

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting
Thursday 08 September 2005 – Quay Arts, Newport**

Present:

Tony Tutton	Chairman
David Court	Coastal Portfolio Holder
Cat Carkeet	Tourism Portfolio Holder
Vicky Basford	Historic Environment Portfolio Holder
Nicola Davies	Countryside Agency
Nicky Blackman	Countryside Agency
Ashley Curzon	Isle of Wight Council
John Brownscombe	AONB Lead Officer
Nicky Rogers	AONB Planning Officer
Fiona Hanna	AONB Communications Officer
Carrie McDowell	AONB Assistant

1) Apologies

Geoffrey Case	Farming and Landowning Portfolio Holder
Jill Green	Recreation Portfolio Holder
Richard Grogan	Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder
David Groves	Rural Business Portfolio Holder
Denis Russell	Vice-Chair/Community & Parish Portfolio Holder
Adam Wallace	Countryside Agency
Councillor Wendy Arnold	Isle of Wight Council
Councillor Anne Bishop	Isle of Wight Council
Andrew Ashcroft	Isle of Wight Council

2) Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising

Memorandum of Agreement: this has now been extended to 2011, and will be subject to revision in 2008.

Rural Communities Bill: JB confirmed that this was the Bill relating to the setting up of Natural England. The Partnership has provided input on an individual basis as part of the South East AONB Regional Group, and also in discussions with the Countryside Agency.

Job descriptions for portfolio holders: these have been written and distributed.

Paper on charity events: RG is still to progress production of this paper.

Dates of future SCOPAC meetings: these have been advised to DC.

Signage of arterial routes: CC has fed details back to TT and JB, but not in any great detail. Another issue has arisen regarding warning signs being set up near to other signs and giving the impression of clutter. The Traffic Management Section have advised that as Island roads are failing safety standards, in respect of the top coating making stopping distances longer, a decision was taken to put up temporary warning signs for motorists, but these will be removed when improvements have been made.

Nominees for portfolio elections: VB and JG have advised they will stand again, and as no other nominees have come forward, they will be returned unopposed.

3) AONB Unit

3.1 Activity Update

The next quarterly report will be issued at the end of September, so a verbal report was provided of the work of the Unit since the previous meeting, and a full report will be circulated in October.

We have had very positive feedback from several areas on our latest newsletter, and it is hoped the amendments to the website will be complete by the end of October. The calendars have now been printed, and copies distributed to various outlets on a sale or return basis, with a selling price of £4.95 each.

We attended the Sea Britain events at Fort Victoria, the National Trust sand sculpture competition at Compton (for which the Unit was highly commended), and the event at Wolverton Manor where we sponsored the conservation tent. Several talks have been given to local organisations, and discussions were held on bus links, concerns about Winkle Street and vehicles on the beach at Thorness Bay, where liaison with English Nature has led to physical barriers and signs being put in place.

Eighty planning applications were put forward within the AONB from June to September, and we have commented on 45. Several pre-application meetings were held, together with consultations on highway schemes, Leader + and the Island Plan. The SDF project is progressing and 14 meetings have been held with prospective applicants, and six applications have been received which were considered at the first meeting of the SDF panel. Regarding the Small Grant Fund, a meeting will be held soon as three applications have already been received.

Preparations are well underway for the AGM and Open Forum, and interviews for the post of AONB Assistant will be held on 13 September.

3.2 Financial Report

AONB spending is on target, with no concerns over particular budget headings. The cost of recruitment has come in over budget, as advertisement costs are very expensive. However, this will be compensated by economies in other areas. Publicity and Promotions is low at the moment, but bills have yet to be received. The SDF budget of £50K has now been reached and if possible, we may try to obtain further funding for projects delivered in this financial year. There has been a lot of interest in the Small Grant Fund, and we will easily reach our £15K target.

4) Updates

4.1 Portfolio Holders, Core Funders, Chairman

Coastal - DC has looked at the documents concerned with coastal strategies published by the Council, and has had discussions with Robin McInnes. As these strategies have been in place for some time there is little or no mention of the AONB, but the expectation is that we will be involved in the future, especially with regard to the West Wight. The overall view appears to be that maintenance will continue where coastal defence works already exist, with no intervention/watching brief in other areas. TT commented that the Shoreline Management Plan is over ten years old, and needs re-visiting.

JB has provided comments to Robin McInnes regarding his bid to Leader+ to fund a feasibility study for a World Heritage Site/Geopark bid to Unesco. There were a considerable number of gaps in the information provided in the draft bid as follows:-

- a feasibility study is required.
- mention should be made of both the AONB and Heritage Coasts.
- there is a need for a cost benefit analysis where we can learn from the Jurassic Coast experience.
- physical management and guidelines to clarify issues regarding protection and resources additional to the Island.
- Identifying roles and responsibilities for those involved in management of the areas, including farmers.
- There are major issues regarding physical management and increased number of visitors, so perhaps the Geopark designation would be more appropriate.

Tourism - The quarterly report due out soon will provide details on business performance, as it has been a mixed season for the Island. CC agreed to take forward the suggestion that JB should sit on the group involving the Local Producers Network. Although it is not AONB, CC will provide feedback on the report due on Island Eating Out establishments, following visits by assessors. The brown sign issue has been fairly dormant during the busy summer months, but over the winter we should see more improvements. The 2006 guide is now in production, and there has been liaison with the AONB Unit. A Council Group has also been set up to study issues regarding public conveniences on the Island, with the idea of making substantial improvements.

Historic Environment - VB gave a brief overview of the workshop she had attended with Nicky Rogers, which was organised by English Heritage in Birmingham, and a detailed report was distributed to the meeting.

Countryside Agency - A large amount of work has been done regarding development of the new organisational structure, developing objectives and thinking about the type of organisation they will be delivering when they are a single integrated agency. Customer focus will be at national, regional and local levels, with regional locations being in county based teams. There will be flexibility with regard to how staff will deliver, and a professional exercise as to the best fit for all the skills they have available.

JB said he would be interested to see what the changes will mean in relation to the consideration of people as well as biodiversity, and the input Natural England will have into planning and DC issues.

IW Council - AC expressed his support for comments made by the Unit regarding new initiatives and certain processes within the Council, although there had been too little time to respond, in view of the sensitive nature of the discussions.

Chairman - Visitor numbers had generally been good until the hot weather of the Bank Holiday weekend, and the sand sculpture together with other events had been very successful. The National Trust are also working closely with the RSPB on a joint lottery bid for land at Yaverland Manor adjoining Brading marshes, which will include Centurions Copse. Fencing work has been undertaken on Shalfleet Manor Farm land, and a phased programme of renewal put in place for downland grazing.

5) **Aim High (Council Change Management Plan)**

JB gave the Committee an overview of the process and how it impacts on the AONB, together with how it ties in with the LAA and the Council's budget prioritisation procedure. The revised Council structure removes all reference to the environment, and is based on the blueprint from the ODPM, which concentrates on four core areas with priorities being set within each area. Although comments were invited from all departments which it was advised would be taken on board, it is now understood that the blueprint has been adopted by the Council, although where particular

departments will fit, has still to be debated. Comments on Annexe 1b of the Aim High document have to be provided to the Local Authority by 16 September setting out the impact on both the AONB Partnership and the Island.

An "Aim High Conference" meeting was also held, where there was an address from the Chief Executive Officer and the two Chief Officers, followed by workshops to discuss the Annexe attached to the Aim High document in detail. The lack of reference to the environment and sustainable development was raised by many attendees at the meeting, and it was hoped that these comments would now be built into the Annexe.

It has been discovered that the AONB Budget Centre has been included within the Countryside Section, rather than Planning Policy. This means when Countryside is included in the prioritisation procedure, because the Council are trying to find savings of £9m, the Unit will not be represented independently. AC and JB have raised this with Central Finance, as it is important that we are considered as an individual service. AW of the Countryside Agency sent a very supportive letter, expressing the Agency's concern about the lack of explicit reference to the environment, and English Nature have also written to the Director of Environment expressing similar views. SEEDA have also expressed concern and would be prepared to write a letter of support. Although GOSE have not yet been contacted, it was felt they would have similar views.

With reference to the AONB, and the Memorandum of Agreement, the IW Council has a contractual obligation for three months and if they withdraw, the Countryside Agency would have to have discussions on the Unit's future. However, the Council may not then be fulfilling their statutory duty to adhere to the Management Plan through a Partnership, and could breach DEFRA guidance on duty of regard..

The meeting expressed their support for the approach the Unit wishes to take as follows:-

- concern over lack of a detailed response to comments submitted as part of the consultation process.
- Strong message from Aim High meeting from many services within the Local Authority of the need to make reference to the environment, sustainable development and sustainable communities.
- Audit of statutory duties should have been an early exercise, as many functions and non discretionary duties were omitted.
- Sustainability checklist required.
- More detail required on major changes within Economic Development and Regeneration Directorate.
- Raise the point about the very short timescale to provide comments.
- Regarding the AONB Unit Cost Centre being included within Countryside, we are prepared to undergo scrutiny if necessary, but feel this should be on an individual basis.
- Raise the point that the AONB Unit was regarded as a good performer under Best Value.

6) AGM/Open Forum

This is progressing well with speakers already invited to participate, and the official notification has appeared in the County Press.

7) Any Other Business

AC advised that the Issues and Options discussion document consultation mid to end September, to tie in with Annual General Meeting and Open Forum.

CC raised the point that Island 2000's Development Officer, Martin Gibson, could be very helpful to the Committee in filling the gap left by Becky Collier. It was agreed any help or information he could provide would be fed to the meeting via CC.

ND also agreed to apply more pressure on the Local Authority regarding an audit of statutory duties.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.10 p.m.

8) Dates of future meetings

Details of these were listed on the agenda. Venues to be confirmed.

cdm/15 September 2005