

19<sup>th</sup> March 2008

**Mendip Hills AONB Partnership**

Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership held in Shipham Village Hall, Shipham on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March at 1.30pm.

**Present**

**Partnership Committee**

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Steve Marston	Natural England
Ann Harley	North Somerset Council
Cllr Roy Wills	Mendip District Council
Cllr Shirley Steel	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Sue Murtagh	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Gareth Withers	North Somerset Council
Janette Burton	Sedgemoor District Council
Paul Harley	Mendip Society
James Small	NFU
Andy Mayled	National Trust
Catherine Shellswell	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Ros Wyke	Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council
Gill Davis	Cheddar Parish Council
John Agate	Shipham Parish Council

**Other**

Gwynn Thomas	Priddy Resident, MBBA Supporter
Judith Porter	North Somerset Planning
Jane Briggs	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Cherry Lawson	MBBA
Richard Archer	RSPB
John Wilson	Volunteer Ranger

**AONB Staff**

Sarah Jackson	Manager
Jonathan Richards	Planning Liaison Officer
Les Davies	Senior Warden
Tina Bath	Warden
Merryn Nisbet	Community Links Officer
Norma Newby	Support Officer

Apologies were received from, Jim Hardcastle Development Officer Mendip Hills AONB Service, Matt Hamilton Avon Wildlife Trust, Trevor Wall Somerset County Council, Cllr Harvey Siggs Somerset County Council, Mary de Viggiani CPRE, Cllr Brian Robinson Ubley Parish Council, Tony Shepherd Volunteer Ranger, Barry Lane CHERT, Rob Morgan Sedgemoor Planning, Paula Hewitt Head of Environmental Regeneration and Regulation Somerset County Council, Stuart Cave Mendip District Council, Andy Tandy Goblin Coombe Environment Centre, Richard Sermon Bath and North East Somerset Planning.

The Chairman stood down as his period of election (along with that of Vice Chairman) had come to an end and handed over to Sarah Jackson, Manager, Mendip Hills AONB Service who stated that Steve Pilkington CBE Chairman and Cllr Harvey Siggs Vice Chairman are both willing to continue in their posts unless anyone else wanted to take over.

Cllr Roy Wills Mendip District Council proposed both for re-election. James Small National Farmers Union seconded the proposal.

The meeting continued with Steve Pilkington in the Chair.

### **Chairmans announcements**

182. The Chairman announced that Tom Elkin, previous Senior Warden and founder of the Volunteer Rangers had recently died and a measure of the esteem in which he was held was evident from the attendance at his memorial service at St Hughs.

183. The Chairman informed the meeting that Andrew Burns, Natural England had attended his last Partnership meeting in October and was thanked for all his support and assistance in the past. Steve Marston has taken on his role and has direct experience of AONBs having recently completed a one year secondment to the Blackdown Hills AONB as manager. The Chairman welcomed him to the meeting.

184. Jim Hardcastle, Development Officer Mendip Hills AONB Service, is moving on to pastures new from July 2008. The Chairman recognised Jim's contribution as a central figure in the small AONB team especially referring to his appropriation of major funding, and wished him well for the future.

185. The Chairman thanked Sarah Jackson and Norma Newby for the organisation of the day and special thanks to Merryn Nisbet for arranging a very successful Forum programme for the morning.

## **Minutes**

186. The following amendments were made to the minutes of the Meeting held on October 17<sup>th</sup> 2007;

(1) Public Question Time 167, final sentence should read “He stated that it was dangerous and unpleasant, especially for cyclists and horse riders because of the volume of traffic and driver attitude”

(2) Updates from Partnership Members 169 (c) should read “Gareth Withers is liaising with other groups on the Strawberry Line and the route to Shepton Mallet.”

187. The minutes were then signed as a correct record

## **Matters arising**

188. Paul Harley gave an update on cattle grids in Cheddar Gorge – a meeting will be held to discuss who owns what. (153.1)

189. Paul Harley is applying for funding as outlined in 169(1a) on behalf of a Local Action Group – Walls and Ridges

190. Signs warning of livestock on the road have now been erected in Burrington Combe by the AONB Service (172)

## **Public Questions**

191.1

(a) Jean Mulchinock a Priddy resident read a letter outlining concerns that Mendip Farmers Hunt propose using land accessed across an SSSI overlooking Priddy Mineries for stabling and kennelling of 60 hunt dogs which will cause pollution and noise. She referred to the morning talks, particularly the issue of biodiversity.

(b) Cllr Roy Wills stated that no application had yet been presented to the Mendip District council and asked therefore should the Partnership discuss the issue?

(c) Sarah Jackson AONB Manager explained that AONB has a process to follow regarding significant planning applications, the ' Guidelines for referral of planning applications'. No application regarding this site has been referred to the AONB Service and anyone asking about the proposal has been referred on to Mendip District Council by Jonathan Richards, Planning Liaison Officer. The Guidelines agreed by this committee delegate to the Planning Liaison officer responsibility for responding on behalf of the AONB. This was agreed partly to remove conflict of interests issue faced by elected members who sit on this committee and their own authority planning committees.

(d) Steve Pilkington pointed out that the Partnership had held an extraordinary meeting to facilitate comments in connection with the Bristol Airport proposal – prior to a planning application having been submitted did this create a precedent. SJ said that this was in response to a consultation document which Jonathan Richards had then been able to respond to formally.

(e) Ros Wyke asked if on this occasion bearing in mind the concern of residents the Planning Liaison Officer will respond on behalf of the AONB and Jonathan Richards stated that if there is a planning application which fits within the AONB guidelines for comment we would look at it and respond.

### **Updates from Partnership Members**

192.

(1)

Gareth Withers, North Somerset Council

(a) reported that funding of all Partnerships is under review.

(b) thanked Jim Hardcastle for assistance with North Somerset Local Action Groups funding from SWERDA

(c) Strawberry Line and other works progressing

(2)

Sue Murtagh, Bath and North East Somerset Council – no specific updates but reported that the authority is reviewing its contributions to the Partnership.

(3)

Janette Burton, Sedgemoor District Council – contributions to Partnership will be covered in Paper C.

(4)

Cllr Roy Wills, Mendip District Council – no specific updates

(5)

Andy Mayled, National Trust

(a) looking forward to working with the AONB and Somerset Wildlife Trust with the new People and Places Project

(b) NT CHIPS Project – 61 Young People Volunteered 2000 hours in the first year at 52 interpretation events.

(c) Rock safety in Cheddar Gorge is a huge responsibility for NT who spend in the region of £20k annually and are unable to sustain that level of investment. A Seminar is planned for the end of the year to discuss the issues associated with managing their part of the Gorge.

(6)

James Small, National Farmers Union

(a) Foot and Mouth has gone but has been replaced by concerns over Blue Tongue that is carried by midges. It is predicted that this will have spread across this country by end of this year affecting all ruminants. 47% of sheep who catch it will die and 17% of bovine cows die. Vaccinations are being developed but there are many types of viruses. The scale of the problem is recognised : (in speed in which they are trying to develop a vaccine\_ – it is hoped to develop a vaccine in two years whereas it normally takes 10 years to develop one.

(b) Because of the high commodity prices for grain and milk the environmental payments are not as attractive to farmers. Food products are now better value for farmers not bio fuel.

(7)

Paul Harley, Mendip Society

(a) Mendip Society held an invitation only seminar in February on the Severn Barrage attended by Bristol Port Authority, Wetlands Trust, builders and CEGB. The Government has commissioned a two year study on the impact expected on infrastructure of surrounding towns and villages. There have been other feasibility studies in the area. Sarah Jackson reported that SCC are expected to identify stakeholders to develop an energy policy as SCC also have to take into account proposed development of Hinkley Point.

(8)

Steve Marston, Natural England

(a) explained that the funding centre for NE has been moved to Taunton to help deliver a more integrated service

(b) Ebbor Gorge is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 13<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> June and the AONB will be taking part with Information Trailer and volunteers

(9)

John Agate, Shipham PC – asked about affordable housing and the AONB as Shipham are currently considering this. Members of the Committee reported that West Harptree has already built affordable housing on which the AONB were consulted and Priddy PC has an application pending at the moment.

(10)

Ros Wyke, Westbury sub Mendip PC

(a) village has committed to public street lighting reduction in response to Dark Skies and asked what else was happening. Jonathan Richards reported that the AONB have raised the profile of this issue in the House of Commons via John Penrose MP and have funded lighting reduction from the Sustainable Development Fund.

(b) expressed concern over Junctions 21 and 21a and their impact on the AONB. No one was able to update the meeting on the latest developments regarding the existing or proposed junction.

## **AONB Service Update**

### **Project Update (Paper A)**

193. The Partnership considered a report by Jim Hardcastle. In his absence Sarah highlighted a few items including The appointment of Merryn Nisbet as the People and Places Project Officer.

The Young Rangers have been awarded the SCC Team Collaboration Award and have been nominated for the Leader of the Council Team Award.

Jim Hardcastle has been awarded the SCC Individual Collaboration Award and has been nominated for the Leader of the Council Individual Award.

The Heritage Seminar and Sunday Walks day were both very successful.

### **Planning update (Paper B)**

194. The Partnership were asked to consider a report by Jonathan Richards

1.0 Ros Wyke felt that the overall sense of the paper indicated a reduction in the planning role of the AONB Service and that a strong role should be maintained

with no reduction in funding or hours. The Chairman stated that the reduction in hours is not a funding issue but personal choice and the change in the role has freed the Planning Liaison Officer to do more pro-active work to ensure that local plans and planning documents reflected the views of the AONB Partnership.

2.0 The Partnership agreed to the permanent continuation of the development monitoring procedure and approved items 1 – 1.6. Items 2–5 were noted.

### **Partnership Funding 2008/9 and AONB staffing (Paper C)**

195. The Partnership considered a report by Sarah Jackson

1.0 Sarah Jackson reported that Sedgemoor District Council have announced a 21% cut in AONB funding to £10½k. Bath and North East Somerset Council are considering a funding cut but are to meet with the Chair and Sarah to discuss this on 20<sup>th</sup> March. Sue Murtagh stated that the possible funding reduction by Bath and North East Somerset Council does not reflect the service given by MHAONB.

1.1 Due to the uncertainty in local authority funding for 08/09 a budget has not been made available to the Partnership. It is hoped that contributions will be confirmed at a meeting of the Resources Steering Group (RSG) meeting on April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

1.2 Natural England – Steve Marston stated that he is optimistic funding will be greater for us than expected for 08/09 with Core funding being secure, future longer term funding being put in place and Sustainable Development Funds of £60k looks probable. The AONB did not apply for NE Project funding. Sarah Jackson pointed out that this was decided because guidance from NE was that project funding should cover ongoing projects or where staff posts were dependent on it. Neither case applied to the Mendip Hills. Steve Marston congratulated Merryn on her appointment as People and Projects Officer and he looks forward to developing NEs input to the project.

1.3 Consideration will be given as part of RSG discussions to the possible restructuring of the AONB staffing and core funding.

1.4 Steve Pilkington pointed out that – (a) the Mendip Hills AONB Service is not a complacent service and had not received increases for inflation for 6 years, effectively achieving 3% efficiency savings per annum. The cumulative effect of

this was now being felt and (b) the Mendip Hills AONB Service is neither a voluntary group nor a charity but discharges statutory responsibilities on behalf of local authorities they having taken the view that it was more cost effective to do so through the service. The Memorandum of Agreement agreed by all the local authorities states this and commits authorities to funding and agreed processes for changing those arrangements.

1.5 Roy Wills suggested that Parish Councils be asked to make donations to the AONB and Ros Wyke expressed the view that there is no reason why not but that naturally funds are limited and she was also saddened by the local authority reductions.

1.6 Chairman reassured the meeting that all Parish Councils are invited to the meetings but their attendance is low and we need to raise our profile with them. The Chairman reported that he intended to initiate a programme of visits to PCs in the near future.

### **Management Plan review (Paper D)**

196. Sarah Jackson introduced Paper D and people went into 5 themed discussion groups to consider the objectives and actions in Appendix 1.

1.0 Following the session the meeting heard a summary of key points from each group. Sarah Jackson having collected the record sheets will consider the comments and amend the objectives and actions as part of the draft Management Plan document.

1.1 The Draft Vision and Statement of Significance were circulated with a response form for returning comments. Deadline for comments is 11<sup>th</sup> April 2008. There will be a further opportunity to comment on these when they form part of the draft management plan document.

### **Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008 10.00am – Draycott Village Hall