

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting
Thursday 01 December – Committee Room 1, County Hall**

Present:

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| Tony Tutton | Chairman |
| Denis Russell | Vice-Chair/Community & Parish Portfolio Holder |
| David Court | Coastal Portfolio Holder |
| Cat Carkeet | Tourism Portfolio Holder |
| Vicky Basford | Historic Environment Portfolio Holder |
| Nicola Davies | Countryside Agency |
| Jill Green | Recreation Portfolio Holder |
| Richard Grogan | Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder |
| Councillor Anne Bishop | Isle of Wight Council |
| 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

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| Geoffrey Case | Farming and Landowning Portfolio Holder |
| David Groves | Rural Business Portfolio Holder |
| Adam Wallace | Countryside Agency |
| Andrew Ashcroft | Isle of Wight Council |

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Bishop to her first Steering Committee Meeting. Each attendee introduced themselves giving brief details of their responsibilities.

2) Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising

Paper on charity events: Previous minutes will be reviewed to obtain further information on this paper.

Resignation of Councillor Arnold: The point was raised that this was not included in the minutes of the previous meeting. The reason for this was at that time, we had not received official notification from Members Support that Councillor Arnold had resigned. Confirmation has now been received, and the AONB Unit has formally requested that the Isle of Wight Council nominate a member to sit on the Steering Committee. It was agreed that until the vacancy is filled, this should be a standing item on the agenda.

3) AONB Unit Update

3.1 Activity Update and Financial Report

The quarterly report for July to September was circulated to the meeting, together with an update covering October and November. The only major area where we are behind is in the production of the Annual Review, and we anticipate publication in the early part of 2006.

A question was asked about “Reclaiming Rural Highways” which was a conference covering all aspects of highways including signposting and traditional designs, which has proved very successful in the Dorset AONB. There were several different senior speakers covering all areas of highway work and their impact on protected landscapes, and there was a commitment that changing attitudes was the way forward. However, although

Highway Departments have a duty of regard in AONBs, there are no enforcement powers in place to ensure sensitive solutions are applied. It was also pointed out that the Highways section of the Isle of Wight Council were given several opportunities to send a representative to this conference, but this was not taken up.

AC pointed out that following major changes in planning, it is difficult to find ways of including community documents such as the Shorwell Landscape Character Assessment within the planning process. However, this omission has been identified at Government level, and attempts to find ways of including such documents are ongoing.

Applications for the Sustainable Development Fund are going well. Two meetings of the SDF panel have already taken place, and the next meeting will be held on 06 January 2006. We intend to request a further £15K from the Country Agency for applications already received, and ND confirmed an additional £50K has been put aside for projects on the Island. The Small Grant Fund had a slow start, but applications are now being received, and a meeting is scheduled for 19 December 2005.

4) Updates

4.1 Portfolio Holders, Core Funders, Chairman

Coastal - An update on the meeting of the SCOPAC Officers Working Group attended by DC was circulated to the meeting, and DC gave a brief overview of the details. DEFRA's 'Making Space for Water' consultation was discussed. Its suggestion that responsibility for coastal protection be removed from the Local Authority to the Environment Agency could result in a loss of local input. It was suggested we look at this from an AONB perspective as to the advantages and disadvantages in managing our coastline.

Action: AONB Unit to look into and provide comment on the DEFRA consultation document

Tourism - There will be a meeting in January of the Local Produce Group, which JB will be attending. The "Brown Sign" issue is ongoing, with progress being made in Brading. Over the next few weeks, dependent on the Highways Department, it is hoped some signs will be removed. The Civic Pride Group are developing a draft plan, which identifies the sites of all the Island's public conveniences with proposals for action. The Sunshine Trail has recently received some bad press, but contact with Island 2000 had led to some improvements. Rail Rides from local stations are due to be expanded to cover people who are walking or cycling. A Ten Steps Guide for local businesses to make improvements will be issued in the New Year. Cycling and walking guides have now been converted to pdf format. A new Gift to Nature Officer, Sam Buck, has now been appointed.

RG advised that he had received an e-mail from Becky Collier, and pointed out that the Isle of Wight is not covered on what he thought was the South East Tourism website. RG will forward his e-mail to CC and JB to investigate.

Action: RG to forward e-mail

Historic Environment - Regarding Countryside Quality Counts, should we be making a specific comment on historic environment in the context of the AONB - would like to have a meeting with JB about this subject.

*Action: JB and VB to have a meeting
Update: Meeting now taken place and CQC comments submitted*

Countryside Agency - The re-structuring of the Countryside Agency is continuing and under the South East structure, the Hampshire and the Isle of Wight division will have four local teams, based on joint character areas. Concern was expressed this would mean the AONB will not have such a high profile under the new structure, but the Countryside Agency is trying to ensure that this does not happen. The AONB Unit are waiting to contribute to a regional response by protected landscapes to the future set up of Natural England.

Nature Conservation - Nothing specific to report, but regarding Undercliff Drive discussions are being held with the Isle of Wight Council and individual landowners (of which Hants and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust is one), regarding selling of land and possible compulsory purchase.

Community and Parish - There are several areas of local concern including speeding traffic in rural areas, which is perceived as a worsening problem; a proliferation of road signs in rural areas; and clearance of dead elm trees. The Council have undertaken some clearance work, but it is a problem finding out who is responsible. It was pointed out it is not just a question of responsibility, there are also health and safety issues, volume of work, key zones, re-planting, and the visual aspect with regard to tourism. The question was asked if funding for such work was available through the Unit's funding streams, but concern was expressed that individual landowners may become reliant on this as a regular funding stream. It was suggested that contact was made with our colleagues in other AONB's to see how they deal with this.

Action: Contact other AONB's regarding their approaches to the problem of dead elms

Recreation - Nothing to report in this area, apart from the paper on the "Reclaiming our Rural Highways" meeting, which will be attached to the minutes.

Action: AONB Unit JG's report to be enclosed with the minutes

Chairman - The National Trust have received national recognition of the strong volunteer base they have built up. Access has been improved to properties to meet DDA legislation. They are in the process of providing a strategy in Ventnor on "Living with Holmoak", which will feature control and management with regard to the impact of climate change on this species, and changing the perspective on the role of this species in the landscape. Two land acquisitions are currently in the pipeline. The first is Brickfields, which is being sold to the National Trust by the Isle of Wight Council, as part of the National Nature Reserve although there are problems about the Council's title to the land. The second is a joint project at Yaverland with the RSPB.

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

AC gave an update of where the AONB Unit fits into the new proposed Regeneration Service. Further details have been provided, which are part of a second consultation with staff due to end on 03 January 2006. More detailed proposals show a new Environment Team within the Regeneration Service which includes Countryside, Parks and Gardens; AONB Unit and Local Agenda 21, and the Island Plan is at the heart of the new Service. The line management structure remains the same, with no change to the physical location of the Unit at this stage.

It was advised there had been no further update on the budget scrutiny process exercise regarding any decisions that are due to be made. The concerns that had been expressed in several areas about the importance of the environment have been taken on board. The three main areas under Regeneration are:-

Asset Management

Environment

Infrastructure Management

The delivery mechanism will be the Island Plan, a Private Finance Initiative for transport and roads, and the “ Local Delivery Vehicle” for specific regeneration projects. Various funding routes will be available to the Council, and the intention is to raise wealth and wages underpinned by sustainability. It was pointed out the environment was a key driver in this process, and it is important we all know what is meant by “sustainability”.

DC asked how “quality” fits into these discussions, and said he believes this to be fundamental. AC responded that the Isle of Wight Council are trying to raise the bar with regard to quality. The meaning of the term regeneration can be as variable as the meaning of the term sustainability. One of the key issues is to ensure everyone has an understanding of the definition of these terms. AB agreed definitions need to be clear, citing the potential confusion over the term “Progressive Island” as an example. The main role of the Regeneration Service will be to ensure that sustainability is at the heart of the delivery work of all key partners.

6) **2006-2007 Funding Bids**

A paper on the Funding Bid was circulated to the meeting with the Agenda. This requires ratification by the Steering Committee, for submission to the Countryside Agency by the end of December. JB gave the Committee two options:-

- 1) The decision can be taken by the meeting today.
- 2) Committee members could consider the bid and have until Friday 09 December to raise any concerns or ask questions.

It was agreed to hold the decision until next week.

Action: Members to contact the AONB Unit with questions and/or comments before 09 December 2005, and the AONB Unit to obtain the necessary signature from AA for submission of bid to the Countryside Agency by the deadline

Regarding project funding, it has been suggested the Committee look at a different way forward with regard to the Small Grant Fund. JB suggested the Fund has run its course, as it is becoming more difficult to obtain quality applications, particularly from new applicants. As has previously occurred, there has been a rush of applications towards the end of the funding year, rather than a spread over the twelve month period. Two proposals have been put forward as follows:-

- 1) A continuation of the Small Grant Fund, requesting a funding amount of £15K.
- 2) AONB ‘Character Building’ Project - a new approach to build on community based work created by Village Design Statements, Parish Plans etc. The funding will help in the delivery of specific projects identified through these community approaches, which will benefit the character and local distinctiveness of the AONB. It is proposed to target 3-5 communities within the AONB, and the amount of funding requested will be £25K.

7) **‘Finest Landscapes’ Newsletter**

This is the “shop window” of the Unit, which has now covered all eight themes detailed in the Management Plan. A decision is required as to how we take this forward for the next and

subsequent editions, and do we consider allowing advertising. It was suggested we make contact with other AONBs to obtain information on their protocols, and re-debate the issue at the next meeting. This course of action was agreed.

Action: Unit to canvas protocols with other AONBs

Ideas were put forward that perhaps the themes for future issues could be based on landscape character areas or individual portfolios. FH advised it was intended the next issue to be published in April 2006 would re-focus on who we are and what we do, with the way forward to be agreed at the next meeting to commence with the August 2006 issue.

AB asked if consideration had been given to include our newsletter within Wight Insight. JB advised this had been considered in the original discussions, but it was felt the Partnership required a separate publication to increase its profile.

RG asked if the changes were required just to reduce costs. JB advised that they were, and although we have negotiated with Crossprint to change the paper quality, each edition brings potential increases in printing and production costs. It was pointed out, however, that compared to similar publications produced by other AONBs, our newsletter was very inexpensive.

JG asked if more staff time would be required to sell advertising, and it was advised that a cost benefit exercise would be undertaken before making a final decision.

DC expressed concern that the important impact of the newsletter would be compromised by the inclusion of advertising, even if we applied caveats to what would be acceptable.

8) Any Other Business

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.30 p.m.

9) Dates of future meetings

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