

Mendip Hills AONB Unit Business Plan 2018 - 21

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Management Plan & Delivery Plan 2014-19: <http://plan.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/>

V.2 05/2018

To be reviewed 03/2019

1.0 PURPOSE AND ROLE OF THIS BUSINESS PLAN

In order to ensure that the AONB is protected and enhanced it is essential that appropriate staffing and resources are allocated and maintained to enable effective delivery of key aspects of the Management Plan. It is important to justify the effectiveness and efficiency of the AONB Unit to existing and potential users and sponsors.

The Business Plan sets out the current position and future requirements for a core staff unit to provide an effective mechanism for implementation of the AONB Management Plan and Delivery Plan <http://plan.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/>

1.1 Context

Four elements provide the context and strategic direction for the work of the Mendip Hills AONB Unit:

1.1.1 The **Mendip Hills AONB Partnership** brings together representatives of local communities, local authorities, national agencies, voluntary and interest groups to co-ordinate and influence management of the AONB.

The Partnership has four key aims to:

- Promote the AONB and the Management Plan to all the constituent organizations and others.
- Promote the vision for the AONB and implement the Management Plan.
- Review and monitor progress of the Plan and its objectives.
- Consider, debate and recommend courses of action on the main issues relating to the AONB.

1.1.2 The **AONB Management Plan 2014-19 (and subsequent 2019 – 21 plan)**, adopted by the five local authorities, identifies the AONB Special Qualities with policies and objectives to protect them, and emphasizes the importance of protecting this nationally important designated landscape for its natural beauty and the wide range of benefits it brings society.

1.1.3 **Defra's 11 core functions of an AONB staff unit:**

| |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a) Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the AONB vision and the CRoW Act AONB Management Plan |
| b) Raising awareness of the AONB, and promoting the AONB vision and the management plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside |
| c) Advising upon, facilitating and co-coordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan |
| d) Advising Local Authorities on their activities within AONBs, to encourage them to go |

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| beyond normal levels of service (attain the highest possible standards) in countryside management |
| e) Monitoring and reporting on progress against AONB Management Plan targets |
| f) Monitoring AONB landscape condition |
| g) Accessing resources for management activities |
| h) Working with and contributing to the NAAONB activities, Participating in and promoting joint working between AONBs and across protected landscapes family. |
| i) Providing a management role to co-ordinate AONB protection through the actions of the AONB unit, the AONB partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level. |
| j) Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB |
| k) Providing landscape related planning advice |

1.1.4 Each AONB reports to the National Association for AONB statistics for these Key Performance Indicators. The figures are aggregated and provided to Defra.

1. **Landscapes for Wildlife (nature)** Hectares of land enhanced for nature through the work of AONB teams.
2. **Landscapes for People (wellbeing)** Number of people engaged through the work of AONB teams.
3. **Landscapes for Culture (history)** Number of Scheduled Monuments that have been protected through the work of the AONB team.

2.0 VISION FOR THE AONB UNIT

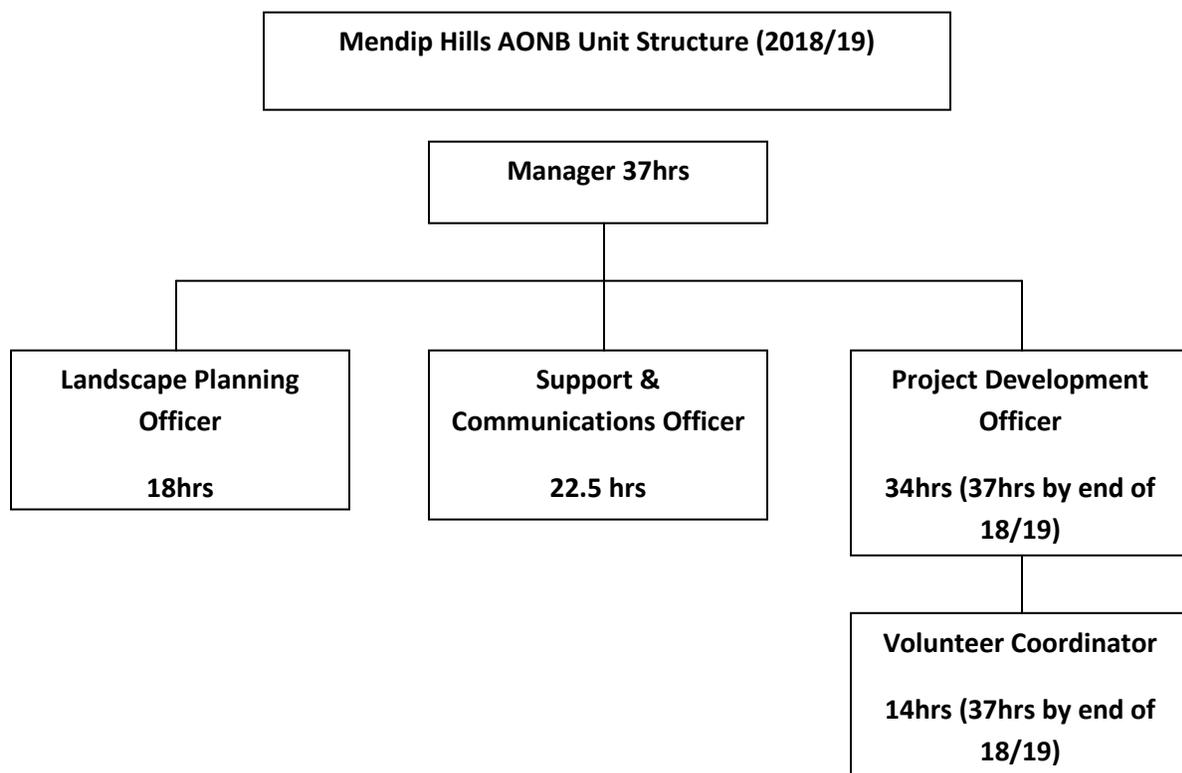
2.1 The vision for the Mendip Hills AONB Unit is to deliver the AONB management plan by:

- Engaging with people in a wide variety of ways
- Being ambitious, modern and open

2.2 Three themes run through all the roles and work of the unit to achieve the vision:

- **Special qualities**
- **Communications**
- **Volunteers**

2.3 The work of the Partnership is coordinated by the **AONB Unit**; currently Manager, Project Development Officer, Support and Communication Officer Landscape Planning Officer and the Volunteer Coordinator (shared with the Quantock Hills AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB) coordinating and running volunteer practical tasks, the Volunteer Rangers and Young Rangers. The Unit delivers the AONB core functions defined by Defra (see C).



3.0 CURRENT FUNDING

3.1 The Statement of Intent (SOI) demonstrates the ‘intent to fund’ but is not a legally binding document. It is signed by Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council, Mendip District Council and Sedgemoor District Council.

3.1.1 Defra is not a signatory to the Statement of Intent. Defra informed each AONB of a funding settlement in 2016 but is unable to give an indication of funding beyond 2020. This plan assumes the same Defra contribution in 2019-20 as 2020-21.

3.1.2 In the Statement of Intent, Somerset County Council continues to be the host authority.

3.1.3 Contributions from the funding partners;

| Organisation | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| SCC | £16150 | £16150 | £16150 |
| B&NES | £8500 | £8500 | £8500 |
| SDC | £8001 | £8001 | £8001 |
| MDC | £8017 | £8017 | £8017 |
| NSC | £3000 | £3000 | £3000 |
| TOTAL | £43668 | £43668 | £43668 |
| Defra | £156417 | £158832 | £158832* |
| Contributions required to draw down Defra £s | £39037 | £39708 | £39708 |
| Surplus | £4631 | £4590 | £4590 |

3.1.4 The AONB Partnership has managed ongoing national and local government cuts by reducing operational costs and reducing the project budget. There continues to be pressure on local authority budgets, and the work of managing activities and resources in line with available budget will continue.

3.1.5 Defra state that the AONB Government grant is intended to meet only part of the AONB budget and is conditional on match funding 25% of core costs from other sources. The current small team can be afforded assuming the contributions indicated on the Statement of Intent are confirmed, income is generated from other sources and with contingency funding being allocated to be carried forward. However, the AONB Partnership is mindful that the SOI is not a legally binding document and that it is important to continue to

demonstrate the value for money each pound of local authority contribution brings to the area.

3.2 Hosting arrangement

- 3.2.1 The current management fee paid to Somerset County Council is £7983. A new hosting arrangement is to be signed in 2018 and through this process we will seek best value.
- 3.2.2 The AONB Partnership in addition pays SCC via Charterhouse Centre: rent and services £7533 and ICT fees £3270. Total SCC hosting charges for 2017/18 are £18786 (based on 2017/18 figure and assuming a 3% increase).
- 3.2.3 SCC now pay the Apprenticeship Levy of £410 (17/18 figures) and pension deficit £9142 (17/18 figures) on behalf of the Partnership.

4.0 OPPORTUNITIES

Achieving the purposes of the Business Plan with reduced funding from existing partners is a major risk that threatens the future of the Partnership, Unit and delivery of the AONB Management Plan. However the value of AONB Partnerships and the opportunities for them to deliver a wide range of benefits continues to increase.

4.1 The Value of AONB Partnerships

- 4.1.1 In the current AONB Management Plans 2014-19 Lord De Mauley Parliamentary under Secretary of State for natural environment and science has written the Plan Foreword stating that *'AONB Partnerships have been the architects of a landscape scale approach to land management'* and that the plans *'makes the important connection between people and nature'*.
- 4.1.2 In July 2013 'The Value of AONB Partnerships' an independent assessment prepared for AONB Partnerships was produced by Land Use Consultants. The report played a significant part in securing the current four year Defra AONB settlement that saw an additional 1.2% increase on and no further cut when Defra faced a 30% budget cut.
- 4.1.3 In 2015 the report 'So much more than the view; England's AONBs and National Parks' (NAAONB, NPE. 2015) states that *'these dynamic, living landscapes underpin the economy and the health and wellbeing of society and that all these benefits come at a very low cost to the English taxpayer – at less than £1 per person a year'*. The report also states that every £1 of public money invested is turned into £10 by AONB Partnerships.
- 4.1.4 Other opportunities that will have an impact on the AONB Unit;
- Defra 25 Year Environment Plan, resulting in a review of AONBs and National parks as announced in May 2018
 - The Joint Spatial Plan
 - West of England Green Infrastructure Plan
 - Local Development Plans

4.2 New models for delivery

- 4.2.1 The NAAONB is working on behalf of AONBs to identify future models and liaising with Defra on future funding. The current NAAONB Business Plan has a priority to 'Develop new ways to generate income for NAAONB and the AONB Family', supported by the action of devising a resourcing strategy in October 2018.

4.2.2 There is a recognition that whilst project funding and delivery could be delivered through a body/structure working alongside AONB Partnerships, delivery of the core duties of an AONB Unit and the duties placed on local authorities through the CRoW Act with regards Management Plans and current Defra funding arrangement via a host local authority may not be appropriate or easy to move away from being under the public sector umbrella.

4.2.3 The AONB Unit will proactively seek new ways of funding and seize opportunities as they arise to deliver their duties. These could be;

- Mitigation from development
- Community Infrastructure Levy
- Mendip Hills Fund and visitor-giving
- New income streams e.g. event bookings, sales of merchandise, landowner payment for volunteer work
- Sharing accommodation with partners
- Joint funding of posts with partners

4.3 Volunteers

4.3.1 In 2017/18 129 people directly volunteered their time to conserve and enhance the AONB in a wide variety of ways. Collectively they gave 3700 hours of effort with a total financial value of £26500 (using the Heritage Lottery Fund value of £50/day).

4.3.2 There is increased interest in volunteering opportunities; more people attend the practical tasks alongside help in the office and workshop, at events and delivering walks and talks.

| Year | Total Volunteer Hours |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 2010-11 | 1,196 |
| 2011-12 | 1,942 |
| 2012-13 | 1,589 |
| 2013-14 | 2,077 |
| 2014-15 | 2,357 |
| 2015-16 | 2,123 |
| 2016-17 | 2,350 |
| 2017-18 | 3,709 |
| GRAND TOTAL | 17,343 |

- 4.3.3 Enabling more volunteers to help should be a priority for the Partnership. The Partnership has approved the volunteer coordinator's role to be full time during 2018/19. This should enable the volunteer rangers to rise in numbers, the practical tasks to be every week including weekends and an intake of young rangers every year, supported by more advanced young rangers.
- 4.3.4 The volunteers should be the subject of an ongoing development plan that seeks new opportunities and income sources for them and for them to generate income themselves.

4.4 Assets

The Partnership has a number of assets and should constantly identify other opportunities to meet its vision.

An asset should be something that conserves or enhances the area, or generates income or has the potential to do both.

4.4.1 Currently tangible and intangible assets are:

- The AONB Units brand for the area 'a wild land ready for adventure', supported by the website, social media and position as the only body promoting the hills in their entirety
- The AONB Units staff with tradable skills
- The Mendip Hills Fund and panel
- Volunteers and tools
- Accommodation and contents

Potential assets:

- Blackmoor and Deer Leap Reserves
- AONB Unit office and visitor centre in Burrington Combe

4.5 The Mendip Hills Fund

- 4.5.1 In January 2014 the Fund was set up between the AONB Partnership and Somerset Community Foundation. The Foundation holds the accounts with the ability to acquire gift aid on private donations, receives the applications, runs due diligence on them and supplies the applications to the panel. The Foundation takes a fee of 10% from donations for governance.
- 4.5.2 The AONB Unit promotes the fund via encouraging visitor giving schemes from businesses, events and individual donations. The Unit administers the panel of local people with backgrounds in the environment, community development and business who decide on the applications.
- 4.5.3 Since it started the fund has awarded approximately £15000 in grants.

- 4.5.4 The fund is very important as it provides a tangible link between the community and the AONB Partnership plus businesses/events that bring visitors to the area. As the fund is a separate charity it provides a means for businesses and events to donate to a scheme that provides grants to improve the landscape and communities affected.
- 4.5.5 The fund's panel is an important asset to generate awareness and new sources of income.
- 4.5.6 The fund has the potential to grow way beyond its current levels increasing the amount of awards and potentially funding elements of the AONB Units work. For these reasons the fund should continue to be a priority for the work of the Partnership.
- 4.5.7 The Partnership should aim to claim 10% of funds available to cover fundraising costs of the AONB Unit when the Mendip Hills Fund exceeds £10,000.

Appendix 1 Risk Assessment

| Risk | Action | By when | Progress |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Failure to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency of the AONB Partnership/Unit to existing and potential users and sponsors | Agree 2018-21 business plan | Summer 2018 | Draft completed |
| | Deliver awareness raising activities and targets as outlined in the activity plan | March 2019 | Monitored quarterly |
| | Volunteers need development plan | Mar 2019 | To be commenced |
| 2. Further reduction in funding from any partner seriously risks the AONB Partnership being able to deliver its obligations under the CRoW Act. | Signed Statement of Intent | Annually | Sol 2018 version agreed |
| 3. Further reductions could also impact the AONB Unit's required knowledge and skills, either through staff leaving by choice due to uncertainty or redundancy. | Signed Statement of Intent and agree 2018-21 business plan | Annually | Sol 2018 version agreed |
| 4. The AONB Unit provides independent landscape advice and guidance to assist and influence planning decisions and land management to local planning authorities and the community. This service is at risk as if funding reduces further. | Signed Statement of Intent and agree 2018-21 business plan | Annually | Sol 2018 version agreed |
| 5. The AONB Unit and the | Signed Statement of | Annually | Sol 2018 version |

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| AONB Management plan also enable local authorities to meet their 'duty to cooperate'. The duty to cooperate was created in the Localism Act 2011& places a legal duty on local planning authorities to engage constructively to maximise the effectiveness of Local Plans. | Intent | | agreed |
| | Review and adopt AONB Management Plan | Under review | 2019 |
| 6. Reduced contributions to the AONB Partnership and AONB Unit | Draft Sol (April 2018) needs signing | May 2018 | Draft distributed |
| | Budget and wider finance issues a standing agenda item at each OSG | Quarterly | Monitored quarterly |
| | Maintain active membership of NAAONB | Annually | Ongoing |
| 7. SCC ending hosting arrangement for the AONB Unit | 2018 host agreement with SCC to be signed | Summer 2018 | Draft needs preparing |
| | Maintain good relations through a variety of means to demonstrate efficiencies and effectiveness | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| 8. Reduced support for the Mendip Hills Fund | Meet and communicate with the fund panel to identify targets and opportunities. | October 2018 | Last met March 2018 |
| | Increase marketing opportunities that raise awareness of the fund. | June 2018 | New materials being sourced for summer promotions |
| 9. Funding not sourced for AONB core and projects through a variety of | Production of activity plan with targets | Quarterly at OSG | Produced |

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| <p>sources, the ability to bid for and secure funding for new projects is already an issue and this will be more difficult if there is no match funding or willingness to host new project staff. Plus the ability be a partner in bids including current bid for LEADER is at risk.</p> | | | |
| <p>10. Delivering current commitments for 2018/19 and beyond are at risk if funding reduces. This includes the Mendip Hills Fund, and the continuation of the Young Ranger Scheme, the joint Somerset AONBs Nature and Wellbeing Project. In total approx. £16,000.</p> | <p>Signed Statement of Intent and agree 2018-21 business plan</p> | <p>Annually</p> | <p>Sol 2018 version agreed</p> |

Appendix 2 Budget 2018-2021

| Budget | 2018-19 | Notes | 2019-20 | Notes | 2020-21 | Notes |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EXPENDITURE | | | | | | |
| Salaries | | | | | | |
| Sub Total | 150952 | | 144681 | | 150626 | |
| SCC Host fee (Line mgt, HR, Finance) | 7983 | | 8222 | | 8387 | |
| Charterhouse Centre ICT charge | 3270 | | 3368 | | 3435 | |
| Charterhouse C.Rent and services | 7533 | | 7759 | | 7914 | |
| Insurance | 400 | | 412 | | 420 | |
| Other costs | | | | | | |
| Office Cleaning | 1125 | | 1136 | | 1148 | |
| Training | 200 | | 202 | | 204 | |
| Recruitment | 1202 | | | | | |
| Vehicle R&M | 2200 | | 2222 | | 2244 | |
| Vehicle fuel /tax/insurance costs | 750 | | 758 | | 765 | |
| Travel costs | 750 | | 758 | | 765 | |
| Car allowances | 1500 | | 1515 | | 1530 | |
| Volunteer costs | 2500 | | 3500 | | 3535 | |
| Tools and equip | 450 | | 455 | | 459 | |
| Staff clothing | 300 | | 600 | | 606 | |
| Stationery/digital/tel | 5750 | | 5808 | | 5866 | |
| Subsistence | 200 | | 202 | | 204 | |
| Partnership | 4650 | | 4697 | | 4743 | |
| Management Plan review | 4000 | | - | | - | |
| Sub Total | 44763 | | 41612 | | 42226 | |
| Projects | 16700 | Mendip Rocks £2700 Young Rangers £2500 Community Events £1000 Community Access Works £6000 Top of the Gorge £2500 Other Projects £2000 | 19400 | Mendip Rocks £2700 Young Rangers £2500 Community Events £2500 Top of the Gorge £1000 SQ Monitoring £1000 L/Link Dev £4000 Proposed Visitors Centre £2000 Vol Development £3000 Other Projects £700 | 22200 | Mendip Rocks £2700 Young Rangers £5000 Community Events £2500 Top of the Gorge £1000 SQ Monitoring £1000 Proposed Visitors Centre £6000 Vol Development £4000 |
| Joint Health & Well Being project | 8600 | | - | | - | |
| Mendip Hills Fund | 1500 | | 1500 | | 1500 | |
| Sub Total | 26800 | | 20900 | | 23700 | |
| Mendip Hills Fund Donations | 10900 | | 13000 | | 15000 | |
| Total | 233415 | | 220193 | | 231552 | |
| Core costs (Defra criteria) | 195715 | | 186293 | | 192852 | |
| INCOME | | | | | | |
| DEFRA | 156147 | | 158832 | | 158832 | |
| SCC | 16150 | | 16150 | | 16150 | |
| B&NES | 8500 | | 8500 | | 8500 | |
| SDC | 8001 | | 8001 | | 8001 | |
| MDC | 8017 | | 8017 | | 8017 | |
| N.Som | 3000 | | 3000 | | 3000 | |
| LA contribution Total | 43668 | | 43668 | | 43668 | |
| LA contribution required to draw down Defra Grant | 39037 | | 39708 | | 39708 | |
| Young Rangers | | | 1500 | | 1500 | |
| SCC Public Health | 8600 | | - | | - | |
| | 25000 | Staff £1500 Volunteers £800 Grant Applications £9300 Mendip Rocks £2500 Mendip Hills Fund £10900 | 30050 | Land Donations £1200 Staff £2000 Volunteers £800 Grant Applications £10000 Sales of Merch £500 Mendip Rocks £2550 Mendip Hills Fund £13000 | 44300 | Land Donations £1800 Staff £3000 Volunteers £1200 Grant Applications £20000 Sales of Merch £750 Mendip Rocks £2550 Mendip Hills Fund £15000 |
| Other Income | | | | | | |
| Total | 233415 | | 234050 | | 248300 | |
| Contingency B/fwd from previous year | 51000 | Redundancy £8000 Vehicle £16000 Reserves £25000 National Trust £2000 | 62857 | Redundancy £8000 Vehicle £16000 Reserves £38857 | 79605 | Redundancy £8000 Vehicle £16000 Reserves £55605 |