

Minutes
(19th October 2006)
Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership held in Shipham Village Hall, Shipham on Thursday 19th October 2006 at 10.00am.

Present

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Andrew Burns	Natural England
Amy Coulthard	Natural England
Cllr Brian Robinson	Parish Representative
Cllr Ann Harley	North Somerset Council
Paul Harley	Mendip Society
Cllr Alvin Horsfall	Somerset County Council
Andy Mayled	National Trust
Cllr Richard Bartlett	Parish Representative
Cllr Harvey Siggs	County Council Representative
Ros Wyke	Parish Representative
James Small	NFU
Dr Brian Robinson	Parish Representative
Cllr Roy Wills	Mendip District Council
Mary de Viggiani	CPRE

Officers Working Group Representatives

Sue Murtagh	Bath & North East Somerset
Mike Fackrell	Somerset County Council

AONB Staff

Sarah Jackson
Tina Bath
Merryn Nisbet
Jim Hardcastle
Jonathan Richards

Apologies were received from Kate Lawrence (Somerset Wildlife Trust), Cllr David Joslin (Sedgemoor District Council), Cllr Shirley Steel (Bath & North East Somerset Council), Stuart Cave (Mendip District Council), John Agate (Parish Representative), Gill Hogarth (Parish Representative), Simon Lee (Natural England), Heather McBeth (GOSW), James Batemen (CLA)

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

132. Sharon Baxter of Winscombe Business Services would take on duty of producing the minutes and would have draft minutes available 2 weeks after the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

133. There were no declarations of interest made.

MINUTES

134. (1) There were no amendments to be made to the previous minutes (23 March 2006).

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

MATTERS ARISING

Page 2, 124. (1) Steve Pilkington reported that he had discussions with Brian Robinson and the AONB office and it had been agreed that, in light of the increasing importance of the internet in accessing data and information, the AONB website would be used as a focal point. This would include highlighting important publications about the Mendip Hills as well as continuing to make links to publications on other relevant web sites. The Mendip Society and Somerset Wildlife Trust being examples of these.

Minute 118(2) – Extending the Mendip Hills AONB

Andrew Burns reported that the Merrick judgement, appealed against by DEFRA has not yet been settled. He would continue to monitor the case.

Paul Harley would continue to gather information regarding the Mendip Society proposed AONB extension area

Updates from Partnership members

126 (5) The chairman confirmed that an Environmental Impact Assessment would be required.

126 (6) Sarah Jackson reported that John Agate was nominated to be Parish Representative for Group B

129 (2) Sarah Jackson confirmed the minutes of the Heritage Group were now on the AONB website.

129 (2) The issues regarding Dr Jodie Lewis's conference were resolved and it was reported that the conference was a sell out.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

135. There were no public questions.

LIFELINES PRESENTATION

136. (1) A presentation was given by Merryn Nisbet, Lifelines Community Links Officer and Jim Hardcastle, Mendip Hills AONB Development Officer on the Heritage Lottery Funded Lifelines project.

(2) The Lifelines project aims to raise awareness of the cultural and wildlife importance of Mendips dry stone walls to landowners, residents and visitors, through a programme of walks, talks, training and innovative arts events. Volunteers are currently undertaking surveys. For further information view the web site www.mendiplifelines.org.uk.

MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

AONB Service Project

137. (1) a) The Partnership considered a report by Jim Hardcastle. JH highlighted the installation of visitor counters in March 2006. The counters are located throughout the AONB and the information is currently being downloaded for the first few months. The counters work by detecting body heat from people and pressure pads identify horses and cycles. JH commented that the major interest would be in 5 years time when they could identify trends at the various sites. Paul Harley asked how long the sensors would stay in place. JH replied, for foreseeable future.

b) The AONB Service is collaborating with the RSPB to conduct a farmland bird survey for the Mendip Hills AONB in support of the 'You and Biodiversity' section of the Management Plan. Approximately 30 to 40 volunteers will be required to assist with this survey that commences in the spring.

c) JH reported that Rickford is currently having all overhead services i.e. electricity and BT cables put underground. This project received SDF funding and is good example of how AONB work with the public and utility services. Comments were made on the excellent serviced received by Western Power

Distribution. Western Power and BT are able to claim a contribution from the regulator (OFGEN). Ros Wyke commented that Westbury would also like all cables put underground, but as yet, they have had no joy.

Local Authority Initiatives

(2) a) Sue Murtagh reported that B&NES Batscape project would be finishing in December and has focussed on improving knowledge and working with owners/farms to get bat friendly. The Dormouse project has found two separate records of dormice in East Harptree Woods.

b) Mike Fackrell reported that the planning application for reed bed at Charterhouse had been withdrawn as the costs had escalated. They would pursue with a new application for an alternative system behind Charterhouse.

c) Harvey Siggs reported that the Somerset Big Lottery Bid 'Waterlinks' project across Somerset would be televised next year. The SCC bid for the prize of £50 million is one of 6 in the final stage that will be decided by viewers votes.

d) Sedgemoor District Council had no representative.

e) Mendip District Council had nothing to report.

Updates from Partnership Members

(3) a) Andrew Burns reported that Natural England that started operation on 1st October was still organising division of areas and staff responsibilities. AB suggested that Partnership may wish to write to Janette Ward, regional Director expressing concerns that the AONB will be split between two of their areas, the former Avon area and Somerset.

b) Ros Wyke reported that the SDF grant for the Strawberry Line, Cheddar to Wells had been withdrawn by the SDF Panel due to lack of match funding and delay in acquiring planning permission for the route. Whilst invited to resubmit in November the group had decided to withdraw but will seek alternative funding this year to progress work and resubmit to the SDF next year.

RW reported that Somerset County Council are looking at traffic flows on the levels and the implications of traffic on the A371. Ros also reported that Westbury had won an award 'Somerset Village of the Year' for supporting rural life and looking after the environment.

c) Andy Mayled of the National Trust introduced himself, thanked the AONB and referred to their North Somerset Community outreach project being part funded by the SDF.

d) Paul Harley reported that the Mendip Society has had a busy summer teaching the art of scything. Ash trees in the fields near the Strawberry Line have been removed with the help of local farmers. PH also referred to the new website 'Visit Somerset' will be up and running in February. He has also been working with TMTV regarding freight routes throughout the area.

e) The issue of increase in lorry movements in Longbottom was raised. Tina Bath, Warden said that she had received complaints from residents and had liaised with the police regarding quarry lorries using the roads around Charterhouse.

(4) The Partnership **RESOLVED** that :

1) the Chairman write to Janette Ward requesting that the AONB be dealt with by one area team.

2) the AONB Service would try and find out reasons for increase and current restrictions imposed by SCC and Mendip District Council on operations of quarry and wood chippings factory.

Mendip Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund

139. (1) The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson about the Fund. The report gave a summary of the grants offered. There is currently £8330 yet to be allocated. The Panel next meets on 23rd November 2006.

(2) SJ highlighted the £2500 ring fenced for light pollution reduction and reported that criteria would be drawn up by the SDF panel and promoted in next few weeks.

(3) Harvey Siggs, Chair of the Panel reported that it had been a steep learning curve but that the Panel sought to be consistent in all their decisions and ensure that the projects funded helped deliver the Management Plan.

Planning Update

140. (1) The Partnership considered a report by Jonathan Richards, AONB Planning Liaison Officer. JR reported the following updates:

- Charterhouse waste water scheme was withdrawn.

- The multi user path at the Strawberry Line would go to Committee in December at the earliest.
- The stables at Half Way Farm have been approved.
- The single storey extension at the Star Inn, Winscombe has been approved.
- The erection of the timber chalets at Manor Farm, Cross has been refused.
- The gypsy caravan site on Banwell road is going to Appeal.

(2) Brian Robinson asked of progress on the Butcombe Trail. JR replied that he was not aware of any problems.

(3) JR reported that he was setting up a meeting in November with North Somerset Council, Forest of Avon and Somerset & Avon Wildlife Trusts to progress the Green Infrastructure Plan for Weston super Mare.

Light Pollution – Mendip Hills AONB draft policy statement

141. The Partnership considered a draft policy statement by Jonathan Richards. Mary de Vigianni commented that she liked the document and stated that a lot of road lights light up gardens and fields which are not necessary. Ros Wyke reported that she was disappointed in the document and felt that a stronger direction was needed. She requested that in point 8. the word ‘request’ be replaced with ‘urge’. Also referred to Charterhouse Centre being far too bright at night, why was this necessary? Referring to point 9 of the policy, RW suggested supporting Parish Councils by having open days on the subject. Ann Harley expressed reservations about Councils being put under too much pressure to switch lights off. Concerns were for street crime and road maintenance that is poor in some areas may cause accidents if unlit. Mike Fackrell explained that Somerset County Council would receive funding next year to look at street lighting and suggested that maybe lights could be dimmed rather than switched off. There would be more education for the planners to encourage use of certain types of lighting in new development. Alvin Horsfall suggested the lights could be changed to a lower frequency. Harvey Siggs suggested that the document was too wordy and should be trimmed considerably.
142. The Partnership **RESOLVED** that the policy statement be amended accordingly and circulated to members before uploading to the AONB web site.

Partnership Working Groups report

143. The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson. The RSG are reviewing the funding formula and assessing core priorities in line with the review of the AONB

Management Plan. The Strategic Traffic Action Group will meet in November and is being asked to consider public transport provision in the AONB as an issue. The Heritage Group met on 11th October and had agreed that the annual seminar will take place 10th and 11th February.

National and Regional AONB Update

144. The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson. The Chairman reported that the visit to Gower in July for the National AONB conference was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended and had been a useful networking experience. The conference was given an insight into the future direction of Natural England including an enhanced performance focus on biodiversity, access and landscape quality.

Any other Business

145. Tina Bath reported the sad loss of volunteer ranger Pat Ifold .TB also reported that 1531 volunteer rangers' hours had been recorded from April to September and many rangers had completed training courses. Also, the Mendip Hills AONB Young Rangers are working with Somerset Rural Youth project to produce a Young Mendip web site funded by the SDF.

Date of Next Meeting

146. The Partnership agreed to hold their next meeting on Thursday 22nd March, Forum at 10.00am followed by a meeting at 1.30pm. The venue to be confirmed.

(The meeting closed at 12.30pm)