



**Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee  
Draft Minutes of the meeting at Ubley Parish Hall  
21<sup>st</sup> March 2019**

**Present:**

**Partnership Committee**

Cllr Liz Richardson (Vice Chair)  
Jim Hardcastle  
Cllr Mike Adams  
Tom Lane  
Cllr Ann Harley  
Ian Clemmett  
Richard Frost  
Pippa Rayner  
Steve Dury  
Cllr Roger Dollins  
Becky Collier

Bath & North East Somerset Council  
AONB Manager  
North Somerset Parish Representative  
Natural England  
North Somerset Council  
National Trust  
Mendip Society  
Somerset Wildlife Trust  
Somerset County Council Officer  
Somerset Parishes Representative  
CPRE

**Other attendees**

Tim Haselden  
Sarah Catling  
Pete Douglas

AONB Project Development Officer  
AONB Support & Communications Officer  
Somerset Wildlife Trust

**Apologies**

Di Sheppard  
Chris Lewis  
Cllr Nigel Taylor (Chair)  
Tim Curley  
Cllr E Brimmell  
Julie Cooper  
John Flannigan  
Cllr Tom Killen  
Rachel Tadman  
Andy Wear

Bath & North East Somerset Council Officer  
CPRE  
Somerset County Council  
Avon Wildlife Trust  
Bath & North East Somerset Council Parish Reps  
Sedgemoor District Council Officer  
North Somerset Council Officer  
Mendip District Council  
Mendip District Council Officer  
National Farmers Union

## Summary of Actions

Item	Item	Notes	Action
1	<b>Declaration of Interest</b>	No declarations	
2	<b>Notes of Previous Meeting</b>	Accepted as a true and accurate record Proposer RD Secunder MA Apologies as stated. Tim Curley will now be representing Avon Wildlife Trust on the Partnership.	
3	<b>Paper A - OSG Report</b>	Additional points to note, RP is no longer the Mendip District Council Officer, Rachel Tadman has been appointed with immediate effect. Point 3 - Finance underspend resulting from the delayed delivery of the new vehicle has now been allocated to partnership working with Bristol Avon Rivers Trust on The Chew Headwaters Assessment Project and QGIS mapping. This will enable the Unit to draw down the full Defra grant for 2018/19. Report noted. Proposer TL Secunder JH	
4	<b>Partnership Updates</b>	<p><u>TL Natural England</u> – Work continues on agri-environment engagement, its importance underlined by the increasing allocation of time from NE. The Partnership raised the state of the current payment scheme JH advising that a major land owner on the high level scheme has not been paid for 3 years. NE extremely disappointed but unable to do anything, RPA continue to be the payment body with a separate body responsible for setting up agreements. All agreements are now currently with the Secretary of State. AH worried that if the Partnership does not voice concerns then there is a suggestion that we are condoning it. Suggestion therefore that this should be an item on a future agenda with an approach made to the relevant body for a summary statement. Richard Penny is monitoring stewardship agreements in the AONB. RP to be invited to present at the next Partnership meeting. NE have been working on providing supplementary advice on European Designated Sites in the AONB, this information is now available on the NE website and should help inform planners moving forward. The information is more comprehensive than previously available.</p> <p><u>IC National Trust</u> – NT continue with scrub management work. Recently collated records of the sheep and goat numbers in Cheddar Gorge, latest count indicates goat numbers have dropped by half this year. Discussions have been held with the new owner of Ebbor Grove Farm around land management of the area to buffer the farmland and adjacent NNR.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">JH</p> <p style="text-align: right;">JH</p>

	<p>Continue to prioritise habitat surveys and mapping of NT land assessing how improvements can be made on nature conservation, this information forms the update for the Property Business Plan. Bat surveys with SWT and advice from Somerset Botany Group also inform their work.</p> <p>Landscape scale, NT continue with 'bigger and better working on a bigger and larger scale', with scoping work currently being carried out.</p> <p>Cultural heritage work on Scheduled Monuments; Shute Shelve Hill a Saxon Way has seen scrub clearance as well as work following advice from University of Bristol on cave management.</p> <p>Recreation and Access, the second TOTG festival will take place 14-16 June. Currently working with Cheddar Walking who are funding work to manage paths and general access along the Gorge walks. New interpretation panels due to go in at Cheddar Gorge and Crook Peak. Rock safety work continues on a rolling programme.</p> <p>Community and partnership engagement is on-going; work to stop anti-social vehicles in cheddar gorge, NT also represented on Cheddar Vision Forum, Mendip Hills Facilitation Fund, inform Habitat Regulations</p> <p>Assessment of flooding down the Gorge as well as providing commentary on the North Somerset Plan.</p> <p>Attended careers fair at Churchill.</p> <p>RD requested an update on Cox's Mill; site is owned by Longleat; initial plans are proposed removal and construction of a further car park, whilst the hotel is not listed it is sat on a listed building. It is understood that future development is as yet undecided.</p> <p>Current delay on the road repairs through the Gorge is due to a disagreement with Highways on responsibility for maintenance. Longleat are leading on this; currently no update.</p> <p>PR advised that SWT would be happy to support NT work on habitat mapping.</p> <p><u>SD Somerset County Council</u> – European INTERREG has recently funded an £8m project on flood management in Somerset. This fund is Brexit proof with one further call for bids due, SD will advise if there are any further opportunities that could be of interest to the AONB.</p> <p><u>BC CPRE</u> – CPRE Somerset are currently advertising for a planner, this is a part-time role offered on a freelance basis, closing date is 12 April, details are on the CPRE Somerset website.</p> <p>CPRE coordinated the recent Star Count involving members of the public over a 3 week period in February. The count is an annual process and the new map will be produced in the next month, this will provide a measure</p>	
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of dark skies in the AONB. It will also be a useful tool to support comments on planning applications. State of brown field report has been carried out; with the press release due out next week. Somerset currently has 260 hectares that could supply housing.

RF Mendip Society – The Society events programme for Mar-Jul is available.

Membership to the Society continues to increase and they continue to receive great support from the AONB Unit. Mendip Rocks! will go ahead again this year. JH gave a brief update on the Unit's recent visit to the Wye Valley AONB who run a very successful Arts Festival. Current format for MR is the most we can achieve given current resources. The plan is to appoint an outreach post tapping into STEM for 19/20 to move this project forward.

AH North Somerset Council – Highlighted the good work being done by Mendip Outdoor Pursuits on their 250 acre site, this is great asset for the AONB. They have submitted planning permission having found gaps in some of the historic planning currently held. The AONB Unit will continue to liaise with them and will keep an eye on future development.

PR Somerset Wildlife Trust – Facilitation Fund has been a slow process but the benefits are now being seen.

Pete Douglas has been appointed the Facilitation Coordinator to cover Ellie Higginson's maternity leave. There are now 19 members with 4 new members joining since the last meeting. Two further stewardship applications are due to be submitted during this window. Adder surveying training session was held on 9 March. Surveying will continue in the AONB between now and the end of May.

The Partnership continues to support the Facilitation Fund which is a great way of establishing links with landowners.

Chris Eyles is now in post as the Senior West Mendip Reserves Coordinator and has worked with the AONB Volunteers installing new gates at Bubwith Acres.

Making Space for Butterflies in Mendip project is running and involves woodland management work at Cheddar Wood and grassland and hedgerow restoration in East Mendip to improve habitat for Mendip butterflies.

Wild Paths Trainee Project continues, funded by HLF, trainees gain skills in practical reserves management and community engagement. The funding covers a 9 month period for 3 years, SWT will be recruiting in April for the next trainees, there will be 2 posts; Mendip and South Somerset.

Initial results of the dormice survey have been received identifying that Somerset has a unique genetic sub species and good connectivity between populations with

		<p>good flow and dispersal. Surveys help inform how the AONB is coping and help inform future programmes of work.</p> <p><u>LR B&amp;NES</u> – Management plan was adopted on 27 February and is effective from 7 March. Chew Valley lake railings are now being painting following advice from the AONB Unit. Chew Valley Lake Recreational Trail has now been identified as a 2 phase project, with phase 2 needing a lot of work. The funding application for phase 1 will be submitted before the end of the month.</p>	
5	<b>Adoption of Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024</b>	<p>Formal consultation of the Draft Management Plan took place during December. Following the consultation period no material change was identified, the plan is now with the Local Authorities for adoption. Updates so far:</p> <p>B&amp;NES – Adopted SCC – Due for adoption next week NSC – Awaiting final signature SDC – No concerns, but unlikely it will be adopted before the end of the financial year MDC – No update</p>	JC RT
6	<b>Paper B – Delivery Plan for the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024</b>	<p>The new Draft Delivery Plan is a strategic document for the AONB Partnership not just the AONB Unit and will be a live document for the whole period. The plan reflects the key activities and projects taking place across the AONB over the next 5 years. TH is aware that there are currently some gaps relating to what partners are delivering or planning to deliver that will be key in helping to achieve the AONB Management Plan, and therefore that should be captured in the AONB Delivery Plan.</p> <p>TH has put together a project mandate form for Partners to complete with any relevant activities or projects that are being planned for delivery over the next 5 years that are not currently referenced. Please return all completed mandates to TH as soon as possible.</p> <p>LR confirmed that approval is needed on the Plan in its current format; this will enable the AONB Unit to begin submitting funding bids. As this is a live document it will be expected that the Delivery Plan will be presented to the Partnership at one meeting a year for review. The Partnership felt that the Draft Delivery Plan provides an extremely strong evidence base with strengths and weaknesses easy to identify.</p> <p>The Delivery Plan was approved as a live document subject to annual reviews and with further partner additions to be made.</p>	ALL
7	<b>Paper C – AONB Unit Update</b>	<p>The AONB Unit has now recruited a new full time Ranger Volunteer Coordinator, Sammy Fraser will take up the role at the end of April.</p>	

		<p>Volunteer hours continue to rise year on year, hours are currently 4060 for 18/19 an increase of 360 on last year. A range of core competencies have now been introduced for Volunteer Rangers including Navigation, Outdoor First Aid Training, Interpreting the Landscape and Emergency Situations.</p> <p>Walk Leaders successfully ran 2 Christmas Walks; the Unit is keen to promote these as experiences rather than simply a guided walk. Enquiries have already come in for Easter Walks.</p> <p>Success of the Young Rangers programme continues with 2 Rangers having been accepted onto the Europarc Camp in the summer.</p> <p>Planning continues to be extremely busy. CC and our Planning Volunteer are at UWE today, sharing information with MSc students on the AONB.</p> <p>Mendip Hills Fund panel distributed £11k in November on a good spread of projects from Forest Schools to Mendip Mountain Bikers who are improving trail signage. Cheddar Ales are the latest business to support the MHF, donations will come from a percentage of the profit from sales of their Hardrock Ale.</p> <p>We are currently communicating the AONB Special Qualities through a series of monthly blogs, March is #mendiparchaeology month. Information is available on the Special Qualities page of the website and guides our Social Media content.</p>	
8	<b>Paper D – NAAONB Update</b>	<p>Glover review continues.</p> <p>The NAAONB have helped coordinate some of the AONB bids to the new Environmental Land Management Schemes.</p>	
9	<b>AOB</b>	<p>Rachel Thompson MBE has requested to join the Partnership to represent access. She is from the Trails Trust and is an access campaigner for Mendip with vast experience of common law dedicated access.</p> <p>Proposer – NT  Seconder – LR</p> <p>The Partnership felt that Rachel’s knowledge and experience would be a great asset.</p> <p>Voted in favour.</p> <p>The new Farm Payment Scheme has notable gaps with regards to access, Defra have asked Rachel Thompson to write a bid which needs to be submitted by the end of next week. Any comments that may support this should be shared asap.</p>	<b>ALL</b>
10	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>	21 November 2019	