

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting  
Thursday 13 December 2007 - Brighstone Scout Hut**

**Present:**

Tony Tutton	Chairman
Denis Russell	Vice-Chair/Community and 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
Steve Blamire	Tourism Portfolio Holder
Geoffrey Case	Farming and Landowning 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**

David Groves	Rural Business Portfolio Holder
Graham Bryant	Natural England
Bill Murphy	Isle of Wight Council
Councillor Anne Bishop	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.

Tennyson Trail: JB has made contact with Highways, and is also contacting colleagues in other protected landscape areas to see how they approach byways subject to traffic regulation orders, and to identify a more suitable method of signage.

Dredging contract: JB has had a brief look at this, but feels it needs more work. TT has advised that SCOPAC did produce a document on some research commenting that dredging more than three miles from the coast was not a problem. JB will endeavour to locate a copy of this document.

It was pointed out that the Marine Bill advocates the setting up of a series of marine nature reserves, although decisions are still required on how this can be achieved, as a holistic approach would be the best way forward.

**Action: JB to obtain copy of SCOPAC report**

Higher Level Stewardship: TT and JB met with Alan Law and other officers of Natural England at the recent consultation meeting, to discuss the points of concern raised by the Steering Committee regarding the recently distributed document. We now have more details on the proposed consultation process, and early in the New Year we will have the opportunity to put forward our case for the Isle of Wight to be included. It was advised that Phase 2 is targeting areas of high landscape value, including AONBs, so it is likely we will be included. There will also be further targeting within AONBs of the highest quality areas. It was suggested we take the opportunity to identify what we consider to be priority areas within the AONB, to have this

information in place when decisions are made; when producing information on the AONB we should endeavour to take the HEAP project into account.

The document was primarily internal, to enable Natural England to identify the best opportunities across all areas for investment in this financial year, and going forward to target Higher Level Stewardship. Concern was expressed that if funding is not allocated this year, it will not be available next year. If a good scheme is submitted, we would expect this to be looked at on its merits, but single elements such as archaeology are unlikely to be approved. The Living Landscapes approach is preferred, and HLS can be used as a form of leverage to attract other funding.

### **3) Financial Report and SDF Update**

Overall our finances are on target, with a 70% spend 67% through the year, but we do, however, have a potential issue in the area of salaries. When the budget was originally set, the potential for a pay settlement of 2.5% was not included. This area will, therefore, be overspent, as the increase was not incorporated for projected salaries spend\*. Next year's budget has now been amended to take this into account, and now includes a potential increase of 2.5%.

\*JB will be speaking to BM on this issue.

The Sustainable Development Fund has been very successful, and we have not had to actively market this funding stream. A report will be distributed to the SDF panel on how projects are progressing, with most of them currently on target. We only have two definite projects under the Character Building Fund, but other applications are in the pipeline. We are on target to use up all the funding in these two areas.

### **4) Core Bid for Natural England 2008/2009**

The key issue for this year will be the review of the Management Plan, which will involve an extensive amount of work. This means some actions will not be delivered at the end of the life of the Plan, but we have achieved 80% of the actions in the Work Plan. The Team's Planning Day reviewed the activities for next year and in addition to the Management Plan Review, the Unit may only be able to concentrate on core work. The bid sets out activities under core functions, provides financial details of salaries etc., information on budgets for office accommodation, delivery of the Management Plan Review and Partnership running costs. We also intend to bid for the full amount for SDF and project funding, but understand that project support is unlikely. The meeting then ratified the bid for submission.

### **5) Rural Funding**

A paper was tabled to the meeting, setting out the possible funding opportunities available to the Island over the next three to five years, identifying aims and how we link these to the performance and remit of the AONB. This follows on from the work with the Rural Community Council and the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership, to identify rural issues through evidence based work, what is not being picked up Islandwide, and the issues in rural areas that are presented in a different way and may need a different approach to delivery. The data will be collated into a State of the Rural Wight report, which will be distributed to stakeholders for their comments. Three pieces of work have recently been commissioned i.e. mapping buildings in rural areas, surveying rural areas to identify what services people use and surveying farms to identify the level of business confidence within the farming sector.

By working together, it is intended to link the key issues into delivery programmes which will help all of us deliver our aims. Looking at shared approaches to administration and management will ensure any available funding will be used to best effect, and available resources shared within one bid. The AONB Unit's function is primarily one of overseeing and facilitating through grant aiding and other activities, and focussing on partnership delivery of AONB objectives. JB feels we may be well placed to act as the management body for many of the programmes listed in the report and if this proves to be the case, additional help and resources would be available.

There was considerable discussion on this proposal, with concern that this could deflect from the core performance of the AONB. JB advised he would only "throw his hat into the ring" if it was appropriate. The meeting, therefore, agreed to the following:-

- To ratify the continued involvement of the AONB in the tripartite approach to assessing the Island's rural issues.
- To investigate the implications of the AONB potentially providing the management for the forthcoming LEADER programme.
- To agree to the AONB seeking to have influence and direct involvement in other programme management affecting, and potentially benefiting, the conservation and enhancement of the area.

## **6) Communications Strategy**

This was first produced when the original Partnership was set up but with the passage of time, some elements had become less useful. The intention was to re-position and revise to provide a more useful document, surveying Partnership members to get a better understanding of what is required, and FH provided an overview of the consultation responses. After some discussion, the meeting agreed to ratify the revised Communications Strategy.

## **7) Undercliff Drive**

Since the decision not to proceed with Undercliff Drive, the Chairman wished to raise the following:-

- This is a major opportunity for the AONB to become involved in the long term future of this area.
- We need to engage with Highways over how they manage or don't manage traffic in the rest of the AONB. Regarding the messages about Eco-Island if Undercliff Drive is reduced to having part of its carriageway given up to pedestrians, cyclists etc, there are good opportunities for us to influence how the whole area is maintained and managed.

There was much general discussion regarding the above as follows:-

- The effective abandonment of area generates the need to look at its function in a different way.
- Consideration should be given to the overall road network not just Undercliff Drive.
- This is an opportunity for a re-think of the transport strategy for the Island as a whole.

- Suggestions have been made for Undercliff Drive to be car free with parking at either end.
- Other parts of the Island have problems with major arterial routes such as the road from Newport to Yarmouth, which is suffering considerable subsidence at Bouldnor.
- Connections between AONB and Eco-Island.
- This raises sustainability issues as the Local Development Framework Core Strategy is now being produced, and the HEAP project contains a section relating to roads and tracks.

The AONB have been involved in the early stages of the Sustainable Community Strategy through the Environment Forum. JB and RG attended an initial meeting covering the economy and environment priorities, with a key delivery partnership sub-group as part of the Island Strategic Partnership. Once this group is constituted, it is hoped the AONB will have a role in the key delivery partnership and influencing the development of Eco-Island being overseen by the ISP.

A suggestion was made that a letter be written to the Chief Executive in recognition of the AONB Partnership's support for the key statements in the new Community Strategy/Eco Island. This should especially focus on "protecting and enhancing the Island's natural beauty", and this was agreed.

**Action:** ***JB to write a letter to Chief Executive in support of Community Strategy/Eco Island***

## **8) Management Plan Review**

The first Workshop held on 29 November covering Threats and Challenges in the current Management Plan went well, and SB commented that it was a very good workshop. In addition to the workshop, Partnership members could enter their responses electronically, and we have already received ten additional responses.

JB feels that the Management Plan Work Group should be reconvened to oversee this important process. The original Work Group contained representatives from the Local Authority, a Chairman, Vice Chairman, Countryside Agency (now Natural England) and JB. Volunteers from the Steering Committee to take part in this Work Group were Vicky Basford, Andy Gordon, Richard Grogan, Tony Tutton as Chair, and in his absence Denis Russell. The AONB Unit will circulate some dates for the first meeting.

**Action:** ***AONB Unit to circulate dates for the first meeting of the Management Plan Work Group***

## **9) Steering Committee member updates**

**Coastal** - the role of the coastal groups is undergoing change, as available resources are going towards landward flooding, and the time for the final decision is fast approaching. Coastal groups are due to be reduced from sixteen to six, and it is not yet clear if SCOPAC will be one of these.

**Recreation** - a meeting of the Local Access Forum was held recently, and an overview of the proceedings have been provided to JB. In the past the Forum was perceived as just being a "talking shop" and so lost good people, however the future looks more promising because the Isle of Wight Council have now realised its importance and given more support.

**Farming and Landowning** - the local agricultural situation continues to be very difficult with regulations and the impact of recent national foot and mouth and blue tongue infections; the sheep sector is under particular pressure. There are a lot of implications as well as problems relating to support, with help from DEFRA decreased due to cuts. All is quiet on the question of an abattoir linked with the incinerator.

A question was asked about the abattoir within the proposed safari park. JB advised he had recently attended a meeting on this issue of the Isle of Wight Council Policy Commission. Details were provided on the abattoir infrastructure, funding difficulties, success, other areas etc. The key messages were the funding available, a requirement to have matched money from the private sector, and the need to find a site which, when selected, could raise public concern. It was felt that a lead presence or group within the farming community was required to drive this forward. The Safari Park was briefly outlined by its supporter/proposer, who stated that an application was imminent, however, no application has yet been received.

**Historic Environment** - Archaeology had a presentation day on 26 October, in order for HEAP to meet a requirement for Leader. Difficulties in writing HEAP documents have been solved with a new format from English Heritage. There will be another round of revision, and HEAP has now moved up the agenda significantly within the Local Development Framework (Island Plan). Wendy Perera has made it clear it needs to be adopted by the Isle of Wight Council and have the status of a background document. JB's assistance to the Archaeology Centre into carrying out consultations linking with the AONB Management Plan Review, is a good example of joint partnership working.

**Nature Conservation** - concern regarding Shoreline Management Plans, where only one has currently been ratified. There is continued concern that decisions and development on coastal defence still seem to be at odds with the Strategy.

It was suggested that JB /DC work on talking to Peter Marsden in an attempt to get a better understanding of the timetable for the process and linkage between documents. In addition the Local Development Framework/Community Strategy need to consider these issues, and make reference to documents but based on flood risk studies identifying areas at risk in next 50/80/100 years.

The Marine Environment Bill needs to be in form of Coastal Strategy and Shoreline Management Plans, but the trend is through sustainable appraisal of the Local Development Framework.

**Natural England** - Shoreline Management Plans should be in the form of Supplementary Planning Guidance and require further integration. JB advised that he was more confident these issues had been properly considered in the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, with additional work undertaken around strategy and consideration of flooding in relation to nature conservation, environment and landscape.

**IW Council** - the Private Finance Initiative for Highways will not now take place, which has meant two years of wasted officer time and money. It is not yet known what Plan B will be, but the AONB Unit needs to have a big input on this, to ensure our objectives are met.

**Tourism** - The Isle of Wight Council have agreed to retain its tourism service, but it will be broken up and split between different departments, with Tourism Information Centres as part of Customer Services and Marketing part of Communications, but how this will pan out is unclear. Projects currently being developed include getting Island producers to market Isle of

Wight products in connection with top eateries in London; the Island as a destination to refresh the mind and spirit and de-stress; and continue with managing Tourism to fit the new Eco-Island.

**10) Committee Development**

The AONB Unit have developed a forward plan strategy, which entailed a day out of the office to review our work initially prior to Christmas and then into the next financial year. This covered events preparation, conference, diarising and forward plans, with more regular smaller forward planning meetings throughout the year. If portfolio holders would like to take part in something similar, as a way of making more use of their experience on a less formal basis with free and open debate we could organise these. The committee agreed with this approach, and NR agreed to put forward some suggested dates.

**Action:** *NR to scope for suitable dates*

**11) Any Other Business**

The Quarterly Report for the third quarter (to end December) normally provided to the Committee cannot be prepared until January, so this will be tabled at the next meeting.

The Steering Committee date proposed for July clashes with this year's National Conference, so the suggestion has been made to change it to 17 July 2008, and this was agreed by the Committee.

**Dates of Future Meetings**

**2008**

07 February	Steering Committee (venue tba)
08 May	Steering Committee (venue tba)
17 July	Steering Committee (venue tba)
09 October	Steering Committee (venue tba)
11 December	Steering Committee (venue tba)
14 October	AGM/Open Forum

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.50 p.m.

cdm/11 January 2008