

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
held in Shipham Village Hall on Thursday 13th November 2008

Present

Partnership Committee

Steve Pilkington	Chairman
Cllr Harvey Siggs	Somerset County Council
Barry James	Somerset County Council
Sue Murtagh	Bath and NE Somerset Council
Cllr Shirley Steel	Bath and NE Somerset Council
Cllr Roy Wills	Mendip District Council
Cllr Dave Joslin	Sedgmoor District Council
Catherine Shellswell	Somerset Wildlife Trust
James Small	NFU
Roy Jones	Winscombe/Sandford Parish Council
Richard Parker	Compton Bishop Parish Council
Ros Wyke	Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council
Steve Marston	Natural England
Paul Harley	Mendip Society
Cath Shellswell	Somerset Wildlife Trust

AONB Staff

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

Others

Janice Gardiner	Avon Wildlife Trust
Samantha Patten	Countryside Management Degree Student
Graham Livings	AONB Resident – Milton Hill
Nigel Taylor	AONB Resident – Cheddar

Apologies

Apologies were received from Dick Gosling (Forestry Commission), Stuart Cave (Mendip District Council), Julie Cooper (Sedgmoor District Council), Gareth Withers (North Somerset Council), Cllr Anne Harley (North Somerset), Sir David Wills (Country Land and Business Association), Tina Bath (Mendip Hills AONB Service Warden)

The Chairman welcomed Gail Graham the new Development Officer, Mendip Hills AONB Service and Janice Gardiner (Avon Wildlife Trust) to the meeting.

Minutes of the meeting held on 30th July 2008

213. The Minutes were presented, approved and signed as a true record.

Matters arising

214. There were no matters arising.

Presentation

215 The Partnership were given a presentation by Dick Hyde, Trustee of the Bristol Children's Help Society, on Barton Camp Children's Centre near Winscombe. The Centre is used by Foundation, Primary and Secondary Schools as a Field Study Centre with the primary objective of the society being to support children aged 4–11 by providing free and subsidised study/respite breaks which give positive experiences. The Children's Centre finds £60000pa from voluntary income as they receive no funding from local, regional national or European government. They appeal to public and community groups, charitable trusts and local businesses for annual funding. They are supported by the National Lottery through the big lottery fund and Mendip Hills AONB Service has granted £1000 via the Sustainable Development Fund for the creation of a "Wild Walk" Nature Trail by Adrian Boots.

Public Questions

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216.1 The chairman took a question from Nigel Taylor – referring to the Management Plan Mr Taylor expressed his thanks to Sarah Jackson Manager of the AONB Service and her team for the time and diligence they put in to the delivery of the Management Plan. He thanked and congratulated Les and Tina the AONB wardens for their service to the farmers and community. He asked if more funding is needed to secure delivery of the management plan and the chairman suggested that his question could be answered under AONB Management Plan Implementation.

216.2 The chairman took a question from Graham Livings – Mr Livings endorsed the above comments. He asked what the AONB is doing about the unacceptable development near Milton Hill which includes paint balling and use of quad bikes. Jonathan Richards, Planning Liaison officer for the AONB explained the AONB role is keeping a watching brief with a request to the Mendip District Council officer to bear in mind that the area is within the AONB. Paul Harley pointed out that no planning application had yet been received for the development at Milton Hill and the Chairman commented that when landowners operate within the planning system it generally works well but it is unregulated activity that causes most anxiety. Further discussion took place regarding the roles of AONBs and local authorities. Sarah Jackson pointed out that whilst the Planning Liaison Officer furnishes the local authorities with information it is not appropriate or necessary for the AONB to duplicate local authorities planning responsibilities. Furthermore Natural England's funding for the Planning Liaison Officer post of 75% is for the post to influence policy and is not to take on role of development control. The Partnership had agreed that the Planning Liaison Officers time should be used to influence policy by responding to consultation on local, regional and national strategies eg the Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Frameworks. Ros Wyke suggested that the role of the Planning Liaison Officer regarding planning applications might be revisited when the Local Development

Frameworks emerge to see if policies in them are protecting the AONB adequately from inappropriate development.

Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan Implementation

Updates from Partnership Members

217

- 217.1 Steve Marston (Natural England) reported that Natural England is launching a refreshed corporate strategy as it is now just over two years old. The emphasis to be on the environment for the people. Natural England have experienced redundancies due to pressures on resources. Additional funding for Environment Stewardship Schemes is being planned for the next financial year with the highest priority to getSSSis in favourable or recovering conditions. The target is for 95% in 2010 currently 84% in the South West with the AONB above 84% already. The AONB and Partnership Committee members are seen as key delivery mechanisms NE wish to secure a two year funding commitment made more formal through the use of legally enforceable MOAs between LAs and NE rather than remaining as “gentleman’s agreement”
- 217.2 Paul Harley (Mendip Society) reported that the Mendip Society is appointing a new Chairman next spring. Mendip Society has been represented at the Severn Barrage meetings and he has worked closely with the AONB on the Management Plan. Walks and talks for Mendip Society members are continuing.
- 217.3 Janice Gardiner (Avon Wildlife Trust) reported that the Living Landscapes Project had started August 2008. Working with farmers and landowners via agri-environment schemes the focus is on Chew Valley grasslands. A report was circulated at the meeting. Work is continuing towards the Mendip escarpment which hopefully will be reached by next year when working groups will be set up with Somerset Wildlife Trust.
- 217.4 Cath Shellswell (Somerset Wildlife Trust) reported that the reserves are going well and that agri environment schemes are being considered. The Living Landscapes Project will move to the Shipham area over the next 6 months and the east side of the AONB next financial year.
- 217.5 Sue Murtagh (Bath and North East Somerset Council) reported that the dormice project has now ended and a final report with specific information for the AONB project area will be sent to Sarah on CD. Additional funding is being sought to continue the work.
- 217.6 Richard Parker (Compton Bishop Parish Council) reported that cattle grazing on Wavering Down seems to be working well and he has noticed an increase in the groups of children on the hill from Barton Camp and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.
- 217.7 Cllr Harvey Siggs (Somerset County Council and Mendip District Council) reported that SCC involvement with the Regional Spatial Strategy progresses forward. MDC will maintain AONB funding though with increasing difficulty.
- 217.8 Cllr David Joslin (Sedgemoor District Council) reported a £1m funding gap for Sedgemoor District Council, a difficult situation for them to be in.

217.9 Ros Wyke (Westbury sub Mendip Parish Council) reported that the Dark Skies trial of lights off in the village is continuing. She referred the meeting to Paper A reference to English Heritage work on the villages architecture. The Westbury Sociey has carried out glow worm and owl surveys. The North Somerset weight restriction on the A368 has caused considerable concern because of the impact on the A371 this summer.

217.10 James Small (National Farmers Union) reported that Blue Tongue is spreading through Europe and that a voluntary vaccination scheme is continuing here. A new strain has developed for which there is no vaccination. Crop prices are down on farm gates despite prices up in shops. Farmers are to be charged for recycling that is likely to result in farmers returning to practice of burying waste on land. European directives have banned some pesticides despite the fact that farmers are using them in a controlled way and they are known to work well.

James was interested to hear that Natural England are increasing the funding for Higher Level Stewardship and Entry Level Stewardship. Priddy Parish Council has had to postpone its affordable housing project due to withdrawl of land by owner due to planning difficulties.

AONB Servcie Update

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Partnership Project Update – Paper A

218.1 The report was given by Sarah Jackson who added some information to section 1.2 of the report: due to additional funding from Natural England a Ranger training day and practical training is being considered as part of the People and Places Project programme for 2009

218.2 The SDF will hopefully remain at the £65k level for 2009/10 subject to partner contributions.

218.3 The Chairman expressed thanks to Cllr Harvey Siggs for chairing the SDF Grant Panel and his delight at the range of innovative projects that the committee had been able to support through the SDF.

The Partnership noted the report.

Planning Update Paper B

218.4 Ros Wyke thanked Jonathan Richards for the report and asked what progress and actions followed the Equestrian conference held by SWPLF. Jonathan reported that the SWPLF are now –

- building on the work to produce generic regional guidance based on SE model and
- holding local events to highlight to horse and landowners the impact of equestrian development on wildlife and the landscape

218.5 Ros Wyke asked if there is a timescale for proposals on the loopholes in planning law and Jonathan reported that there could be proposals as soon as next year.

218.6 Ros Wyke then thanked Jonathan for the large part he has played in taking these concerns forward.

- 218.7 Paul Harley gave some facts and figures on the North Somerset survey of traffic on the A368 reporting on the reduction of HGV movements along the A368 and through Burrington Combe. Surveys have been undertaken in July and October 2008 at 3 different locations.
- 218.8 Nigel Taylor said that Cheddar Parish Council are concerned at the results
- 218.9 The Chairman pointed out that the survey is still in progress and that it would be unwise to take a view before the survey is complete and only using the data from North Somerset.
- 218.10 Ros Wyke commented that CPRE are about to produce a new map of light pollution and asked if the AONB will respond to it. Jonathan confirmed that light pollution is a priority for the AONB and that when CPRE have made the map available responses via the Partnership will be made.
- 218.11 Sarah Jackson added that the next AONB quarterly newsletter will have a feature on Dark Skies and that 2009 is Year of Astronomy.

The Partnership noted the report.

Draft Management Plan 2009–2014 – Paper C

219

- 219.1 The Chairman reminded the Partnership that the Management Plan had been well discussed at the July Meeting had been the subject of extensive consultation and significant feedback from partnership members and others. The purpose today was to approve the final draft Management Plan.
- 219.2 Sarah Jackson reported that the responses received were discussed by the Management Plan Working Group and the plan amended accordingly followed by editing to ensure that it was a readable informative public document. Information from the Drivers for Change section that had been edited would be included in the State of the AONB web based report.
- 219.3 Sarah Jackson and Gail Graham are responsible for the Delivery Plan i.e. where, what, when.
- 219.4 Ros Wyke asked for additional explanation of the Delivery Plan. Sarah explained that partners would be contacted between now and March to agree what they were each going to commit to in terms of work and funding to assist the delivery of the Management Plan for 2009/10. This would be reported back to the Partnership at the March meeting.
- 219.5 Steve Marston added that the process and format for the Delivery Plan was excellent and thanked Sarah and the working group for their work
- 219.6 Paul Harley added his sincere thanks to Sarah and her team.
- 219.7 Sarah also thanked Paul for the time he volunteered to the working group
- 219.8 The Chairman asked the Partnership to recommend the Management Plan to the local authorities for adoption.

The Partnership recommended the Management Plan 2009–2014

Extra Updates

220

- 220.1 Nigel Taylor asked for comments on the structure review and the chairman explained that the statement handed to the meeting can not be commented on further at this stage.

Items for Information

221

National and Regional Update – Item 1

The Partnership noted the report.

AOB

222

- 222.1 Steve Marston had received a thank you letter from the Vietnamese Group who recently visited the AONB
- 222.2 Paul Harley commented on different forms of “Green energy” he had been reading about in use in other protected areas that did not impact on the landscape. Water powered archimedes screws had been used in Derbyshire and referred members to www.h2ope.co.uk or www.torrshydro.co.uk. Harvey Siggs mentioned the Mendip Micro Hydro Group.
- 222.3 Graham Livings asked if modus operandi were in place for oil licenses but no one at the meeting knew.
- 222.4 Nigel Taylor invited the Partnership to visit Westbury Quarry – SSSI – in Spring 09 and this will be arranged through Sarah.
- 222.5 Ros Wyke suggested timing the visit after the outstanding planning application has been settled.
- 222.6 Sarah Jackson commented that there can be a Partnership day out to the quarry which will complement the Mendip Hills Living Landscapes Project and Biodiversity Action Plan.
- 222.7 Les Davies congratulated Tina Bath on becoming the National Lady Hedge Laying Champion.
- 222.8 Les also mentioned the Vietnamese group had visited Fernhill Farm (part funded by SDF) and that a 50+ strong group from the Environment Agency will be visiting Fernhill Farm in the near future.
- 222.9 Les reported that the Gorgeous Walks Festival raised £850 for Volunter Rescue organisations on the Mendip Hills
- 222.10 The Chairman asked that anyone who had received a Partnership Satisfaction Survey Questionnaire from Somerset County Council to please return it. Over 100 have been sent, he thanked those who had already returned it and encouraged other recipients to complete and forward any outstanding as only a limited number had been returned to date.

Date of Next Meeting

- 223 Thursday 19th March 2009 – venue to be decided.

The meeting finished at 12.15pm