

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership
Minutes of meeting of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership
held in Draycott Village Hall on Wednesday, 30th July at 10am.

Present

Partnership Committee

Cllr Harvey Siggs	Somerset County Council
Cllr Anne Harley	North Somerset Council
Gareth Withers	North Somerset 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
Trevor Wall	Somerset County Council
Catherine Shellswell	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Andy Mayled	National Trust
Lorne Campbell	Forestry Commission
James Small	NFU
Sir David Wills	Country Land and Business Association
Barry Lane	Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council
Gill Davies	Cheddar Parish Council
Terry Andrews	Rodney Stoke Parish Council
Roy Jones	Winscombe/Sandford Parish Council
Richard Parker	Compton Bishop Parish Council

AONB Staff

Sarah Jackson	Manager
Les Davies	Senior Warden
Jim Hardcastle	Development Officer
Tina Bath	Warden
Merryn Nisbet	People and Places Officer

Others

John Burgess	Woodland Trust
Chris Stephens	Dry Stone Walling Association
Gwynn Thomas	Priddy Resident

Apologies

Apologies were received from Steve Pilkington (Partnership Chairman), Steve Marston (Natural England), Mary de Viggiani (CPRE), Dick Gossling (Forestry Commission), Colin Davis (Aggregate Industries), Paul Harley (Mendip Society), Ros Wyke (Westbury-sub-Mendip Parish Council), Stuart Cave (Mendip District Council), Julie Cooper (Sedgmoor District Council).

In the absence of Steve Pilkington, Cllr Harvey Siggs took the Chair.

Minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2008

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

Matters arising

198. There were no matters arising.

Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan Implementation

Updates from Partnership Members

199

- 199.1 Cath Shellswell (Somerset Wildlife Trust) reported that they now have 2 additional members of staff on the Mendips, and are continuing in the development of the nature reserves, and promoting volunteering.
- 199.2 Andy Mayled (National Trust) reported that the current 2 year Community Heritage and Interpretation Project (CHIPS) is now coming to an end. The Project Officer had to leave early. Lessons had been learned – particularly regarding the pros and cons of getting young people involved in the countryside. Andy mentioned the issue of building sustainability to continue the work started by the project. The Trust wardens will take on some of this work. Future Partnership meetings will be updated on progress.
- 199.3 (a) James Small (NFU) mentioned that the vaccinations project for Blue Tongue is going well nationally.
(b) On the question of TB, James reminded the meeting that the Secretary of State had said that a badger cull would not be introduced. The industry is not happy – there may be a legal challenge on this. In 2007 40,000 cattle were destroyed nationally on account of TB.
In response to a question from Cllr Roy Wills, James remarked that there was a policy of non-cooperation with government, in light of the current viewpoint. Farmers were concerned at the Government's insistence on taking a scientific viewpoint, rather than observing the facts on the ground.
- 199.4 Richard Parker (Compton Bishop PC) reported that a new project of a weekend of guided walks would take place in September.
- 199.5 The Chairman welcomed Sir David Wills to his first meeting, as a representative of the Country Land and Business Association.
- 199.6 (a) Sue Murtagh (Bath and NE Somerset Council) referred to the current financial difficulties. There has been a £5,000 cut in funding this year, but thankfully a further cut is not expected in future years. This point was underlined by Cllr Shirley Steel.
(b) The Dormouse Project is coming to a close this autumn. 2 events are planned – a celebration event in Chew Valley on 18th September and an event for Dormouse specialists on 21 Oct. She commented that though there was evidence of dormice, not many had actually been found.

- 199.7 (a) Gareth Withers (North Somerset Council) reported on the Strawberry Line. The surfacing is now finished between the A 38 and the Millennium Green at Winscombe. They are now working on the boundary of the St Monica's Trust property, a large Care Home facility being created in Sandford. The Trust will lease to a local community group (the Sandford Station Museum Group) the station buildings they are restoring, for a project on the station and the history of the Strawberry Line. Lots of people have come forward with memorabilia for the museum. Items should be passed to Gareth or Anne.
- (b) The Council is also working with a company who are offering to help with creating a website for the Strawberry Line.
- (c) Leaflets for cyclists (Cycle West) were made available to those at the meeting.

Chairman's Remarks

- 200 Cllr Harvey Siggs reported on the increasingly grim outlook as Somerset County Council's budget is tightened. There is still a strong expectation by Government that expenditure will be reduced. Fuel surcharges are impacting all local government budgets. Significant contractors are not going to deliver on some construction sites. Some plans for schools, infrastructure and affordable housing will be put on hold unless other funds are diverted. Social and adult care is a key issue at County Council level, and this is becoming more and more difficult to sustain. The next eighteen months are going to be very tough, and if there is a change of government it is already known there will be no new money. There is a new white paper about the Third Sector, but it is likely that these new initiatives will not be funded. Cllr Siggs commented on the 106 agreements that this is starting to move through although some development sites are being closed indefinitely due to downturn in the housing market.
- 201 Cllr Roy Wills raised the matter of a rumour that £15,000 of local funds has been granted to support the Tour de France. The Chairman refuted this, but commented that the issue of an undecided amount of funding had been raised in relation to the Tour of Britain cycle race as it moved through the area.
- 202 Regarding the matter of government funding, Cllr Harley commented that similar issues existed in N Somerset, and endorsed the comments made by the Chairman. She also remarked that the maintenance of local amenities was vital, especially in a climate where people are taking fewer holidays abroad.
- 203 Richard Parker (Compton Bishop PC) asked whether putting some larger developments on hold will cause a greater pressure on small rural communities as smaller sites are developed. Also raised concern regarding impact on low cost housing schemes. The Chairman commented that whereas the figure of 23,000 new dwellings previously proposed by Government for the South West was probably sustainable, the current proposal of around 31,000 to 35,000 new dwellings for the region was not. Occasional builders might look at smaller local developments, but in his view this would not be widespread. The outlook for young people, in particular, is bleak. Cllr Harley commented that in N Somerset they were trying to protect the villages, with only very small developments (eg 4 houses). She referred to an appeal to Government against expected numbers of new homes, as a result of which Government simply increased the numbers. She also referred to Portishead and Long Ashton as the areas most affected by proposed

developments, and to efforts to have the Portishead to Bristol railway line reinstated to create infrastructure.

Partnership Project Update including SDF – Paper A

204

- 204.1 Jim Hardcastle presented this Update with a few brief comments.
- 204.2 The Chairman then took the opportunity to record the Partnership's thanks to Jim, who has now concluded his time as Development Officer for the Mendip Hills AONB, especially noting his input regarding the AONB SDF fund. Sarah Jackson then read a very complimentary note of thanks for Jim's work over several years, touching on a wide range of projects, and made a presentation to him from the Partnership.
- 204.3 The meeting noted the Report, and there were no questions.

Partnership Funding 2008/9 and AONB Service Update – Paper B

205

- 205.1 Sarah Jackson then presented her Report, stressing adjustments that would have to be made to meet budget strictures.
- 205.2 On the matter of staff recruitment, Sarah reported that there was an expectation that it would be possible to offer the appointment of Development Officer to a suitable candidate in the very near future. A suitable candidate had already been found to cover six months' maternity leave for the People and Places post.
- 205.3 The Partnership noted the Report, and raised certain questions.
- 205.4 In a reply to a question from James Small about Callow Rock, Cath Shellswell mentioned that a decrease in current use of a building on the Callow Rock site by quarry company would free up space for the relocation of part of the Somerset Wildlife Trust from Chancellors Farm, as well as better accommodation for the Mendip Hills AONB. Advantages would include more room for volunteers and Broadband access.
- 205.5 Following a question from Cllr Roy Wills, some discussion ensued regarding requests for funds from local parish councils to support AONB Service costs. The general feeling amongst the parish representatives was that requests for payments into a 'general fund' were less manageable than requests for specific projects.

Draft Management Plan 2009–2014 – Paper C

- 206 The Chairman pointed out that the task today was to approve that the paper be passed on, not to attempt to rewrite it. He then asked the meeting for general comments.

General comments

207

- 207.1 Gwynn Thomas, a resident of Priddy, requested that a statement be included regarding vulnerable road users, specifically horse riders and cyclists. He raised the need for an awareness campaign and code of conduct for drivers, and expressed concern at the possibility that the Mendips might be an area used by the police as a 'pace and chase' training zone. He will give a written record for the consultation.
- 207.2 Cllr Harley reported on behalf of Paul Harley regarding ref 4.2.7. The new management plan does not reflect the Partnership support regarding the areas of natural beauty

adjacent to the AONB to be included in the AONB. Sarah explained that although the Mendip Society had presented a report outlining a proposed extension area to Partnership funding partners there had been no formal endorsement of this by the Partnership as the Natural England criteria for review of AONB boundaries and new designations of AONBs is awaited. Until This is known it is not feasible to consider the extension of the area of the Mendip Hills AONB proposed by the Mendip Society. The Draft Management Plan includes an objective and action to consider this matter when producing the criteria and detailed funding associated with it. Cllr Harley registered her concern that insensitive development might already have happened by the time decisions were reached regarding designation.

- 207.3 James Small pointed out that, at item 4.4.12, 650 years would be a more appropriate figure for the history of the Priddy Sheep Fair. This was accepted.

The Chairman then asked for comments on the Report section by section.

208

- 208.1 Section 2: Barry Lane (Westbury PC) and Richard Parker (Compton Bishop PC) commented on the need to focus on the whole environment, not just the land, eg the sky. This included 'dark skies', and low flying aircraft. The Chairman once more mentioned the need for such comments to be returned by the parish councils once the Draft was circulated for public comment.
- 208.2 Section 3.5.1: Cllr Shirley Steel asked whether there had been contact with anyone on the parish plans? Sarah recognised that there should be more proactive involvement with the parishes on this and this would be programmed in to the Planning Liaison Officer time.
- 208.3 Sarah updated the meeting with the news that the Planning Liaison Officer Jonathan Richards hours will be restored to 18 per week as of 1st September.
- 208.4 Section 3.5.2: The Chairman highlighted that the Local Development Frameworks – 'place shaping' ideas coming from Government – will be an important issue.
- 208.5 Section 4: the Chairman pointed out that some of these issues may have changed by the time the results of the Management Plan consultation come in.

209 The meeting agreed that the draft Plan may now go out for consultation. Responses are due by 19th September 2008.

A368 weight restriction – Cllr Anne Harley, North Somerset Council

210

- 210.1 Ann Harley opened her remarks by stressing that consultation on this began about three to four years ago. The initial experimental period of six months will come into force on 4th Aug, and all interested parties are invited to write to N Somerset Council within this period with their comments, including comments on the impact on the A371. A decision will then be taken on how to move forward. Large permits in the lorries' windows have been reduced in size. To accommodate businesses, a restricted access will be operated. The hauliers have been represented on the North Somerset Freight Committee.
- 210.2 The Chairman commented that in Wells they were already struggling with traffic from Cheddar road as it is, and that this will get worse.

- 210.3 Barry Lane registered the regret of the Cheddar Valley parishes, of the unilateral action taken by North Somerset Council on this, apparently running contrary to the advice of the Highways authority and the police who have always tried to work to an agreed cooperative approach to solving the problem. The parishes will monitor and produce evidence during the 6 month experimental period.
- 210.4 In answer to comments by Gill Davies of Cheddar Parish Council, Cllr Harley confirmed that the experimental period was 6 months, not 18, and that the road distance in question was 4 kilometres, not 10 miles. She pointed out that notices of the restricted access were only posted in N Somerset, not Somerset, so lorries would be faced with a restriction notice just half a mile in advance of the restriction. This might cause turning difficulties. The route then taken by lorries would cause additional overload to vulnerable hamlets along the foot of the Mendips.
- 210.5 Cllr Roy Wills, representing the small hamlets, registered the view that this was an insensitive proposal. Both the Highways authority and the police are not happy. In answer to Cllr Wills' question as to who would monitor the experiment, the Chairman replied that N Somerset Council would be monitoring the areas within their boundaries, and that we would assume some local monitoring, eg by the parish councils, and also by the Highways authority.
- 210.6 There was some discussion about the routes that HGVs would take, following a question from James Small.
- 210.7 Cllr Harley closed her presentation of this matter by strongly repeating her point that N Somerset Council had been in consultation with Somerset Council and others for quite some time. Not just Banwell but the whole of the area is gridlocked with HGVs. Something clearly had to be done to address the problem, and raising this proposal had ensured that the matter was properly aired. This scheme starts with a small stretch of road, which provides flexibility – the Council would respond to the responses to the experiment, with consultation at the end of 6 months.
- 210.8 The Chairman commented that strong views had been expressed, and emphasised the need to make sure that all responses to the scheme were backed up with facts, in order that proper consideration could be given.

AOB

- 211 No other items of business were raised.

Date of next meeting

- 212 Thursday 13th November 2008 – venue to be decided.

Following the meeting, Partnership Committee members were invited to join the AONB Service at the Rodney Stoke Inn as it was the AONB Development Officer Jim Hardcastle's last day with the AONB service.