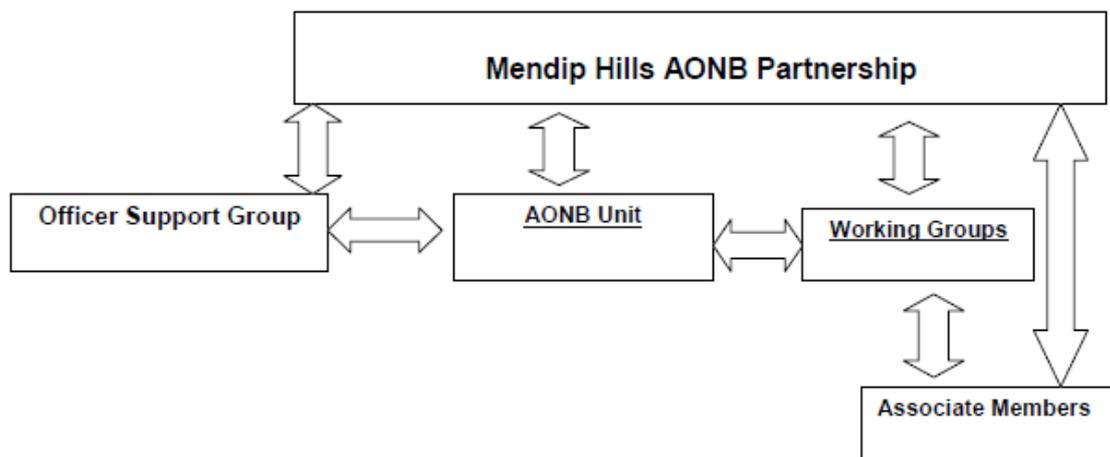


Mendip Hills AONB Partnership TERMS OF REFERENCE – revised March 2015

1. Application and Context

- 1.1 These Terms of Reference apply to the governance structure of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership:



- (a) the Partnership Committee;
- (b) the Officer Support Group;
- (c) AONB Unit
- (d) Working groups
- (e) Associate Members;
- 1.2 The term the 'constituent local authorities' applies to the five principal local authorities whose areas wholly or partly comprise the Mendip Hills AONB (i.e. Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, North Somerset Council and Bath and North East Somerset Council). These local authorities (with the exception of North Somerset Council), plus Defra, are also the 'funding partners'.
- 1.3 The Committee is set up as a Joint Advisory Committee under Section 102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to advise the constituent local authorities. The Partnership does not have executive powers over the funding partners rather it acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to the funding partners.

2. Review of Terms of Reference

- 2.1 These Terms of Reference operate alongside the identical time periods of the Statement of Intent, signed by the local authority funding partners, and are subject to review by the Partnership Committee at the same time the Statement of Intent is reviewed.
- 2.2 Subject to the agreement of all funding partners and a majority of the Partnership Committee, these Terms of Reference may be reviewed at any time.

3. The AONB Partnership Committee

General

- 3.1 The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee is the body responsible for coordinating, on behalf of the constituent local authorities, the management of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 3.2 The principal purpose of the Partnership Committee is to enable the relevant local authorities, 'acting jointly', to fulfil their duties under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CRoW Act) to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Mendip Hills AONB through the production of a Management Plan. In addition, the Partnership Committee encompasses a wider membership in order to engage an appropriate range of relevant national, regional and local interests in the management of the area.
- 3.3 The Partnership Committee's principal focus is on the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty as designated. However, recognising that such designated landscapes cannot be managed in isolation, the Partnership Committee also seeks to ensure that management of the AONB reflects, and is reflected in the management of the surrounding area.

Roles and responsibilities

- 3.4 The Partnership Committee:
- prepares, produces and promotes the AONB Management Plan, leads on its implementation, monitors and reviews its progress
 - seeks to ensure that the policy and practice of authorities and organisations with management responsibilities in the Mendip Hills are consistent with and complement AONB Management Plan objectives
 - develops and fosters partnership working with all appropriate bodies and organisations to assist in the effective management of the Mendip Hills AONB
 - seeks additional funds, including external finance, to assist in delivering projects and initiatives identified within the AONB Management Plan and for effective AONB management continually promotes the work of the AONB and engages the wider community in the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

Membership and Meetings

- 3.5 There are 16 voting members of the Partnership Committee comprising:
- (a) five elected members appointed by the constituent principal local authorities (one from each):
 - Somerset County Council;
 - Mendip District Council;
 - Sedgemoor District Council;
 - North Somerset Council;
 - Bath and North East Somerset Council;
 - (b) three members elected by the constituent Parish Councils¹ (see Appendix 1);
 - (c) one representative of Natural England;

¹ in these Terms of Reference the term Parish Councils is used as a generic term for Parish Councils, Town Councils and City Councils.

- (d) one representative of land owning and farming interests:
 - National Farmers Union or Country Land and Business Association;
 - (e) three representatives of non-governmental organisations:
 - National Trust;
 - Mendip Society ,
 - Campaign to Protect Rural England
 - (f) two representatives of wildlife interests :
 - Avon Wildlife Trust
 - Somerset Wildlife Trust
 - (g) one representative of local business/tourism interests¹
- 3.6 Each member of the Partnership committee has one vote, with the Chair having a second or casting vote if required.
- 3.7 The AONB Manager attends the Partnership Committee but does not have a vote.
- 3.8 The Partnership Committee elects a Chair and Vice Chair, one of whom will be one of the Statement of Intent local authority partners, to each serve a term of 2 years.
- 3.9 The Partnership Committee may, at any time, co-opt onto the Committee an individual or a representative of an organisation that it feels will bring particular knowledge, expertise or experience to its deliberations. Co-option will normally be for a limited, although not necessarily predetermined, period of time. Co-opted members do not have a vote.
- 3.10 The Partnership Committee normally meets twice per year at a venue within or close to the AONB. Dates for these meetings should preferably be identified several months ahead.. Additional Partnership Committee meetings may be held, at the discretion of the Chair, as and when required.
- 3.11 A quorum for a Partnership Committee meeting comprises a minimum of five voting members, of which a minimum of three will be representatives of funding partners.
- 3.12 Whilst each member of the Partnership Committee represents an organisation or stakeholder group, such interests should be considered in context with the Committee's collective goal of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. The principal role of individual Partnership Committee members is to bring their knowledge, skills, experience and expertise to this process and to assist the Partnership in the delivery of the Management Plan.
- 3.13 Local authority members of the Partnership Committee are subject to the following conditions:
- (a) All local authorities represented on the Partnership Committee should have regard to the desirability of appointing one member of the authority who represents a ward or electoral division situated wholly or partly within the Mendip Hills AONB.
 - (b) Each local authority elected member attending a Partnership Committee meeting may be accompanied by no more than one officer. The officer of the authority may still attend if the member is absent
 - (c) If a local authority elected member wishes to be accompanied to a Partnership Committee meeting by more than one officer, or if more than one officer wishes to attend such a meeting when the elected member is absent, this should, on each occasion, be with the prior agreement of the Chair.
 - (d) Local authority officers accompanying local authority elected members to Partnership

Committee meetings do not have the right to vote

- 3.14 All members of the Partnership Committee are to sign the 'Membership Accord' which sets out the role of individual members and the way in which they are expected to contribute to the work of the Partnership Committee. A copy of the 'Membership Accord' is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.15 The three parish council representatives elected to the Partnership are to reflect the interests of the parishes in Somerset, North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset respectively and to ensure that the Partnership takes account of the needs of their communities (Appendix 1 contains more information).
- 3.16 If the named representative is unable to attend they can send a substitute. If they fail to attend on a regular basis membership of that organisation will be subject to review.
- 3.17 The Chairman, in consultation with the AONB Manager, will decide whether items are appropriate for inclusion on the agenda for a Partnership Committee meeting or may be considered in other ways. Items for the Partnership Committee should be appropriate to the AONB and its delivery of the Management Plan.
- 3.18 Partnership Committee papers will be uploaded to the AONB web site and the Partnership Committee members notified of this at least one week prior to Partnership Committee meetings.
- 3.19 With prior notice to the Chairman members of the public may raise a matter of relevance at the AONB Partnership Committee meeting if the Chairman agrees that it is appropriate to do so. Matters that are deemed not appropriate will be considered by the Chairman with the AONB Unit Manager or other relevant partner and responded to accordingly.

4. Financial Matters

- 4.1 The local funding arrangement for the AONB Partnership is set out in a Statement of Intent (SOI) between the four funding local authority partners², to give the Partnership a secure financial future for the period of the SOI
- 4.2 The annual budget is agreed by the funding partners in accordance with their Statement of Intent. Decisions regarding the annual strategic priorities for this budget are the responsibility of the Partnership Committee. Day to day management of the budget is the responsibility of the AONB Manager who follows the host authority's financial standing orders. The OSG provides budgetary guidance/advice to the AONB Manager as required.

5. Officer Support Group

5.1 The principal roles and responsibilities of the Officer Support Group (OSG) are:

- (a) to provide support to the AONB Unit through the AONB Manager and the Partnership Committee;

² i.e. the four local authorities are Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council & Bath and North East Somerset Council

- (b) to agree with the AONB Manager the form and content of the agendas for the Partnership Committee meetings and the process through which the decisions of the Partnership Committee will be implemented.

5.2 The membership of the OSG comprises:

- (a) one officer from each of the five constituent local authorities;
- (b) the Chair of the Partnership Committee (or Vice Chair in their absence);
- (c) the AONB Manager.

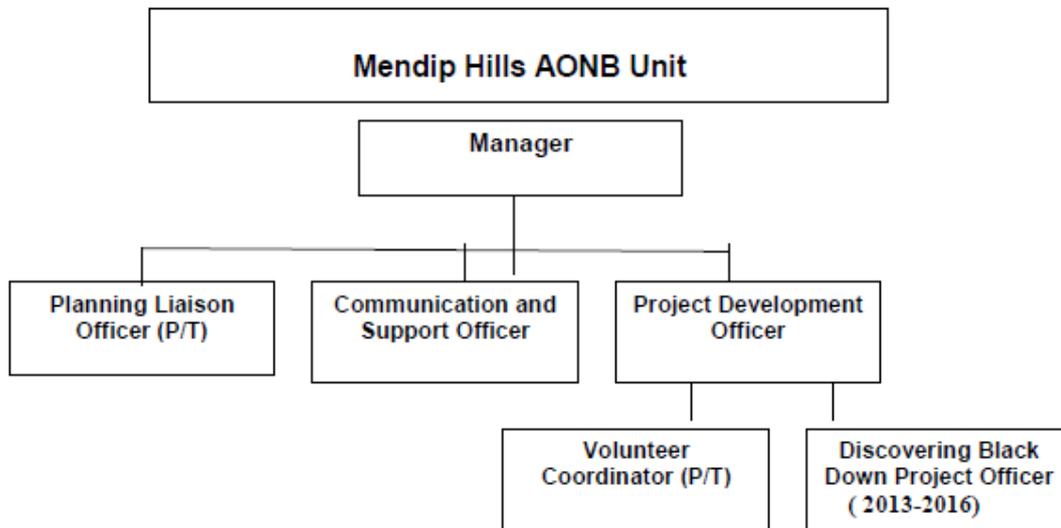
An officer of Natural England may attend by invitation

5.3 The OSG elects a Chair from amongst officers of the five constituent local authorities for each meeting.

5.4 The OSG meets before each Partnership meeting and as required.

6. AONB Unit

6.1 The work of the Partnership is coordinated by the AONB Unit. The Unit delivers the AONB core functions as defined by Defra (see Business Plan)



7. Working Groups

7.1 The Partnership establishes Working Groups, as and when required, to provide specialist advice and guidance on issues relating to:

- (a) policy development
- (b) the review or delivery of the AONB Management Plan;
- (c) project development and implementation;

(d) any other matter where the Partnership decides that it would be expedient.

7.2 The Partnerships approach to the establishment of all Working Groups is to:

- (a) facilitate the development of an inclusive and participative approach to the management of the Mendip Hills AONB;
- (b) provide a mechanism through which the Partnership Committee, Officer Support Group and AONB Unit can actively engage with a wide range of organisations, individuals and interest groups concerned with, or interested in the management of the Mendip Hills AONB;
- (c) enable the Partnership Committee, Officer Support Group and AONB Unit to access specialist knowledge and expertise that will assist in the production/review and implementation of the AONB Management Plan.

7.3 Working Groups are normally established on a 'Task and Finish' basis with specific and time-limited role with clear purpose(s) and goals. Current working groups are listed on the AONB web site.

8. Associate Members of the Partnership

8.1 Associate membership of the Partnership is open to any organisation or individual contributing to the delivery of the AONB Management Plan who wishes to be recognised as an Associate Member.

8.2 All Parish Councils that lie wholly or partially within the AONB automatically become an Associate member of the Partnership. Parish Councils are required to provide the AONB Unit with a current e-mail address if they wish to be included on a circulation list to receive notifications from the Partnership regarding Committee meetings and other matters.

8.3 All Associate members :

- (a) will be notified of Partnership Committee papers uploaded to the AONB website and are welcome to attend the meetings in a non voting capacity.
- (b) have the right to submit a request to the Chair of the Partnership Committee to be allowed to address a meeting of the Committee where there is an issue that is of particular interest or concern to them: any such request should be decided by the Chair.

Appendix 1

Parish Council Representatives and the Election Process

The Partnership Committee has three Parish Councils members, one elected from each of the following principal local authority areas by those parish councils that lie wholly or partially within the boundaries of the Mendip Hills AONB:

- (a) Somerset County (11 parishes)
- (b) North Somerset (9 parishes)
- (c) Bath and North East Somerset (8 parishes)

The eligible parishes within each of these three principal local authority areas are listed in Table 1 below.

Somerset County	North Somerset	Bath and North East Somerset
Axbridge	Banwell	Chew Stoke
Cheddar	Blagdon	Compton Martin
Chewton Mendip	Bleadon	East Harptree
Compton Bishop	Burrington	Hinton Blewett
Litton	Butcombe	Nempnett Thrubwell
Priddy	Churchill	Stowey Sutton
Rodney Stoke	Hutton	Ubley
St Cuthbert Out	Loxton and Christon	West Harptree
Shipham	Winscombe and Sandford	
Wells City		
Westbury sub Mendip		

The elections are administered by the Somerset Association of Local Councils.

Each candidate is required to currently hold a position as a parish councillor on one of the parish councils within their principal local authority area. Candidates should preferably not be an elected member of a principal local authority: it is hoped that this will ensure that those elected to the Partnership Committee are better able to focus on issues at the parish council level and give the necessary time and commitment to the work of the Partnership Committee.

Each of the three parish councillors elected to the Partnership Committee will hold the post for a five year term (i.e. through the 2011 parish council elections and on until the parish council elections in May 2015). Elections for the next four year term on the Partnership Committee (i.e. 2015 – 2019) will be held after the parish council elections in May 2015.

Role of Parish Council Members on the Partnership Committee.

The role of parish council members of the Committee is to ensure that the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership takes full account of the needs of their local communities and to improve the links between the Partnership and local residents.

Parish members are appointed to reflect local concerns and to represent the wider AONB view, not just that of their own parish.

Appendix 2 Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

Membership Accord

As a member of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee, I undertake:

- to promote the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Mendip Hills AONB;
- to respond on request to the review and preparation of the Management Plan and the Delivery Plan, signing up to key actions where appropriate.
- to champion and communicate the Partnership's vision for the Mendip Hills AONB and its communities, as set out on the AONB Management Plan and Communication Action Plan;
- to contribute knowledge, expertise and experience to the work of the Committee;
- to promote, support and play a full and active part in the work of the Partnership Committee in fulfilling its 'Roles and Responsibilities' as set out in the Partnership Committee's 'Terms of Reference';
- where appropriate, to consult with the organisation(s) or interest group(s) that I represent on relevant matters being considered or addressed by the Committee;
- to assist the Partnership Committee in achieving an independent and apolitical profile in the performance of its functions;
- to ensure that no activity or decision of the Partnership may cause any member to be in breach of its constitution
- to attend Partnership Committee meetings whenever possible and to step down from the Committee if I am no longer able to attend meetings on a regular basis.
- to follow the Seven Principles of Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership

Name.....

Signed..... Date.....