

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting
Thursday 11 October 2007 - Innovation Centre**

Present:

Denis Russell	Vice-Chair/Community & Parish Portfolio Holder
David Court	Coastal Portfolio Holder
Vicky Basford	Historic Environment Portfolio Holder
Richard Grogan	Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder
Jill Green	Recreation Portfolio Holder
David Groves	Rural Business Portfolio Holder
Andy Gordon	Natural England
Councillor Vanessa Churchman	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

Tony Tutton	Chairman
Ashley Curzon	Isle of Wight Council
Geoffrey Case	Farming and Landowning Portfolio Holder
Bill Murphy	Isle of Wight Council

2) Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the proceedings of the last meeting, apart from a correction in the Nature Conservation report where the number of SAMs should be 7 and the number of SINCs 19 - the minutes were amended to reflect this change..

Thank you letter to A Curzon: This action is complete

Contact with Committee Services and Natural England: The Unit received a note from Committee Services that initial enquiries around Councillors elicited no positive responses. However, at the event on the Island Design Awards TT and NR had a discussion with Councillor Hobart, who expressed an interest in being one of the Council representatives on the Steering Committee. JB has made further contact with Committee Services to inform them of this, and whether it would be appropriate for them to make direct contact with Councillor Hobart, we await their further advice.

Tennyson Trail: A TRO has been imposed on the Trail with the section from Nodgham Lane to Freshwater being closed from October to March other than for private access, and from April to October access will be by limited permit only with a speed limit of less than 10 miles per hour. A question was asked about who enforces the Order, as currently there is no signage giving information on the closure. JB will follow this up, as the AONB Unit will want to be involved in any discussions about signage, which should be positioned at all points where other BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic) cross the Trail, as well as main roads.

It was pointed out that the Council is aware there is too much signage around the Island generally, and their policy is to restrict or reduce this as much as possible, thereby improving the visual aspect of the landscape. A survey is underway to remove all unnecessary signage.

Action: JB to clarify the position regarding signage for the Tennyson Trail

Dredging contract: This matter is still ongoing, and an e-mail has been received recently from one of our Partnership members also expressing the concerns of local fishermen. In addition a recent CPRE meeting raised concerns about gravel extraction at Thorley and Newtown, but this would be a matter for the landowner.

It is hoped the prospective Marine Bill will provide greater protection of the environment immediately offshore and other areas.

Action: **AG/JB to find out more information**

3) Financial Update/Core Budget

A copy of the latest Financial Report was circulated to the meeting, with no concerns as we were on target with our core budget. There are some areas of overspend, but this will balance out at year end. We have committed most of the funding available from the Sustainable Development Fund, and the small amount remaining could be absorbed into existing projects or other applications being received. A half yearly report will be provided at the December Steering Committee meeting. Progress with the Character Building Fund is slow, but several projects are now in the pipeline with a project on the Village Design Statement for Brighstone actually underway

An opportunity has arisen to work with the Conservation and Design Team, undertaking a survey on local distinctiveness and general Island quirkiness. We are hoping as a result of a forthcoming meeting, we can enlist the help of local Women's Institutes to help with the initial survey.

We have had very good feedback from the National Communication Officers meeting on our recently published Interpretation Guide.

4) Special Agenda Item - Environmental Stewardship - Higher Level Scheme

TT and NR attended a recent meeting in London of the Chairmen of the South East Protected Landscapes, where discussions took place on strategic issues with overviews of Environmental Stewardship and targeting resources for Higher Level Stewardship. With regard to the potential advantages of targeting resources for protected areas, the map distributed to the meeting completely omitted the Isle of Wight as a target area. TT felt this was a serious cause for concern, as there was an emphasis on the alignment of this resource to achieve AONB aims, and HLS was an important delivery mechanism for the conservation of protected landscapes. TT attempted to clarify the criteria used for the selection of target areas, and was advised it was done through a desk top exercise. AG advised this was Phase 1 and is short term, when reviewed there may be changes to targeting in Phase 2.

The resultant discussion raised several areas of concern as follows:-

- Countryside Stewardship Schemes will soon be coming to the end of their 10 year life span. This could cause serious problems if the Island is not seen as a target area, as we could miss out on funding, and there would be no incentive to maintain the land that has benefited.
- Environmental Stewardship Schemes are important mechanisms for conserving and enhancing the landscape, and lack of future resources could be a significant issue.
- Although it is known that HLS is a competitive process, this was previously thought to be based on the quality of applications and not a target area approach. If this is now to be

changed we need to have a better idea of how this will roll out, as it does not look good for the Island.

- The implication that some AONBs are more equal than others is not helpful.
- If monies are only available for 35% of the region, then some areas will miss out unless the available funding is shared.
- The NFU Conference was concerned about what happens to farms over the next ten years, as we may be in danger of losing that which we are trying to protect.
- Although the HLS is a competitive process, each application should be assessed on its merits which was its original intention; it is wrong to imply that one part of the country is better than another.

This matter will be on the agenda at the consultation meeting to be held with Natural England on 31 October, and we need to highlight the implications of this document in terms of how it will impact on the Island. It was agreed we write formally to Alan Law to express our strong concerns, and request further information as to what criteria was used by Defra so we can challenge their assumptions. We also need to know how Phase 2 will be assessed, as it is important we set this within the context of socio economic as well as environmental problems for the farming community on the Isle of Wight. We need to emphasise the Island is different to other parts of the South East, and should be recognised as having special needs.

Action: **JB to write letter to Alan Law**

5) Making the connection between Land and Sea

This document was circulated to all members of the Steering Committee and those Partnership members within the Coastal Portfolio. The document recognises the need to address the challenges for protected landscapes where land and sea meet. It deals with Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) and the forthcoming Marine Bill, providing examples of why these are important, the issues affecting them and the way forward.

It was pointed out there was little mention of the Historic Environment e.g. maritime archaeology in coastal waters, Protection of Wrecks Act and the Historic Seascapes Programme.

We have no disagreement with the broad process, but it is not delivering anything new and stating the obvious; it is not identifying what the barriers are to moving forward, how to move forward or what it will cost. There are different pressures in and around the Island as compared to other areas in terms of recreation etc, which will mean compromises will have to be made.

It was agreed that JB will write a response advising that we do not have any disagreement with the broad principles, which have been identified for some years, but more important is how we move forward to deliver more integration. The letter should also include our concern about the lack of detail on the Historic Environment.

Action: **JB to write response**

6) AGM/Open Forum

Attendance at this year's AGM/Open Forum was rather disappointing, so we need to make the event more interesting ensure partners feel more involved, and not just give a report of the work of the Unit. It is not clear whether the low attendance means the Partnership feel we are doing a

good job, or we need to engage more with partnership members. A general discussion highlighted the following:-

- All portfolio holders not standing for re-election could give a short verbal report on their particular area of interest, which would also put names to faces.
- The AGM could be a short business meeting covering elections and finances, with the Annual Review discussed at the Open Forum.
- Start with lunch followed by the Open Forum, then the AGM finishing late afternoon.
- Hold the event later in the year i.e. October.
- Get a keynote speaker for the Open Forum, and focus on an interesting theme.
- At the AGM portfolio holders could report back on their areas where relevant to the theme of the event, then cover the business part of the meeting, encourage members to think about what they want to ask then look at the Annual Review.
- Have Open Forum as a separate event with a keynote speaker to focus on a particular item of interest.
- Hold a separate event for the general public on a specific theme.
- Look at other venues e.g. Botanic Gardens, College, Roman Villa.
- Workshops could make partners feel they were making more of a contribution.

It should be remembered the Open Forum is primarily for the Partnership, although the general public are usually invited to attend. However, we still need to concentrate on the primary work of the AONB Unit, which is conserving and enhancing our protected landscapes.

Further discussions about how we plan for next year's AGM/Open Forum will be included on the agenda of the Steering Committee meeting to be held in February 2008.

7) **Steering Committee member updates**

Coastal - DC reported that he was unable to attend the last Officers meeting, but will be present at the full Conference on 26 October. Regarding the consultation on Shoreline Management Plans a more detailed report will be provided at the next meeting, which hopefully will contain recommendations as to how we move forward on this issue.

Recreation - nothing to report on this occasion.

Rural Business - nothing to report on this occasion.

Historic Environment - the HEAP project is going well, with the focus now on how to tie it in with the Local Development Framework, with first drafts nearly complete. The Sites and Monuments Record update will be key to monitoring the condition of the Historic Environment. Ruth Waller is also involved in a project with the Natural History and Archaeological Society on the site of the former leper hospital.

Nature Conservation - A recent Woodland Forum meeting discussed wood fuel with the idea of creating a company to buy wood then supply it to customers. Sustained worked woods are good for the AONB, but market forces may lead to changes in woodland type and practice so we will

need to keep a watching brief. The recent increase in wheat prices could see land going back to wheat production, and such an economic driver may lead to more intensive agriculture than ten years ago. Changes to the Habitat Regulations have increased protection for species such as dormice, early gentian and great crested newt. Ignorance of the new guidelines will no longer be a defence if protected species are damaged.

Natural England - although Natural England have some financial constraints, twenty new personnel will be recruited to provide new blood, which can be moulded into what the organisation requires. South Hampshire and the Isle of Wight will get three of these recruits, two terrestrial and one marine, but it is not yet known how regional teams will be affected by the new structure.

IW Council - the Council will be playing their part in tidying up the Island and provide the direction of Tourism for the life of this Council. Any new policies are likely to concentrate inside rather than outside towns, but where they affect the countryside it is hoped they will enhance the AONB.

The suggestion was made that as the Bestival was the type of event which was Island focused, and attracted a lot of people who would be interested in green issues and conservation, this could be the place for an AONB stand.

8) **Any Other Business**

As the work schedule for the AONB Unit for next year will be very busy, we intend to hold a Project Planning meeting in November. Information on our Grant Application for next year's funding will be brought to the Steering Committee in December. This will be held in Brighstone Scout Hut, followed by Christmas lunch at Brighstone Tea Rooms. Menus will be circulated to all members of the Steering Committee, for them to make their choices and return them to the Unit by 31 October 2007.

The non-attendance of the Tourism Portfolio Holder was noted, and JB agreed to contact him to discuss the matter.

Action: *JB to contact Tourism Portfolio holder*

Dates of Future Meetings

2007

13 December	Steering Committee - venue Brighstone Scout Hut and lunch at Brighstone Tea rooms
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2008

07 February	Steering Committee (venue tba)
08 May	Steering Committee (venue tba)
10 July	Steering Committee (venue tba)
09 October	Steering Committee (venue tba)
11 December	Steering Committee (venue tba)

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.12 p.m.

cdm/23 October 2007