Steering Group), Gwyn Thomas (Trailriders Fellowship)

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

121. The Chairman referred to the death late last year of Diana Burgess Parish Representative for Group B. Diana had been an enthusiastic member of the Partnership and had welcomed the Partnership to Shipham Village Hall at the last meeting.

122. The AONB Service as of this meeting would take on duty of producing minutes to have draft minutes available 2 weeks after the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

123. There were no Declarations of Interest made.

MINUTES

124.(1) The following amendments were made to the Minutes of the meeting of 22nd September 2005;

(1) Dr B Robinson reported omission to the minutes of his comment at the end of the meeting regarding need to collect basic information about the AONB, assemble a bibliography and other means of organising information. Steve Pilkington said that he would discuss this with AONB Service.

(2) 113. (2) SSI should read SSS1

(3) 114. (1) First sentence should read 'reported about CHERT...'not church.

(4) 114 (4) first sentence should read , ‘ reported that work’ not walks

The Minutes were then signed as a correct record

Matters arising

Minute 118(2) – Extending the Mendip Hills AONB

(2) Andrew Burns reported that Defra have been allowed under the Court of Appeal to launch an appeal against the Merrick judgement in the High Court in November. This appeal process could take up to two years. The Countryside Agency cannot proceed with their selection criteria for boundary reviews until the appeal is complete. The Merrick judgement called into question ‘natural beauty’. An amendment to the Natural England Bill is planned in the meantime to address this.

Paul Harley hoped that the Mendip Society document setting out the area proposed by the Mendip Society for an extension, circulated to local authorities and the Countryside Agency, has been received well. The Mendip Society will continue to work on the issue.

Ann Harley requested that the Partnership be mindful of the fact that local authorities are about to start work on local plan documents for 2011– 2018 and are trying to protect areas included in the proposed extension area and this hold up is worrying.

Paul Harley mentioned wind turbine appeal due on 25th April on land lying just outside existing AONB boundary but within Mendip Society proposed extension. James Bateman felt that premature to be considering extension when question now as to what defines ‘natural beauty’.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

125. There were no public questions

MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Morning site visits

126. (1) Les Davies reported on Burrington Combe walk to see management work in progress and recently undertaken work with various partners including English Nature, Defra, North Somerset Council, Mendip Hills AONB Service, Conservators and others. Tina Bath reported on visit to Chancellors Farm owned by Somerset Wildlife Trust to look at unspoilt landscape, stock grazing regime and improvements for group visits. Steve Pilkington commented on potential of the site and looking forward to seeing hay meadows in June. Dr B Robinson commented on excellent condition of dry

stone walls. Gareth Withers reported on Strawberry Line, Winscombe visit to see work at the Millenium Green and the low level lighting being installed in the tunnel at Shute Shelve. Funding had been received from Mendip Hills SDF. Paul Harley asked if their were going to be bike racks at Winscombe near path. Gareth Withers said that there would be. Graham Price commented that he would have liked to have gone on all 3 visits. Steve Pilkington rounded up discussion to say that the visits were to see examples of delivery of the Management Plan and asked for suggestions for future site visits to be sent in to AONB office.

Sarah Diacono felt that morning site visit format followed by the Partnership committee worked well.

Local authority initiatives

- (2) a) Sue Murtagh reported that B&NES will launch their Parish Wildlife Maps on 31st March. Parish councils concerned are being invited to be presented with a map of their parish showing parish boundaries, wildlife with management actions. This is seen as beginning of process for activity to improve wildlife linked with priority species identified in the Management Plan (page 10).
- b) Gareth Withers, North Somerset Council reported cooperation with Burrington Combe scheme, work with CHERT and Strawberry Line.
- c) Rob Morgan Sedgemoor District Council reported that main thrust of new SDC Local Plan was sustainability with vast majority of new development to be around Bridgwater. Large developments around Cheddar and Axbridge no longer likely however possibility of some development in old Strawberry Fields around Cheddar.
- d) Somerset County Council had nothing to report
- e) Mendip District Council no representative.

AONB Service Projects

(3) The Partnership considered a report by Jim Hardcastle, Mendip Hills AONB Development Officer, on key projects being undertaken by the Service. James Bateman (JB) raised a number of issues and was answered by Sarah Jackson (SJ), AONB Manager. These were:

Lifelines – JB stated that boundaries can only be surveyed from public rights of way unless owner permission given. SJ said that this is how work will be carried out.

JB–What has Foodpaths to do with Agriculture? SJ said that food is a product of agriculture and project is to identify potential for visitors to purchase local produce, stay in accommodation where they can eat local produce and visit producers to see food production amongst other potential links.

JB – People are completely separated from process of growing and producing food. SJ said that this was why the Mendip Hills AONB Service and others were working on projects like Foodpaths and Farmlink.

JB queried figure of 440,000 people taking part in outdoor pursuits. SJ said that this figure was just those involved in outdoor pursuits and did not include general visitors. A breakdown of this figure however would be brought to next meeting. Other figures on tourist numbers were referred to my members of the Partnership demonstrating the significance of tourism and visitors in the AONB.

JB – Boundary markers promised to modify drivers driving behaviour where is the evidence of this happening? SJ said that this had not been promised. The boundary markers are to raise awareness that drivers are entering a designated landscape.

JB– asked what powers there were to prevent farmers developing businesses. Jonathan Richards explained that there are planning policies. SJ said that government policy was encouraging farm diversification and many farmers have diversified in Mendip Hills. It is also clear that many do not wish to have direct contact with customers but are still keen to market locally through local retailers and farm shops/markets.

Steve Pilkington commented that in Mendip Hills AONB Action Plan CLA, represented by James Bateman had only minimal references and asked that JB identify what he wishes to see in Plan and how CLA will assist with delivery. JB said he would undertake this.

AONB Ranger and Volunteer support

(4) Les Davies reported that 3158 volunteer ranger hours had been recorded for the year up to February 2006. The Rangers assist with school visits to Charterhouse Centre, Avon Cliff Recue, guided walks and today's site visit. Radstock College Land based studies come out every Monday to undertake tasks. Youth Offending team not strictly volunteers but undertake tasks and hopefully if just one can be turned round it is worthwhile. Duke of Edinburgh pupils from Kings of Wessex and Churchill have put in 15 hours with Rangers and work included clearing route in Burrington of litter for today's walk. The hedge laying that has been undertaken on Longbottom between Shipham and Charterhouse is stunning example of hedgelaying undertaken by Tina Bath and Nick Baker, Alvis Bros with volunteers keen to learn the craft.

Updates from Partnership members

(5) Mendip Society Paul Harley reported that they had undertaken walks and talks programme. With CPRE they had objected to Bristol Airport expansion. It appears that GOSW may not require Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Paul Harley reported that John Penrose MP has tabled questions in parliament regarding concerns about noise levels. Paul Harley referred to noise figures

for Congresbury that were rated high enough to be of annoyance to communities and suggested that figures would be higher for villages in AONB. Ros Wyke reported that communities on south side of AONB concerned about increased traffic on A371 and noise from night flights that they are protected from during day due to activities of the local gliding club. Paul Harley reported formation of C1 Group that includes GOSW, English Partnerships, businesses, local elected members in N.Som, Bristol and B&NES who are supporting expansion. David Joslin asked what remit of Partnership was to comment on Bristol Airport. Jonathan Richards explained that as expansion is likely to have an impact on the landscape and tranquility of the AONB it was in our remit to comment. Paul Harley said that Mendip Society did not want to halt expansion but ensure that the local infrastructure could support it. The Partnership **RESOLVED** to a) question GOSW as to why EIA will not be undertaken as this is needed to assess risks to the AONB and b) invite representative from Bristol airport to come to Partnership Committee to discuss issues. It was agreed that a special meeting be organised in June for this and other planning matters. Jonathan Richards to organise and query EIA.

(6) Sarah Jackson reported that voting to replace Diana Burgess is currently being undertaken by the 4 parishes in Group B and will be complete by 4th April 2005

(7) It was **RESOLVED** to accept CPRE's request to become a Partnership Committee member.

Annual Action Plan 2006-7

(8) The Partnership considered a revised Action Plan by Sarah Jackson. Sarah Jackson reported that it is important that the Action Plan is kept up to date and invited members to send details of work being undertaken to deliver the AONB Management Plan throughout the year. Steve Pilkington said that he wants to ensure that consultation with the Partnership is right to generate the right types of things in the Action Plan and he will be bullish about delivering the Plan and ensuring structure of the Partnership meetings is based on Plan delivery. Paul Harley mentioned under 1.4 in the Action Plan concern about loss of protected trees and need for vigilance by parish councils.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND

127. The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson about the Fund. Steve Pilkington stressed need to demonstrate link between achievement of the Management Plan actions and the award of SDF grants. Sarah Jackson said that in future reports she would list the key objectives that the grant related

too for each application. Andrew Burns commented that Countryside Agency produce guidance on criteria that is followed by AONBs.

PLANNING UPDATE

128.(1) The Partnership considered a report by Jonathan Richards, AONB Planning Liaison Officer. Jonathan updated the committee on decisions on a number of applications tabled. David Joslin reported that although Sedgemoor had approved Rangali application against AONB objections it had been a revised application rather than the one AONB had commented on. Jonathan drew attention to forthcoming appeal in to wind turbine at Shooters Bottom, Mendip on 25th April and that in Lake District an application for turbine had recently been refused on appeal. Paul Harley is to inform Jonathan Richards of meeting with Mendip District Council and Mendip Society to discuss appeal. David Joslin asked for update on 1.2 Hide and Skin. Jonathan Richards reported that he is liaising with B&NES officers.

(2) Jonathan Richards displayed two light pollution images of the Mendip Hills showing situation in 1993 and 2000 showing the loss of dark skies in a period of 5 years. Having been discussed at previous Partnership meeting Jonathan Richards proposes that the planning group together look at producing guidance to reduce light pollution. James Bateman asked what powers we have to restrict security lights people put on their own properties. Jonathan said that there are no controls under planning system but in larger scale development it will be addressed as part of application. Ros Wyke reported that Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council has been discussing issue with Somerset County Council (SCC) and the council are reviewing their highways lighting policy. Alvin Horsfall reported that SCC are programming change to use lower power lamps.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING GROUPS

129.(1) The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson. Ros Wyke gave an update on the Strawberry Line Cheddar to Wells work. A planning application will be submitted by and to SCC within the next 6 weeks. There has been considerable discussion on the route that will involve some Compulsory Purchase Orders. Somerset County Council have given their total support. The next phase is to have a project officer to seek external funding for the implementation as the criteria for Local Transport Plans favours urban access and not rural based projects. The officer post has funding offered by the Somerset Aggregate Levy Fund and it is hoped that the AONB SDF can assist with other funds.

(2) Paul Harley asked if minutes of Heritage Group could go on web site. Sarah Jackson reported that intention was to have minutes and notes of all

the working groups on the AONB web site and this should happen shortly. Paul Harley was concerned that it appeared that Dr Jodie Lewis's idea for Mendip conference had been dropped by AONB Service since last report of Heritage Group. Sarah Jackson explained that due to the continued success of the AONB Annual Forum and feedback the AONB Service had decided to continue with the current format:

- a. as it only has resources to run one event
- b. strong community support for the annual forum
- c. clearly tied in with Management Plan delivery.
- d. the event takes place in the AONB
- e. bridges gap between amateur/community led research and academic research.

It had become evident that Dr Lewis's conference would be hard to locate in AONB due to suitable sized venues with accommodation and transport links and was targeting academics from all over the country that will result in proceedings being published that are bound to have a greater appeal to academics rather than the interested local person. The AONB Service is working with Jodie to ensure the events do not clash and has agreed to move the AONB Heritage seminar to March 2007 and avoid November when it would normally be held.

Tony Settrington reported that Dr Lewis plans to hold event at Wookey Hole same weekend as an event organised by Council of British Archaeology South West at Goughs Cave. Sarah Jackson will bring this matter to Dr Lewis's attention.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE

130.The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson. The contents were noted.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

131.The Partnership agreed to hold their next meeting on Thursday 19th October 2006 at 10.00am. The venue to be confirmed.

(The meeting closed at 3.30pm)

CHAIRMAN

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