

MENDIP HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
Held at Cheddar Caves and Gorge on Thursday, 19th November 2009

Present:

Partnership Committee

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Cllr Dawn Hill	Somerset County Council
Cllr Gloria Cawood	Somerset County Council
Julie Cooper	Sedgemoor District Council
Gareth Withers	North Somerset Council
Cllr Shirley Steel	Bath and NE Somerset Council
Sue Murtagh	Bath and NE Somerset Council
Richard Bull	Mendip Society
Mark Courtiour	National Trust
Janice Gardiner	Avon Wildlife Trust
Don Kinsey	Banwell Parish Council
Neville Lee	Churchill Parish Council
Steve Marston	Natural England
Richard Parker	Compton Bishop Parish Council
Keith Pyke	Bleadon Parish Council
Liz Scott	Axbridge Parish Council
Alison Slade	Somerset Wildlife Trust
James Small	NFU
Nigel Taylor	Cheddar Parish Council
Tony Thompson	Westbury Sub Mendip Parish Council

AONB Staff

Sarah Jackson	Manager
Andy Mallender	Project Officer
Mary Lou Denny	SCC Support

Others

Hugh Cornwell	Cheddar Caves and Gorge
D. Cottle	Wells Museum
Gill Davies	Cheddar Parish Council
Dr. Adrian Humpage	British Geological Survey
Chris Woodley-Stewart	Director of North Pennines AONB
Elizabeth Pickett	North Pennines AONB
Graham Price	Council of Southern Caving Club (CSCC)
Eileen Wilson	AONB Resident
R. Baker	

1. Apologies:

Apologies were received from Dick Gossling (Forestry Commission), Andy Mayled (National Trust), Ros Wyke (Westbury Sub Mendip Parish Council), Richard Sermon (Bath and NE Somerset Council), David Clark (Mendip District Council Officer), Mark Macgregor (North Somerset Council Officer), Ann Harley (North Somerset Council Officer), Barry James (Somerset County Council Officer)

2. Minutes of the meeting held 19th March 2009:

The minutes were presented, approved and signed.

Matters arising

The Chairman requested an update on the following items –

228 – Local Authority approval went through.

229 – Sarah Jackson (AONB) reported SW cycling project funding was awarded.

230.2 – Sarah also reported on the Burrington Coombe bike hire application.

The bike shop is open but not hiring.

230.13 – Not followed up.

3.0 Conclusions from the morning Annual Forum:

- 3.1 Steve Marston (Natural England) commented on what an excellent morning and a thoroughly good day it was. He thanked Sarah Jackson and the rest of the AONB team on their efforts. He felt it was very positive and asked if the committee agreed with Geopark status how would the funds be raised. Nigel Taylor (Cheddar Parish Council) also queried where the money would come from to fund it.
- 3.2 Graham Price (CSCC) supports Geo status. However, he feels it needs to be looked more in context to cover all of the Mendip area. Suggested a group to take the project forward.
- 3.3 Gloria Cawood (SCC) noted that this is not the first time this item has been put forward but felt the Committee needs to look at East Mendip as well.
- 3.4 Eileen (AONB Resident) thanked the guest speakers from N. Pennines AONB and commented that the Committee would have to maintain very clear objectives.
- 3.5 Chris Woodley-Stewart (North Pennines AONB) felt that Mendip AONB is still several years away from obtaining Geopark status should they agree to do so, Suggested the Committee needed to have an action plan, obtain a geodiversity audit and obtain the services of a geologist. Should Mendip AONB be considering Geopark status they need to keep this under review when developing the AONB team, particularly if building a team to extend to East Mendip.
- 3.6 Steve Marston (Natural England) suggested, at this point to try and develop Geopark without extending to East Mendip. If bar is set too high AONB will never get there.

- Julie Cooper (Sedgemoor DC) seconded this, and suggested gaining Geopark status for West Mendip at this point and when obtained consider going for East Mendip.
- 3.7 Liz Scott (Axbridge Parish Council) supports Geopark status and offered the Parish Council's support and services to AONB.
- 3.8 Gloria Cawood (SCC) suggested Mendip AONB might get help towards funding a geologist through a local quarry.
- 3.9 Steve Pilkington (Chairman) doesn't feel the Committee can make a decision this afternoon. He suggests the AONB prepare a proforma, seeking formal views both from organisations represented here and others which are not. If the response is yes then the AONB can work on getting a team together. This way the AONB can find out who would be willing to support and become a partner. Partners should then consider how and who they can offer to support the proposal and how will it be funded.
- 3.10 Chris Woodley– Stewart (North Pennines AONB) advised that a geodiversity audit and action plan will benefit AONB whether a Geopark application is taken forward or not. Sarah Jackson (Mendip Hills AONB) asked how much the audit costs and when did he obtain it. He replied it cost £45,000.00 and it was done in 2003. The audit is the costly item.
- 3.11 D. Cottle (Wells Museum) suggested asking Jim Hanwell, who knows about geology in area. There might be more done than AONB realise.
- 3.12 James Small (NFU) asked Chris Woodley–Stewart how much it would cost to apply. Chris replied it depends on many factors. There is no definitive set cost.
- 3.13 Gill Davies (Cheddar Parish Council) suggests a lot of knowledge is already available, particularly by fellow cavers.
- 3.14 At the end of this discussion Steve Pilkington summarised:
The Mendip AONB needed to seek more formal feedback to ascertain if there is enough support. They need to ask for ideas for progressing and fundraising. He further suggested that Sarah Jackson (Mendip Hills AONB) might consider a follow up article in the Mendip Times. An excellent article in the November edition about today's Forum to consider proposals for a Geopark had clearly been highly successful in generating such a strong response today. An excellent day with a considerable amount of constructive input from many individuals and organisations in the area.
- 3.15 *Action:*** Sarah Jackson will ask for ideas for audit and action plan. List what research and information has already been gathered. Produce follow up article to the Mendip Times and will upload the North Pennines audit for everyone to look at.
- 3.16 Dawn Hill (SCC) suggested a way to raise funds is to levy a membership fee. Nigel Taylor (Cheddar Parish Council) responded that this is already done through rates.
- 4.0 Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan Delivery Plan 2009/10 – updates from all partners and AONB Unit – Paper A:**

- 4.1 Sarah Jackson (AONB) had previously asked for updates and had received one from the Forestry Commission in advance of the meeting. Updates were therefore requested from members at the meeting for Sarah to update the Delivery Plan and re-circulate to the Committee.
- 4.2 Janice Gardiner Avon Wildlife Trust updated BA1.2.
- 4.3 Other items reported but not relevant to the Delivery Plan action are listed below:
- Mark Courtiour (National Trust) reported that the NT were reviewing goat management in the Gorge with Longleat to ensure that the grazing was beneficial and not impacting on the Cheddar Pink. Scrub clearance work was being undertaken.
 - Richard Parker (Compton Bishop PC) – dogs are a problem in the hills. Historical photographs are being gathered that may support AONB units fixed post photography work. Parish Council have been giving consideration to views out from the AONB with regard to planning applications. He commented that it was felt that the AONB Unit had not given due regard to this concerning a bungalow application.
 - Richard Parker asked if meeting was to discuss National Grid proposals. Sarah Jackson reported that it was not an item but that the AONB Planning Liaison Officer had notified all parishes of the consultation and had been in contact with CPRE, Mendip Society and Natural England to draft a response. AONB view is that the route should be under the Severn Estuary and under-grounded if a land option was pursued.
 - Neville Lee (Churchill Parish Council) reported that Dolebury landowner ditches needed clearing out as there is a risk of (causing) flooding.
 - Don Kinsey (Banwell PC) reported that the parish council concerned about Hinkley Point proposals.
 - Tony Thompson (Westbury Sub Mendip Parish Council) reported activities of Westbury Society regarding archaeological work. The P C are concerned regarding Local Development Framework proposals for 8000 houses in the area.
 - Keith Pyke (Bleadon Parish Council) reported that their historical society are producing an interpretation board that will be one of a series around the village to raise awareness of the historical importance of features including the Roman Road. Parish are keen to complete a walling project with volunteers. Sarah Jackson offered assistance from the AONB Unit.
 - Nigel Taylor (Cheddar PC) reported that the National Trust bunds in the Gorge have non native species growing on them. The Parish Council is concerned that there is heavier traffic since the weight restriction on B3134. Also concerned that

developments in Chelmscombe Quarry – buildings have been painted bright colours and paint balling is taking place in nearby woods.

- Gloria Cawood (SCC) raised issue of Somerset Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund being lost to local communities affected by quarrying. £100,000 has been available this year but SCC are proposing that it is no longer ring fenced.

Action: Agreed that Chairman would send letter to SCC requesting that fund retained for local communities.

All partners to write as individual organisations to Tony Cooper SCC.

- James Small (NFU) that ‘set aside’ land went last year is now being replaced by the new ‘Campaign for the farmed environment’ that asks landowners and farmers to voluntarily put land aside for conservation purposes. If not enough land is put forward voluntarily the Government will decide on the areas of land. Hillary Benn’s recent speech announced the need to increase food production but spent more time on explaining the intention to re-wild the countryside i.e reintroducing species. National policy on TB is now to eradicate it and not control it.
- Dawn Hill (SCC) commented on the large number of orchids that were seen this year, the low level of water courses, off road riding on Blackmoor and ‘drifting’ (illegal closure of roads to allow cars to skid) in the Gorge that had been reported to the Police.
- Sue Murtagh (B&NES) reported that their Green Infrastructure Strategy is to include ecological corridors including connecting Mendip Hills AONB to Cotswolds AONB as a priority project.
- Steve Marston (Natural England) reported that Ebbor Gorge Warden due to retire next year but no decision made on replacement. NE are restructuring office space to reduce operating costs and improve delivery. Steve is involved in Soils for Profit 4 year project grant scheme. Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative is going well.
- Gareth Withers (N.Som Council) reported local authority work to support wildlife sites into better management.

5.0 Resources Steering Group Update – Paper B:

Steve Marston (AONB) reported the Resources Steering Group update.

5.1 Partnership Review

Associate members and parish councils were reminded to return the review questionnaire to consultant David Haffey by the end of November.

5.2 Office move update

Sarah Jackson reported that the AONB Unit is still liaising with Somerset Wildlife Trust regarding Callow Rock offices and considering other office options as current facilities are inadequate and Charterhouse require AONB office space.

5.3 Development Officer post

Sarah Jackson reported that due to current SCC consultation on increments and other matter relating to staff pay and conditions, a condition that the post can only be appointed on a temporary contract due to the lack of a partnership funding agreement, together with two local authority AONB contributions to be confirmed for 2010/11, the post is not currently being re-advertised. The RSG will meet on 2nd December to consider the interim period to ensure the AONB Unit is able to deliver Delivery plan commitments

5.4 Budget 2010/11

Gloria Cawood (SCC) asked if Mendip were reviewing their contribution. Sarah Jackson replied that currently it was assumed that they were committed to contribute the amount originally agreed in the Memorandum of Agreement but until council budgets were finalised there is no certainty.

Recommendation: The Partnership are asked to note the report.

6. Management Plan Delivery Plan 2010/11 – discussion:

There was no discussion due to lack of time. Partners are therefore requested to send actions for 2010/11 Delivery Plan by January 11th 2010.

7. A.O.B.:

There was none.

8. Date of next meeting – 18 March 2010 (venue TBC)

The meeting finished at 3.50pm.