

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee

Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
held in Bleadon Village Hall on Thursday 19th March 2009

Present

Partnership Committee

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Cllr Harvey Siggs	Somerset County Council
Barry James	Somerset County Council
Cllr Roy Wills	Mendip District Council
Cllr Dave Joslin	Sedgmoor District Council
Cllr Ann Harley	North Somerset Council
Mark MacGregor	North Somerset Council
Steve Marston	Natural England
Catherine Shellswell	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Andrew Mayled	National Trust
Paul Harley	Mendip Society
Richard Parker	Compton Bishop Parish Council
Ros Wyke	Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council
Jane Hill	St Cuthbert Out Parish Council
Nigel Taylor	Cheddar Parish Council

Associate Members

Janice Gardiner	Avon Wildlife Trust
Jonathan Burgess	Woodland Trust
Chris Head	Community Action
Patrick Bulmer	Bristol Water PLC

AONB Staff

Sarah Jackson	Manager
Les Davies	Senior Warden
Gail Graham	Development Officer
Jonathan Richards	Planning Liaison Officer
Norma Newby	Support Officer

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Shirley Steel (Bath and NE Somerset Council), Sue Murtagh (Bath and NE Somerset Council), Dick Gossling (Forestry Commission), Julie Cooper (Sedgmoor District Council), Andy Tandy (Goblin Coombe), Mary de Viggiani (CPRE)

The Chairman welcomed Patrick Bulmer (Bristol Water PLC), Chris Head (Community Action), Mark MacGregor (North Somerset Council Officer), and Jonathan Burgess (Woodland Trust) to the meeting.

Minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2008

224. Steve Marston – Page 3 217.1 “Additional funding for Environment Stewardship Schemes is being planned for the next financial year with the highest priority to get SSSIs in favourable or recovering conditions.” Should read “Additional funding for Environment Stewardship Schemes is being planned for the next financial year to try and get SSSIs into favourable condition”

Paul Harley – Page 5 218.7 – pointed out that the letter and facts and figures he had received from North Somerset on the A368 had not been included in the minutes and he felt that they should have been.

Paul Harley – Page 6 Matters Arising – pointed out that he had specifically mentioned the Archimedes screw when commenting on forms of green energy and felt that the minutes had been edited by the Chair and Manager to exclude his comment.

Chairman commented that minutes are necessarily an edited version of the meeting. NOTE: Chairman informed later in the meeting that the wrong copy of the minutes had been sent out with the meeting papers. The draft which appears on the web site had been edited to include more on the points raised above.

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 4th February 2009

225. Paul Harley – Page 2 – question of what the initials RSG represent – he wished to point out that he asked the question because he thought that some people at the meeting would not know what RSG meant although he of course does know and had not asked the question for his own enlightenment.

Matters Arising

226. Paul Harley – referring back to the November meeting minutes – suggested that we do not employ a planning officer but rather hire one in and out as necessary.

Nigel Taylor voiced thanks from Cheddar PC for the support they had received from the Planning Officer with regard to the proposed bunds in Cheddar Gorge.

Presentation

227. The Partnership were given a presentation “A Living Landscape in the Mendip Hills” by Catherine Shellswell Somerset Wildlife Trust and Janice Gardiner Avon Wildlife Trust.

Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan Implementation

Updates from Partnership Members

228

- 228.1** Barry James (Somerset County Council) reported that he will be referring all AONBs Management Plans to Hazel Prior–Sankey Portfolio Holder for her approval on her Return to the office.
- 228.2** Cllr Roy Wills (Mendip District Council) reported he is happy with the Management Plan
- 228.3** Mark MacGregor (North Somerset) had recently joined the Partnership Committee and felt he was not in a position to comment referring to Cllr Ann Harley (North Somerset). Cllr Harley reported that when looking at the plan for North Somerset, should we highlight that although this is what we want to see, but bearing in mind the recession we may not achieve expectations.
- 228.4** Dave Joslin (Sedgemoor District Council) – nothing to report
- 228.5** Paul Harley (Mendip Society) reported on Sladers Leigh, ancient meadow owned by the Mendip Society that sometimes has problems with the public ignoring signs. However there has been hedge laying carried out there and Sidcot School and a primary school have used the site for surveys sending the information collected to BRERC.
- 228.6** Andy Mayled (National Trust) reported that the National Trust have agreed to assist delivery of 9 objectives in the Delivery Plan. Noted relevance to the Geopark status with regard work in Cheddar Gorge. The NT have planning permission for the bunds which are for rock fall safety purposes. The culture of safety dictates the large scale removal of rocks from the Gorge (at a cost of £1.5M over 5 years) which has been carried out recently along with Longleat Estates – damage to SSSI being of secondary importance to the safety of people from rocks falling on cars and people. He is about to meet with national advisers on Rock Safety. The estimated cost of £20,000 each year is not sustainable by the National Trust. He recognises that the bunds are contentious but are temporary in nature and he will involve the Partnership in discussions. Steve Pilkington asked if the need for rock removal is part of a natural process and Andy Mayled says rocks are removed to improve safety as Longleat Estates have a duty of care but the Gorge may be being damaged. There are differing approaches to similar problems on Dorsets Jurassic coastline and the Giants Causeway to be discussed. Natural England and Longleat Estates to be brought in to discussions. Nigel Taylor commented that Cheddar Parish Council is monitoring the situation closely to work together.
- 228.7** Steve Marston (Natural England) reported that the adoption of the new Management Plan for the Mendip Hills AONB has been signed off by NE. Natural England having experienced a round of redundancy are now recruiting for approximately 60 posts nationally. The structure of the Somerset Management Team is adding a new East Somerset Team to take effect from 1st April who will cover Mendip Hills and South Somerset.
- 228.8** Nigel Taylor (Cheddar Parish Council) Cheddar have adopted and sent in their reply to the delivery of the Management Plan. Sarah stated that although she had received a response from Cheddar PC it did not state what the Parish were going to contribute. Nigel Taylor responded that it should have included this and he will investigate.
- 228.9** Richard Parker (Compton Bishop Parish Council) says they have adopted the plan in principle and offered help. He commended the National Trust for the excellent care of

Crook Peak and Wavering Down having noticed that a new farmer now grazes cattle and sheep. The police have been contacted about Highway Restrictions signs – all signs and speed limits in the area to be reviewed. Andy Mayled thanked him for his positive feedback and confirmed that a local farmer now supplies grazing.

228.10 Jane Hill (St Cuthbert Out) attending her first meeting had nothing to report.

228.11 Ros Wyke (Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council) had responded to AONB in particular to Year of Astronomy re Dark Skies. She welcomed the AONB having stronger identity within parishes. Sees the Planning Officer role as important and wants to see it remain. The equestrian meeting held in Westbury sub Mendip was welcomed to highlight impact on the landscape of equestrian development. Would like to see more about access to the AONB. Sarah reported that she had not received the response from the parish council.

AONB Service Update

229

Partnership Project Update – Paper A – Gail Graham Development Officer

229.1 Steve Marston commented on a good clear report.

229.2 Richard Parker – 1.3 – S W Off-road cycling project – Will it raise the profile of the Strawberry Line? What impact will there be on the surrounding areas? Will there be bike damage? Gail Graham replied that

- There is awareness of possible problems within the AONB
- We are one of 14 protected landscapes within the bid with specific user groups in mind
- Quieter roads will be mapped to encourage use
- Certain routes for certain times of the year
- Steer away from circular routes

Steve Marston asked if there is news of whether or not we are successful. Gail replied that the RDP had received 50 applications and short-listed to 6 and this is one of them. A detailed bid will be submitted by the end of the month then at the end of April there will be a result – £12m to be divided. Ros Wyke asked if the bid is purely for mapping and will areas where there are no paths be identified. Gail replied that the gaps should become more obvious as a result of mapping over the 3year project.

The Partnership noted the report.

230

Planning Update Paper B – Jonathan Richards Planning Liaison Officer

230.1 Details of the 20 Planning Applications referred to the AONB over the previous 6 months are on the web site along with comments made by the AONB on approximately 6.

230.2 Burrington Combe bike hire centre application has been withdrawn.

230.3 National and Regional Local Consultations – The National Association of AONB's is actively responding to government consultations. It is important that the Mendip Hills AONB continue to support the NAAONB by contributing to the process.

230.4 South West Protected Landscapes Forum work is also supported by us. Currently working on Regional Planning Guidance on Equestrian Development following regional and local meetings attended by Frances Clayton from SE England that were organised by us.

230.5 The Equestrian Development seminar arranged by Jonathan recently and attended by Frances Clayton have had encouraging feedback from land and horse owners who expressed willingness to adopt the recommended changes for pasture management

Transport

230.6 The AONB Strategic Transport Group (STG) held a well attended meeting on 10th February to discuss the North Somerset Council A368 temporary weight restriction.

230.7 North Somerset will be reviewing data provided by North Somerset, Bath and NE Somerset and Somerset County Council to support their decision which may be

- To abandon the weight restriction
- To continue monitoring for 18 months with the weight restriction in place
- To permanently adopt the weight restriction

230.8 Ros Wyke thanked Jonathan for arranging the STG as it had been beneficial. RW and others in the Cheddar Valley were trying to get an understanding of where SCC traffic counts take place and have written as a group to SCC to ask for details. There appear to be reduced number of HGVs but larger vehicles with less knowledge of roads causing considerable concern. Lack of available figures on vehicle counts was of concern to others at the meeting

230.9 The meeting discussed whether the STG should meet to discuss this issue again. Sarah Jackson said that although the AONB brings groups together in STG for discussion AONB has limited influence on local authorities as AONB Manager not at an officer level which is able to influence decision makers in local authorities. The AONB STG is a supplement meeting but seems unnecessary when there is already a forum set up especially when resources are tight for the AONB unit and when it needs to prioritise to ensure it delivers work agreed with the funding partners.

230.10 Ann Harley who is on the Freight Partnership agreed and said that whatever decision of the 3 options is taken it has to move forward. She suggested that the Freight Partnership could hold a bigger meeting to involve other interested parties. The AONB Service is represented on the Freight Partnership and does make views of AONB Partnership members known.

230.11 Richard Parker suggested that as there is discontent with the pilot it should be registered for example via a letter saying that Partnership Committee members are concerned about the pilot and have raised the matter at this Partnership meeting.

230.13 Agreed that Barry James will contact Michael O'Dowd Jones SCC Highways to request figures. Mark Macgregor and Ann Harley will report back to North Somerset and will liaise with Barry.

231

Resources Steering Group Update – Paper C

231.1 Barry James reported that the new AONB Service structure will take effect from 1st April and that the RSG met on 9th February and reviewed the whole process taking into account all comments. Lessons learnt were that RSG Officers must keep elected members informed. The process had to be confidential following HR policy and processes but more information could have been communicated than was done so. The vacancy request form for the new Project Officer post is awaiting signing off before sending to recruitment team job ad should be out week commencing 30th March 2009

231.2 Nigel Taylor – added immense gratitude and thanks to Wardens who regretfully are leaving.

231.3 Paul Harley asked if equipment is being sold/auctioned. Sarah Jackson reported that Les Davies had recommended that the equipment should be disposed of as most has not been used for some time and is also over 10 years old. Hand tools are being retained. The information trailer is being donated to the Mendip Search and Rescue charity having reviewed costs and wanting to increase the visibility of the AONB. Portable mobile banners and information boards are being commissioned to use out on site and at display stands. Harvey Siggs confirmed his approval as SCC elected member to donate the trailer but would wish condition to be agreed that it includes AONB logo on to say donated by partnership funders.

Partnership Terms of Understanding Review

231.4 Sarah Jackson reported that the Terms of Understanding are reviewed every 5 years and encouraged people to comment on the paper. Comments will be considered by the RSG who will be looking at models from other AONBs.

231.5 Nigel Taylor – would hope that Parish Councils are not disenfranchised from the Partnership. Sarah Jackson commented that current structure did not appear to work as so few responses received from Parishes to the Management Plan review or Delivery Plan indicating that they are not engaged as well as they might be. Others commented that they wanted more meetings but others questioned the purpose of the partnership. Ros Wyke reported that she has attended meetings for 10 years suggested others than the RSG should be involved.

231.6 Mark MacGregor who had previously worked for a National Park said that there they had faced similar issues wanting more engagement and commitment. The outcome had been a board made up of funders, business and community with an annual forum to discuss wider delivery of the management plan. Task and finishing groups reported back to NPA Team. He suggested other models exist within Landscape Management which might assist Mendip Hills AONB and is keen to remedy non-involvement of Parish Councils.

231.7 Barry James stated that discussion had highlighted need for structure that had clear lines of decision making and communication.

231.8 **Agreed that Sarah Jackson would draft outline brief for the review.**

232

Draft Management Plan Delivery Plan – Paper D

232.1 AONB Service needs to focus on limited number of priorities to ensure delivery for local authorities and NE who fund the AONB Service. There is a need to deliver work that assists them to meet their targets eg access to the countryside, volunteering.

232.2 Sarah drew attention to CC3 page 1 Reduce Carbon Footprint of Mendip Hills AONB – looking at reducing AONB Service carbon footprint by moving office/changing vehicle. Will others be doing similar work to reduce their footprint?

232.3 B3 page 6 Geopark – designation can cover the whole of an AONB, the whole geological outcrop of the Mendip Hills or a small part of it – suggested as a theme for the Forum to include site visits etc

232.4 Steve Marston – commented that he thought Delivery Plan Tables and Principles very good.

232.5 Agreed responses of interest needed from partners by end of April as this is a partnership delivery plan looking for partners to indicate what they are going to sign up to.

233 Steve Pilkington stated that this is Les's final meeting and everyone is welcome to attend the Queens Arms for lunch afterwards. He stated that Les lives on the levels and works on the hill. His enthusiasm brings people in and he has made an outstanding contribution to the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Les will still be working in and around the Mendip Hills and communicating by continuing with his regular article in the Mendip Times.

Les Davies then said that he attended his first JAC (joint advisory committee) meeting in September 1990 as Countryside Warden to Tom Elkin and now here 18½ years later which is half my working life – at my last meeting. Thank you to all members of the community and parish councils.

Date and venue of next meeting to be confirmed

Meeting ended at 12.30pm

