



Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
Minutes of the meeting at Fernhill Farm
16th March 2017

Present:

Partnership Committee

Cllr Dawn Hill
Jim Hardcastle
Mike Adams
Ian Clemmett
Roger Dollins
Cllr Peter Downing
John Flannigan
Richard Frost
Sarah Jackson
Chris Lewis
Rob Palmer
Pippa Rayner
Cllr Liz Richardson (Vice Chair)
James Small
Cllr Nigel Taylor
Chris Westcott

Chair and Somerset County Council
AONB Unit Manager
North Somerset Parishes Representative
National Trust
Somerset Parishes Representative
Sedgemoor District Council
North Somerset Council
Mendip Society
Bath & North East Somerset Council Officer
CPRE Somerset
Mendip District Council Officer
Somerset Wildlife Trust
Bath & North East Somerset Council
NFU
Mendip District Council
Natural England

Other attendees

Cindy Carter
Andy Mallender
Kristen Lambert
Amy Coulthard
Pat Kinsella
Julian Sayer
Jo Lawrence
Becky Collier
Simon Keith

AONB Landscape Planning Officer
AONB Project Development Officer
Somerset AONBs Nature & Wellbeing Project Officer
Natural England
South West Outdoors Festival 2017
Petruth Paddocks campsite
Mendip Hills Facilitation Fund, Somerset Wildlife Trust
minute taking
Hinton Blewett Parish Council

Apologies

Liz Brimmell
Barry James
Eric Heath
Cllr Ann Harley

Bath & North East Somerset Parishes Representative
Somerset County Council Officer
Avon Wildlife Trust
North Somerset Council

Summary of Actions

Item	Item	Action	Who
8	Date of 2017 meetings	6 th July 2017 – informal social event - evening 16 th November 2017	ALL

Item	Item	Notes	Action
1	Apologies	See above	
2	Minutes of meeting held 17th November 2016	Accepted as a true and accurate record. No matters arising which were not covered by today's agenda.	
3	National Trust South West Outdoor Festival – Pat Kinsella	<p>National Trust (NT) launched the festival last year in Exmoor and it will move around different NT venues in the SW in future years. It runs from 8th to 10th September at Cheddar Gorge. All profits made by NT will be put back into the management of Cheddar Gorge.</p> <p>The aim is for this participatory event to involve many different ages and backgrounds. It will be fully ticketed – with 500 weekend tickets for campers and 1000 day tickets for both full days of the weekend. Friday will be particularly community focussed and will involve local school and community groups. The campsite is above Black Rock and all parking will be here, away from public car parks, with minibuses to transport groups to activities elsewhere. Events include fell running, mountain biking, guided walks, foraging, stargazing and kayaking. There will be talks from a range of guest speakers. NT is working with partners such as the AONB, Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Natural England to ensure that the festival delivers positive messages about the special but fragile landscape of the Mendip Hills. Local businesses are also involved, especially those promoting local produce.</p> <p>JH is on the Festival steering group and said he was impressed at the level of organisation. DH said it was an exciting opportunity for the Mendip Hills. She recommended using local parish magazines to raise awareness of the Festival and RD also suggested using local Chambers of Commerce to help to promote it.</p>	
4.	Officer Support group – Paper A – Proposal and Draft Mendip Hills AONB Business Plan 2017-19	<p>JH outlined the proposed new structure of the AONB team. The new Volunteer Coordinator, Sammy Fraser, starts next week – her role is part time and shared with Quantock Hills AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB. The new structure would see this role become full time and permanent so there will be some HR issues to sort out. Norma Newby, the current Communication & Support Officer is going part-time (22.5 hrs) from April 2017 and then retiring in September 2017. It is proposed to maintain this as a part time role without the communication element. The salary saving with additional budget from projects would pay for the full time Volunteer Coordinator post. The removal of £8000 from the project budget would not impact on AM's hours. SJ said the AONB Unit used to run an</p>	

		<p>Advanced Young Rangers Scheme but had to cut this due to lack of officer time and she hoped this could be revisited, with a full-time Volunteer Co-ordinator. JH welcomed feedback on this proposal. DH said it was an ambitious plan but it is one that JH and his team feel comfortable with so she urged the Partnership to note and accept the report.</p> <p>JH asked for any comments on the draft Business Plan to be passed to him. This needs to be considered fully by the Officer Support Group and they will report back to the next Partnership meeting in November. The review of the AONB Management Plan will begin in July.</p>	ALL
5.	<p>Mendip Hills AONB Unit – verbal update</p> <p>Andy Mallender</p> <p>Paper B</p>	<p>In the last year, AONB volunteers have contributed a total of 2,379 hours work, which equates to £16,000 in value. Practical tasks have been carried out with partners such as Avon Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, NT, Bristol Water, Mendip Society and Natural England. 3 of the Volunteer Rangers are doing drystone walling training. May 2017 is “Naturally Healthy Month” and there will be a series of events coordinated by Kristen Lambert. Young Rangers have been on visits to the Wells & Mendip Museum and the Earth Science Centre and have carried out hands-on practical work as part of each trip.</p> <p>See Paper B for updates on AONB Learning Zone, Mendip Rocks, Mendip Way and the Mendip Hills Fund. £6000 has been allocated to a range of projects in the last year – including woodland improvements in the Chew Valley (Mendip Society), the archaeological dig in Ebbor Gorge, equipment for Mendip Caving Group and helping access to the hills for groups helping those coping with mental illness. JH said £10,000 had been raised by the fund over the last 4 years fundraising badges had raised £2500 for the Mendip Hills Fund.</p> <p>Cindy Carter began as Landscape Planning Officer on 1st Feb and works 2 days a week. She has already looked at 16 planning consultations, including 1 major housing application and 4 policy consultations. She is working with Quantock Hills AONB to look at the Sedgemoor Local Plan consultation and is getting to know Local Authority Planning Officers.</p> <p>CL said that CPRE are recruiting their own part-time Planner very soon and he hoped that they will work closely with Cindy.</p>	
6	<p>National Association for AONBs Update - Paper C</p>	<p>JH said that the Unit would continue to contribute to the Landscapes For Life report.</p>	
7.	<p>Mendip Hills management Plan Partner</p>	<p>PR of SWT said the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project had been a great success but funding was due to end in August. They have a new Community Engagement</p>	

	<p>Updates</p>	<p>Officer who is working on improving interpretation materials for reserves. The Mendip Hills Facilitation Fund (70% funded by Natural England) will run for the next 5 years and aims to connect habitats around Cheddar Gorge, working with various landowners. PR thanked the AONB Partnership and Unit for all their support including the recent £2500 contribution to the Magnificent Meadows project, including improvements at Black Rock as part of the Mendip Way project. SWT have carried out scrub clearance at four reserves and are reinstating the flood damaged track at Black Rock. Genetic sampling of dormice continues, to help understand how populations are inter-connected.</p> <p>JS from NFU said it has been an interesting year as the future of food and farming policy is hugely affected by the Brexit vote. NFU has a “Better Planning, Better Farming” initiative which offers free farm awareness days for Local Authority Planning Committees, Planning Officers and others involved in planning consultations.</p> <p>N. Taylor offered to take groups of up to 30 on tours of Westbury Quarry, saying there is no charge and a tour could help to raise donations for good causes.</p> <p>CW introduced Amy Coulthard as the Team Leader of Natural England’s new Avon, Severn & Mendips Team. The Mendip Hills is a focus area and they hope to work more closely with local partners. The application window is now open for Countryside Stewardship.</p> <p>CL of CPRE hopes that recruiting a new Planner will free them up to do more positive, proactive work. They are considering sponsoring photography or art prizes in conjunction with local groups. CL has been attending an inquiry re an application for Village Green Status in Norton St Philip and is astonished at the complexity of the case and the financial cost to the local community.</p> <p>RF said the Mendip Society had grown enormously in the last 12 months. They now have a bi-monthly column in the Mendip Times. He urged people to get involved in local planning matters and felt that Cheddar was being swamped with housing applications. The AGM on 31st March features a talk about the dig at Ebbor Gorge. RF thanked the AONB for practical help at Tania’s Wood.</p> <p>SJ from B&NES is working with officers from the LEP and West of England Nature Partnership gathering evidence to ensure that Green Infrastructure is considered as part of the Joint Spatial Plan. This evidence should identify opportunities for sustainable development to contribute to the GI network. As part of WENP they are exploring a Natural Capital Trust as a way of pooling money from developers in order to create new habitats/GI Staff are</p>
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	<p>Proposal Paper D –Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan Review</p>	<p>now in place for the Bathscape HLF project that includes a pilot Bathscape Walking Festival - BaBath & beyond” which will include a walk on the Limestone Link route</p> <p>DH thanked everyone for their feedback. She is involved with the devolution process and said these reports would help to inform the LEP Productivity Plan.</p> <p>JH referred to Paper D and said that the Plan would become more important than ever as we go through Brexit, as it is community led. This review and the Plan will be the main theme of the November Partnership meeting.</p>	
<p>8</p>	<p>AOB</p>	<p>RD said JH attended a meeting of Parish reps in January and all found it very useful. The Parish reps may meet up themselves to see how they can help the AONB.</p> <p>JH paid tribute to Barry Lane who died recently and who was a great friend of the AONB Unit. Barry played a hugely important part in protecting and sharing the heritage of the Mendips and was fondly remembered as a kind and generous man.</p> <p>JS from Petruth Paddocks asked where he could get copies of walk routes. Suggestions included Cheddar Walking leaflets from the Cheddar NT shop, local walks leaflets from the Westbury Shop as well as downloadable routes from both the AONB website and the SWT website.</p>	

Proposal: The Partnership approve the following:

Current	Proposed	Notes
Communication and Support Officer, currently full-time role.	April 2017 – Sept 2017 reduce hours to 22.5/week. Current post-holder aims to retire after this period. Proposal – agree to reduction in hours, reappoint new post-holder on 22.5hrs permanent contract from Sept 2017. Amend job description to focus on ‘Business Support’ and reduce ‘Communication’ element.	Reduction would result in a salary saving of: £7000 pa Communications have evolved rapidly with digital solutions and social media that can be delivered via all team members. This results in less of a need for a practical coordination role. Current AONB Manager providing strategic coordination and training for staff to deliver effective communications.
Volunteer Coordinator, currently 14hours/week.	Proposal -from April 2018 appoint Volunteer Coordinator as full time permanent contract.	£25000 total for salary, including on-costs (£7000 salary saving, see above) (£10000 ongoing commitment for Volunteer Coordinator) (£8000 reallocation from other budgets)

1. This proposal reflects a desire for the AONB Unit to stay agile to changing communication techniques and to develop the potential for different types of volunteer involvement. Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB is one of the core functions of an AONB Unit. Current coordination level of 2 days/week only allows for a practical task every other week attracting 10 people/task, one Young Ranger intake every other year and management of 20 Volunteer Rangers.

2. Pros

2.1 Increased volunteer opportunities; intake of Young Rangers every year, Advanced Young Rangers, practical tasks every week resulting in more conservation and enhancement of public sites.

2.2 Increased development opportunities and number of Volunteer Rangers; more trained Walk Leaders, Volunteer Rangers event programme promoted to the public (income generation), increased training and accreditation in drystone walling and other skills.

2.3 Use of increased volunteer hours as match-funding for grant programmes.

2.4 Increased opportunity to coordinate volunteer work across sites with National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and others.

3. 0 Cons

3.1. Reduction in project budget that has been used as match-funding for applications.

3.2 14 hour reduction in support for the AONB Unit. New job description would be required, this may be evaluated at a reduced salary level and result in attracting less qualified/experienced person. Reviewing and the existing AONB Management Plan for the Partnership is due to commence in 2017, this requires business support.

3.3 Increased reliance on AONB Unit staff to deliver communications effectively. Staff training to boost skills and confidence would be required alongside appropriate smartphones/tablets.

DRAFT

Mendip Hills AONB Business Plan 2017-19 (Amended March 2017)

Contents

- 1 Context
- 2 Current funding situation
- 3 Issues and opportunities
- 4 Actions

Appendix 1 Risk Assessment

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

1.0 Context

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

A. The **Mendip Hills AONB Partnership** formed in 1983, bringing together representatives of local communities, local authorities, national agencies, voluntary and interest groups to co-ordinate and influence management of the AONB.

In pursuit of this mission the Partnership has four key aims to:

- Promote the AONB and the Management Plan to all the constituent organisations 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.

The work of the Partnership is coordinated by the **AONB Unit's** three full time staff (Manager, Project Development Officer, Communication and Support Officer) and two part-time staff (Landscape Planning Officer (18hrs per week) and the Volunteer Coordinator (14hrs per week) 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).

B. The **AONB Management Plan 2014-19** adopted by the five local authorities, emphasises the importance of protecting this nationally important designated landscape for its natural beauty and the wide range of benefits it brings society.

C. 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 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

1.2 Purpose and role of this Business Plan

1.2.1 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.

1.2.2 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. The Management Plan sets out what needs to be done to achieve the Partnership Vision statement and the Delivery Plan sets out specific work to be undertaken – For Management Plan and Delivery Plan see <http://plan.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/>

2.0 Current funding situation

2.1.1 Statement of Intent (SOI) In 2011 the local authority partners agreed that the Statement of Intent should demonstrate the 'intent to fund' but not be a legally binding document due to current financial constraints and uncertain local authority funding position. It is signed by Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, Mendip District Council and Sedgemoor District Council. North Somerset Council did not sign the 2011 -2015 SOI and is currently not signed up to the 2015-18 SOI. However at the November 2014 Partnership Committee it was agreed that the Chairman formally request that North Somerset reconsider their position.as the other local authorities made it clear that with the current situation of them signing the SOI but not North Somerset Council,

it is increasingly difficult to justify their own contributions. North Somerset has replied confirming that they are unable to sign the SOI.

2.1.2 Defra is not a signatory to the Statement of Intent. In January 2016 Defra confirmed that funding would be protected for AONBs until 2020. For the Mendip Hills AONB the funding is as follows:

2016/17 – £150,911

2017/18 – £153,506

2018/19 – £156,147

2019/20 – £158,832

This offer is made under section 98 of the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*. It includes a contribution to core funding and is conditional on securing match funding equivalent to 25% of core funding, in cash terms, from other sources, such that Defra funding does not exceed 75% of the total core funding.

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

2.2 Contributions from the local authority partners

2.2.1 Expected local authority contributions for 2015/16 as set out in the **Statement of Intent 2015-18**:

SCC £17000

B&NES £11000 (reduced to £8500 2016-17 and going forward)

SDC £8000

MDC £8017

2.2.2 Other local authority funding -Whilst North Somerset Council are not a signatory of the Statement of Intent they have continued to make ad hoc contributions towards the AONB budget of varying amounts.

2.2.3 The AONB Partnership has managed ongoing national and local government cuts by reducing operational costs, staff and loss of the Sustainable Development Fund. Over the last eight years the Partnership has managed over a 54% reduction in local authority contributions. There continues to be pressure on local authority budgets, and the work of managing activities and resources in line with available budget will continue. The Defra contributions have also been reduced each year based on a percentage of their 2010/11 contribution figure. 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 of 4 FTE can be afforded in the short term, 2015-2017 assuming the contributions indicated on the Statement of Intent are confirmed 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.

3.0 Issues and opportunities

How to achieve the purposes of the Business Plan as set out in 1.2 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. See 3.5 and Appendix 1. However the value of AONB Partnerships and the opportunities for them to deliver a wide range of benefits continues to increase.

3.1.0 The Value of AONB Partnerships

3.1.1 There has been clear Government support for AONB Partnerships over recent years— In 2010 Richard Benyon the then Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries, in a letter to the National Association of AONBS (NAAONB) stated:

'I believe AONBs are managed remarkably well be AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards and provide good value for money.

Despite these difficult times, AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards have a fundamental role to play in meeting our environmental objectives and delivering Big Society for example, particularly with regards to the expression and delivery of local priorities.'

3.1.2 In the latest 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'*.

3.1.3 In July 2013 'The Value of AONB Partnerships' an independent assessment prepared for AONB Partnerships was produced by Land Use Consultants. This report contributed impartial evidence to the dialogue that is taking place with national and local governments over the funding and operation of AONB partnerships. The report played a significant part in securing the Defra AONB settlement for 2014/15 and 2015/16 that saw only an additional 1.2% increase on expected cut and no further cut in 2015/16 when Defra faced a 30% budget cut.

3.1.4 Despite national Government support for AONB Partnerships, Somerset County Council publicised a possible cut to the Somerset AONB budget of 89% in 2015/16. This caused major concern to not only Partnership members but other environmental bodies and project partners.

3.1.5 A meeting of the four Somerset AONBs with the SCC Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member David Hall was held in July 2014 where he, David Hall stated that SCC would not be making large cuts and agreed to the Partnerships further consideration of potential savings and new funding sources each could make. The Mendip Hills AONB Officer Support Group considered the budget in detail and Statement of Intent taking the final SOI to their respective local authorities for signing by end of November. In November 2014 The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership endorsed the budget based on the SOI contributions that remain the same as in 2014/15.

3.1.6 In a letter sent to David Hall that if SCC make any further reductions it would not only reduce the ability of the Partnership to draw down the full Defra grant but jeopardise the AONB Partnership as the other local authority partners may consider reductions. They may also be unwilling to subsidise SCC by continuing to contribute at current levels and not be willing to pay host fees to a non-contributing partner. In agreeing to sign the SOI SCC have amended the figures shown for their contributions for 2016/17 and beyond to 'To Be Confirmed' accompanied by a letter from David Hall stating that they expects ongoing review of the AONB budget with an expectation that there will be a proposed percentage reduction in the contribution that SCC are required to make beyond 15/16 financial year.

3.2 Hosting arrangement

3.2.1 Current host charges

The current management fee paid to Somerset County Council is £7750. This fee is made up of £4556.92 (based on 12 days) management by senior officer Grade 6, £1895.35 (8 day) finance support and £1176.55 (4 days) HR support.

The AONB Partnership in addition pay SCC via Charterhouse Centre: Rental £4150 (Charterhouse Centre have indicated a possible 5% increase in 2017-18) and ICT fees £3500. It has been agreed to pay an additional service fee to the Centre to cover a percentage (based on floor space occupied) of electricity, heating, building maintenance. In 2015/16 this will be £2277. Total SCC hosting charges for 2015/16 are £17677

3.2.2. A draft hosting agreement is currently being considered by SCC having been discussed by the Officer Support Group. However due to a SWOne Agreement that SCC have in place it may not be possible to change the current host charges for phones and IT until that agreement ends in 2018. The OSG propose being ready in 2017/18 to effect changes that the Partnership would wish to see with regard to reducing future charges for these services.

3.3 New models for delivery

3.3.1 The NAAONB is working on behalf of the AONB to identify future models and liaising with Defra on future funding. The recommendations in the recent LUC report '*Maximising revenues for protected landscapes*' (June 2014) funded by the Government's Contestable Policy Fund are currently being considered and acted upon as part of the NAAONB Business Plan .

3.3.2 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 (1.1 C) 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.

3.3.3 Potential source of external income is through Section 106 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy. The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership already delivers a range of projects, works with volunteers, and now has the Mendip Hills Fund established within a charitable organisation that could receive the funding and may appeal to developers more than payment to a local authority. Also Somerset Community Foundation has a track record of managing large sums of funding to be distributed within set period of time.

3.4. The Mendip Hills Fund

3.4.1 In December 2013 the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Chairman signed the Mendip Hills Fund Agreement with Somerset Community Foundation, a registered charity who will manage the Fund. In January 2014 the Fund was set up to receive donations including gift aid on private donations.

3.4.2 The Mendip Hills Fund criteria is similar to the previous Mendip Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund but is able to fund projects that conserve and enhance the Mendip Hills as defined by the Mendip Hills AONB and Mendip Hills 141 National Character Area (NCA).

3.4.3 A contribution of £8500 from the 2014/15 Partnership budget was allocated to the Mendip Hills Fund to provide some initial funding to provide some continuity to the SDF to be able to award grants to projects that through publicity would hope to attract donations.

3.4.4 As with the SDF, the AONB Partnership and its individual partners can apply to the Mendip Hills Fund, which will be advised by the Mendip Hills Advisory Panel, managed by the AONB Manager.

3.4.5 The success of the Mendip Hills Fund in being able to support local projects depends on local residents, visitors and businesses donating to the fund. This will be a major area of work for the AONB Manager working with the Partnership during the period of this Business Plan and will include establishing the Visitor Giving Scheme with businesses. Visitor Giving leaflets and a Mendip Hills Fund pull up banner has been produced that has been used at a number of events since July 2014 to raise

awareness of the Fund.

3.4.6 Mendip Hills Fund badges produced and distributed to local shops, pubs and attractions in attractive display boxes have raised over £2200 since August 2014. The AONB Unit has responsibility for collection of the funds from these boxes and ensuring that they are restocked with badges.

3.4.7 In 2016 the fund distributed £6000 to local projects. £24000 of applications were submitted highlighting the community demand for the fund.

3.4.8 In early 2017 a new panel was created, with 4 members of the previous panel and 7 new members.

3.5.0 Risks of reduced funding

3.5.1 Further reduction in funding from any partner seriously risks the AONB Partnership being able to retain its AONB staff with the required knowledge and skills, either through staff leaving by choice due to uncertainty or redundancy.

3.5.2 Due to uncertainty of funding and Partnership commitment, 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.

3.5.3 Delivering current commitments are at risk if funding reduces. This includes attracting funds to the Mendip Hills Fund, and the continuation of the Young Ranger Scheme. If there is uncertainty regarding the future of the Partnership/Unit it will be difficult to secure HLF money and complete the development work and plan for delivery.

3.5.4 The promotion and development of the Mendip Hills as a sustainable tourism destination that the Partnership has invested in (through Greentraveller Ltd, Visitor leaflets and work with Somerset Tourism Association) will be at risk at a time when the need to support the local economy is high on local and national government agendas. The Defra, Visit England and the NAAONB Sustainable Tourism Joint Accord recognises the value of AONBs to tourist economy and value of AONB Partnerships being partners to Destination Management Plans. The AONB Unit stepped in with the loss of local Tourist Information Centre's at Cheddar and Wells and in response to a request from local tourism businesses for joint promotion initiatives. The AONB Unit is still the only organization to produce a guide for the protected landscape in its entirety. Upgrading of the Mendip Way (West and East) took place in 2016 in partnership with the Mendip Society and Mendip Ramblers, nationwide promotion is to follow.

3.5.5 The Mendip Hills AONB Unit is a partner in a number of partnerships bidding for funding from Local Enterprise Partnerships, Health and Well Being Boards and other government funded initiatives. Without sufficient staff resources the Mendip Hills will not have the capacity to participate in the schemes being proposed.

3.5.6 The AONB Unit provides independent landscape advice and guidance to assist and influence planning decisions and land management. This service is at risk as are other posts if funding reduces further.

See Appendix 1: Risk Assessment – risks and action being taken

4.0 Actions

4.1 There are a number of issues raised in this Business Plan that require addressing. The table below identifies the issue, action required, timescale and progress.

Issue	Action	By when	Progress
1. Need to continue to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of the AONB Partnership/Unit to existing and potential users and sponsors	Agree 2015/18 Business Plan Promote Annual reviews – target key individuals	March 2015 Partnership Ongoing	Draft completed
2. Manage risk to the AONB Partnership and AONB Unit	Review risk assessment on 6 monthly basis	May 2017 OSG	Risk assessment agreed by OSG
3. Engage in post-Brexit discussions concerning resources in protected landscapes report	Contribute to NAAONB consultations Report NAAONB reports to Partnership Committee	As required	
4. Review SCC hosting arrangement to ensure AONB Partnership's staff unit is cost effective and can operate independently post SWOne contract change	Host agreement with SCC signed	2017	To be reviewed
5. Identify funding for AONB core and projects through Section 106 Community Infrastructure Levy agreements	Local authorities to include AONB proposals: National Grid compensation funding (SCC) Longleat Estate Cheddar development proposals (SDC)	On going	Submitted paper for consideration to SCC - projects with costs to be funded. Direct contact with NG No formal proposal or planning application submitted to date.

BusinessPlan/March2015/SJ

Appendix 2: Draft budget for 2017-18, 2018-19

Budget	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Team			
Manager	39601	41000	
Planning Officer	18993	19194	
Support Officer	12948	13077	
Proj Dev Officer	36876	37256	
Sub Total	108418	110527	
Vol Coordinator post	9920	25,000	
			Projects (2017-2018) 23300 divided on projects <i>3700 Mendip Rocks!</i> <i>1000 Rural events sponsorship</i> <i>3000 Website upgrade</i> <i>12100 Enhancing & Improving Access</i> <i>1000 South West Outdoor Festival</i> <i>2500 Young Rangers</i>
			Proposal 2018-19 15,000 Volunteer Coordinator post
SCC Host fee (Line mgt, HR,Finance)	7750	7750	18212 on projects
Charterhouse Centre ICT charge	3500	3500	<i>2700 Mendip Rocks!</i>
Charterhouse C.Rent and services	7200	7300	<i>1000 Rural events sponsorship</i> <i>14512 to be allocated</i>
Other costs			
Office Cleaning	1800	1800	
Training	200	200	
Vehicle R&M	1850	1850	
Vehicle fuel /tax/insurance costs	700	700	
Travel costs	750	750	
Car allowances	1500	1500	
Volunteer costs	2000	2000	
Tools and equip	400	400	
Staff clothing	0	0	
Stationary/digital/tel	5800	5800	
Subsistance	200	200	
Partnership	4650	4650	
Management Plan review	4000	3000	
Projects	23300	18212	
Joint Heath and Well Being project	8561	0	
Mendip Hills Fund	1500	1500	
Sub Total	85581	86,112	
Total	193999	196,639	
Core costs (Defra criteria)	160638	176,927	
INCOME			
DEFRA	153506	156147	158832
SCC	16406	16406	
B&NES	8500	8500	

N.Som	TBC	TBC
Young Rangers	1500	0
SCC Public Health	8561	0
contingency carry forward	17000	14000
Total	221491	211071
LA contribution	40924	40924

AONB Unit Project Update

1.0 Mendip Way

1.1 The AONB Unit is coordinating a project to raise the profile of the Mendip Way through route improvements, improved information, signage and promotion.

Work completed:

48miles of way-marking the route.

Route description/guide written for the whole route, in both directions.

GPX data gathered for downloadable route guide.

Detailed route survey part completed to identify access furniture priority works.

New sections have been agreed:

The National Trust have agreed for the Mendip Way to use the permissive paths on the north side of Cheddar Gorge, linking walkers to the village.

Somerset Wildlife Trust have agreed for the route to use a link path from Black Rock to Cheddar Gorge with improvement works scheduled for April (new kissing gate, finger posts and visitor counter).

Somerset Wildlife Trust have agreed for the route to pass through Draycott Sleights to avoid the current detour through Draycott Village.

2.0 Mendip Rocks!

2.1 The Mendip Rocks! Festival 2016 has been completed offering 6 weeks of events, attended by 1000+ people, to celebrate the geology of the Mendip Hills, including:

- Family fundays
- Guided walks
- Tours of working and disused quarries
- Practical dry stone walling tasks
- Stone carving
- Geological mapping workshops
- Three day "Earth Science School"
- Festival finale day of lectures and workshops.

3.0 AONB Learning Zone

3.1 <http://learning.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/> The website went live in December and is being regularly updated with additional resources. The site is a 'shop-window' for learning about the AONB and promoting understanding of the areas special qualities.

- Learning Resources grouped under AONB Management Plan themes, and key stages.
- Interactive map.
- Site completed November 2016 and staff training arranged.

5.0 AONB Volunteer Hours April – October 2016

Practical Task Volunteers	474
Volunteer Rangers	853
Individuals/Other Groups	100
Young Ranger Volunteers	55
TOTAL	1,482

6.0 Mendip Hills Fund

6.1 11 members of the panel now, 4 existing and 7 new members from the local community. Promotional campaign underway, this includes new badges of an adder and dormouse, to increase the size of the funds available. Currently the fund size is £2500. The fund will open for applications in late summer.

Paper C. March 2017 Partnership Meeting
National Association for AONBs Update

1.0 The NAAONB published the Annual Report for 2016, this can be downloaded here <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/images/Annual-Report-2016-FINAL.pdf> Based on a snapshot of the recent work of 23 of the UK's AONB Family with the help of its small dedicated teams, enthusiastic community volunteers and local members, we have as Landscapes for Nature, improved your countryside by enhancing 624,041 hectares of land for wildlife – that's the same area as 4394 Hyde Parks. Landscapes for People, attracted 1,430,139 people to get out into your vibrant countryside to enjoy the wealth of opportunities on offer – that's the same number of people needed to fill Wembley Stadium for 15 cup finals! Landscapes for Business, enhanced the UK economy with a GVA for AONBs of £16.5 billion – similar to that of the city of Leeds. Landscapes for Culture, improved the condition of 270 Scheduled Monuments, and the AONB Family attracted an additional £7.22m of external funding in order to work with local communities, valuing their skills, knowledge and energy and by doing so help sustain a rural economy that conserves and enhances the natural environment for the benefit of everyone.

2.0 The AONB Manager attended the National Communications Group and Lead Officers Meeting. One outcome is the #OutstandingHour on Twitter every Wednesday 1pm-2pm. This provides all AONBs the chance to demonstrate the work of the AONB family and engage directly with other key Twitter users. The Lead Officers Group helped form the agenda for the NAAONB Chief Executive's discussions with Defra around protecting the funding and involvement in post-Brexit discussions.

Paper D Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan Review 2019-2024 - Timetable

Period	Task	Method	Who	Scoping Requirement
July 2017	Local authorities to confirm AONB Partnerships undertake Review	Pro-forma letter with signed form to Local Authorities from Manager to formally communicate intention and seek agreement to undertake review	AONB Manager	
July – Sept 2017	Local Authorities to indicate requirements / expectations of the Review process	Formal communication (Delegated member decision process for DCC) from local authorities on what they would like to see addressed through the Review process	LA officers	
Aug – Nov 2017	AONB Team undertake initial appraisal of scope of Review	Carry out analysis to determine changes / revision requirements taking into account views of local authorities / NE / Defra. Identify key issues via Theme Groups	AONB Unit	Determine if Policy change likely – if so, SEA/SA required Determine Statement of Community Involvement
Nov 2017	Consult Partnership on scope of the Review	Prepare review briefing report for discussion by Partnership	AONB Unit	Confirm scoping requirements Stage A – set out evidence base and agree requirements
Nov – March 2018	Begin to implement Review	Carry out any surveys, analysis, workshops on revisions required taking into account any requirements from LAs and national guidance	AONB Unit	Analysis of responses from SEA Scoping Report Stage B – assess any revised strategy objectives and policies against SEA
March 2018	Initial Draft of Review	Interim report to Partnerships	AONB Unit	
May – July 2018	Produce Consultation Draft	Report / Presentation to County Locality Committees and District meetings outlining key issues being addressed Approval of Consultation Draft through local authority representation on Partnerships	LA Officers AONB Manager Partnership	Stage C – Prepare SEA Alternative and Environmental Report
Sept /Oct/Nov 2018	Six week Public Consultation on revised Plan	Publish Consultation Draft and make available for comment via websites / libraries/ parishes etc	AONB Unit	Consult on SEA / SA
November 2018	Local Authority Comments	Formal officer response	LA officers	
Nov/Dec /Jan	Final Draft prepared taking account of consultation comment	Report to Partnerships outlining consultation feedback and proposed amendments / changes for approval	AONB Unit / Partnerships	Take account of SEA report and Habitat Regulation Screening Report
Jan 2019	Consult NE on final draft	Formal comment and confirmation of final draft	NE on behalf of Defra	
Jan to March 2019	Local Authorities Adopt Plan	Through Committee / Delegated Decision (for DCC)	LA officers	Complete and finalise reports
March 2019	Plan Adoption	Publicised through local media and Adoption Report	AONB Partnership	