

(22 March 2007)

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership held in Bleadon Village Hall, Bleadon on Thursday 22nd March 2007 at 1.30pm.

Present

Partnership Committee

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Cllr Ann Harley	North Somerset Council
Andrew Burns	Natural England
Kate Lawrence	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Paul Harley	Mendip Society
Gareth Withers	North Somerset Council
James Small	NFU
Cllr Harvey Siggs	Somerset County Council
Trevor Wall	Somerset County Council
Andy Mayled	National Trust

Other

Gill Davis	Cheddar Parish Council
Tim Raines	Member of public
Graham Price	Mendip Society
Chrissy Price	Mendip Society
Andy Eddy	AONB Volunteer Ranger
Penny Skully	Bleadon Parish Council

AONB Staff

Sarah Jackson
Jonathan Richards
Jim Hardcastle
Les Davies
Tina Bath
Norma Newby
Merryn Nisbet

Apologies were received from Cllr David Joslin SDC, Ros Wyke (Parish Representative), Mr Mortimer (CLA), Bob Croft SCC, Gill Hogarth (Parish Representative), Cathy Bakewell SCC Sue Murtagh, Sarah Diacono SCC, Heather McBeth GOSW, Rachael Clarke (SDF), Richard Bartlett (Parish Representative), Ian Reid (Bracken Down), Lorne Campbell FC, Brian Robinson (Parish Representative), John Agate (Parish Representative), Mary de Viggiani (CPRE), Cllr Shirley Steele B&NES, Janet Wallace, Margaret Chapman Mendip Society

CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

147. The chairman referred to the morning site visits and thanked all those involved.

148. He congratulated all personnel involved in the 'Mendip from the Air' publication.

149. He also welcomed the Chairperson of Bleadon Parish Council, Penny Skully to the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

150. There were no declarations of interest made.

MINUTES

151. The following amendments were made to the Minutes of the meeting of the 19th October 2006;

(1) 137 (3d) should read 'The trees were removed from the Strawberry Line following advice from North Somerset Council.'

(2) The minutes were then signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

137 (4) Janette Ward's (Natural England Regional Director) visit to the Mendip Hills and was very successful and the feedback from her had been very positive.

With reference to the additional traffic around Charterhouse SJ reported that she had written to both quarries concerned, although just recently the traffic had been significantly less.

142. The amended version of the draft Statement on light pollution has been uploaded on to the AONB website. There has been a good response from local MP's and John Penrose is introducing a Private Members Bill on Tranquillity in the House of Commons. The first reading has been approved.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

152. There were no public questions.

FEEDBACK FROM MORNING SITE VISITS

153. (1) a) Andy Mayled reported on the Cheddar Gorge visit and the proposed fence line restoration project to manage the grassland/scrub. The fence would run through the gorge following the roadside, hidden behind earth bunds as much as possible. Access for visitors would not be affected as there would stiles/gates provided. Stock would then be introduced to graze the grasslands.

b) Gareth Withers reported on the visit to the Strawberry Line to see the solar powered lighting that had been installed in Shute Shelve Tunnel. The solar panels have been placed on a horse

shelter on the top of the tunnel and this produces enough light at ground level to see any debris or stones. The lights will not have any effect on the wildlife in the tunnel that includes bats and many insects. There has been an encouraging response from members of the public.

c) Les Davies reported on the visit to Bleadon walk led by Andrew Eddy, Mendip Hills volunteer ranger. With the help of local landowner Terry Vincent, the village has been involved in walling courses in and around the Roman Road area. There are many walks in the area with outstanding views across the Somerset Levels.

d) Steve Pilkington rounded up the discussion by thanking everyone involved for organising the visits.

MENDIP HILLS LIVING LANDSCAPES PROJECT

154. (1) A presentation was given by Catherine Shellswell, Somerset Wildlife Trust.

(2) Over the next five years the project will work to revitalise wildlife of the Mendip Hills and help species to survive the predicted impacts of climate change by maintaining, creating and linking important wildlife habitats such as wildflower grassland, heathland and woodland. Somerset Wildlife Trust will work closely with farmers and landowners to try and persuade them to make their land more wildlife friendly. For further information view the website www.somersetwildlife.org.

MENDIP HILLS PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Local Authority Update

155. (1) Sarah Jackson reported Cllr Shirley Steel had initiated debate on lighting issues with B&NES lighting officers.

Updates from Partnership Members

(2) a) Les Davies reported that 2921 volunteer rangers' hours had been recorded from October to March. This had involved search and rescue, crime prevention, data tagging, guided walks, dry stone walling, farmlands and birds project, litter picking and he thanked Mr Connell, Mendip District Council for his assistance in this matter. The Young Rangers Scheme is proving to be a great success as is the work with Youth Offending Teams, with very few candidates re-offending. August 2007 is the 20th anniversary of the AONB volunteer rangers.

b) Andrew Burns reported that following the visit from Janette Ward, a grant of £20,000 has been offered to start a new volunteer initiative within the AONB. Sarah Jackson reported that work on the initiative would be starting in the next few months.

PAPERS REQUIRING DECISIONS OR PROVIDING GUIDANCE

156. (1) a) Paper A – Report of the Resources Steering Group Recommendation: Extension of AONB Boundary as part of the Management Plan review process. Agreed to consider this as part of the Management Plan review process.

b) Recommendation: The Partnership to agree to invite all 28 parishes partly or wholly within AONB to become Partnership members and to end parish representative scheme. Gill Davis welcomed this proposal. This recommendation was approved.

(2) a) Paper B – Report of the Management Plan review and the Management Plan Review Working Group

Steve Pilkington reported that in response to the scoping exercise climate change, access/diversity and consideration of the extension to the AONB had been raised. Steve invited contributions from the meeting for any other issues. Pressure of proposed new development identified in Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and opportunity of Green Infrastructure Plans to address access issues were raised. Andrew Burns stated that he would be attending the April RSS Examination in Public as the NE representative.

Gill Davies asked about access land – who would be responsible for putting in gates/stiles? Ann Harley replied that with very little funding it would be up to the Parish Councils to fight for it and maybe get developers involved with contributions. Harvey Siggs reported that resources are going to be difficult, already huge amounts have been spent on Rights of Way and there is a 4 ½ year back log.

Steve concluded that when the Management Plan working group meet on Monday 26th March based on the information obtained to date it was likely that the Mendip Hills AONB would be undertaking a minor review. Steve considered that the focus of the work should be on the delivery of the Plan through agreed priorities and targeted funding.

(3) a) Paper C – Report of the Mendip Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund

Recommendation: The Partnership is asked to endorse this arrangement in that it differs from the agreed Panels Terms of Reference. This was approved.

PLANNING UPDATE

157. The partnership considered a report by Jonathan Richards, AONB Planning Liaison Officer. Gill Davis reported that there had been no consultation with regard to the lorry weight restrictions on

the N. Somerset routes. Ann Harley reported that the proposal was a 6 month experimental ban of lorries other than those who have a right to be there between Churchill cross roads and Burrington Combe. JR said that they were still awaiting the outcome of a proposal from Cllr Crockford Horley. Paul Harley reported that councillors would like to extend the restriction through to West Harptree.

AONB DEVELOPMENT OFFICER PROJECT UPDATE

158. The partnership considered a report by Jim Hardcastle. The contents were noted.

MENDIP HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP WORKING GROUPS UPDATE

159. The partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson. The contents were noted.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE

160. The partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson. The contents were noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

161. There was none.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

162. The Partnership agreed to hold their next meeting on Wednesday 17th October 2007 at 10.00am. The venue to be confirmed.

(The meeting closed at 3.30pm)