

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting  
Thursday 22 February 2007 - Innovation Centre**

**Present:**

Tony Tutton	Chairman
Denis Russell	Vice-Chair/Community & Parish Portfolio Holder
David Court	Coastal Portfolio Holder
Geoffrey Case	Farming and Landowning Portfolio Holder
Vicky Basford	Historic Environment Portfolio Holder
Richard Grogan	Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder
Jill Green	Recreation Portfolio Holder
Andy Gordon	Natural England
Councillor Vanessa Churchman	Isle of Wight Council
John Brownscombe	AONB Lead Officer
Nicky Rogers	AONB Planning Officer
Carrie McDowell	AONB Assistant

**1) Apologies**

Graham Bryant	Natural England
David Groves	Rural Business Portfolio Holder
Councillor Anne Bishop	Isle of Wight Council
Ashley Curzon	Isle of Wight Council
Fiona Hanna	AONB Communications Officer

JB advised that AC was on annual leave and although we were expecting attendance by a representative of the Local Authority, until they arrived, the meeting would not be quorate as set out in our constitution. The Committee agreed to continue with the discussions, as there was no particular item on the agenda that would be likely to require a formal vote. However, the Committee felt it would be opportune for JB to write to Committee Services and Natural England, to clarify the needs of core funder representation, to enable the AONB Partnership Steering Committee to function. Discussions later in the meeting about a change to meeting times may help to alleviate this situation.

**Action: JB to write to Committee Service and Natural England**

**2) Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising**

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the proceedings of the last meeting.

Tennyson Trail: JB has formally written to the Head of Engineering Services requesting a resolution of the closure issue, based on Tim Slade's report. A response was received confirming the report had been passed to Councillor Ward, who has responsibility for the Environment, and a decision will be made under delegated powers. JB subsequently wrote to Councillor Ward setting out the discussions of the Steering Committee, together with the position of the AONB Partnership which was against the recommendation being put forward by T Slade for a partial closure. It was felt important to emphasize the consideration of the AONB, SSSI's and SAC, and that consideration should be given to full closure. The decision should have been posted on the Council website, but a check prior to the meeting revealed the information is not yet available.

On her arrival, Councillor Churchman read out to the meeting the latest decision regarding the Tennyson Trail. It has been decided that the order will be redrafted to include a permit system for specific users, including small passenger carrying vehicles and blue disabled badge holders. This is intended to overcome the objection from businesses catering for the disabled and those who drive disabled relatives along the Trail. It is intended that permits will have to be obtained from the Local Authority.

JB expressed the view that in his opinion, there was not a need to consider business interests when considering protection of the Trail, and nothing in the legislation about keeping the route open for disabled access. It also sets a bad precedent, and could create more problems than if the Trail was either fully closed or fully open, and a permit system would have its own problems with regard to enforcement. The meeting agreed that JB should write a letter to Councillor Ward to re-iterate our position about full closure of the Trail, and that disabled access is not covered by legislation. If the re-draft is put out for consultation, we will take the opportunity to reiterate our concerns.

**Action:** *JB to clarify position regarding re-draft*

Changes to AONB designation: JB has written a letter to Andrew Turner, which has been circulated to committee members, setting out the view of the Steering Committee regarding boundary designation.

Ashey Down: RG advised that the Wildlife Trust are still awaiting a decision about the purchase of Ashey Down.

### 3) **AONB Unit**

A copy of the latest Financial Report was circulated to the meeting, together with updated figures for the Sustainable Development and Character Building Funds. JB gave a brief overview of the current situation, and although we are 83% through the year with a spend of 85%, we expect to be on track for the year end. The Sustainable Development Fund is on course, but due to the fact that the Character Building Fund did not commence until October last year, monies will be used for an AONB information leaflet and another project application for the Western Yar, to utilise all the available funding.

It was advised that a 3% increase has been built into the core bid to Natural England for next year, with a request for £100K for the Sustainable Development Fund and £25K for the Character Building Fund. AG said the final decision about core bids would be taken shortly by their Chief Executive, and they would be likely to concentrate on project bids which deliver the business of Natural England, and fit with their four new core headings.

### 4) **Quarterly Report - Third Quarter 2006/2007**

JB gave a brief outline of the Unit's extensive work in the third quarter. A question was asked about Shoreline Management Plans, and it was advised that after discussion with D Court, JB had contacted Robin McInnes about the position of SMPs. It is intended to re-form the Work Group, and R McInnes will write formally to invite the AONB Unit to be a member of this Group.

A question was asked about the situation with PRIME (Problem Resolution in Multi-agency Environments), but nothing has happened for some time. A leaflet was produced about Rights and Responsibilities regarding BOATS, and JG requested a copy. However, due to

the situation regarding the Tennyson Trail, and the fact that the two Police representatives have left the Island, it did not have an official launch, and has not been circulated.

**Action:** ***AONB Unit to provide copy of PRIME leaflet to J Green***

Regarding the World Heritage Site Committee, we have been involved in the process from an early stage, and provided thoughts regarding the relevance to AONB management. Geoparks contain certain caveats regarding protection, while World Heritage sites do not, however, if the conclusion is to aim for a Geopark, the establishment of a World Heritage site can be put in place at a later date. Issues have been raised regarding management and conservation enhancement and not just promotion of the area. If there is an extension to the Jurassic coast, care is required regarding responsibility for certain issues, and the problems associated with the resources to manage increased visitor numbers. The final report should be published soon, to provide a way forward on how the Local Authority can establish its priorities.

With reference to the One Million Blooms project, the Environment Agency has expressed concern about the possibility of inappropriate planting of non-native species in the countryside. Councillor Churchman advised that several initiatives are in the pipeline for the next financial year, and two internal meetings have already taken place. Preferences have been expressed for drought tolerant plants, with Simon Goodenough of Ventor Botanic Gardens available to provide advice. It is intended to have a budget of £50K, with both Town and Parish Councils applying for funding from £250-£5,000, for landmark features in towns and villages which will have to obtain Council approval. JB suggested that now the project is in the public domain, a paper is brought to Steering Committee regarding how the project will operate, together with its aims and objectives.

**Action** ***JB to provide paper on One Million Blooms project***

## **5) Steering Committee member updates**

**Coastal** - The last SCOPAC officer meeting were still very concerned about "Making Space for Water", particularly regarding the relevant responsibilities of Government and Local Authorities, on which there has been very little progress. There were also discussions regarding sites within the AONB, and the lack of closeness to the decision-making process. Concern was expressed about liaison between the Coastal Management Section and the AONB Partnership.

**Farming and Landowning** - It was advised that at the last meeting of the NFU/CLA, members have commenced making monetary contributions into a fund to be used for an incinerator feasibility study, and contact with members of the sheep group regarding their incinerator have been put on hold. NR advised that regarding the site for the sheep incinerator within the AONB, recent discussions have enabled a possible move forward in terms of access to the site. Regarding farm payments on a national level, only 20% of farmers have received their full payments. Also Natural England's plan regarding coastal access is causing concern to those landowners who will be affected by any changes.

**Recreation** - JG has written two articles on the 50 for 50 Walk, for the Ramblers Association newsletter. Following the walk JG has been asked to give talks about the AONB, and is happy to continue to publicise the work of the Unit in this way. In addition for the third year running, a 24 hour Round the Island Walk has been organised as part of this year's Walking Festival.

JG also supports the AONB stance on the Tennyson Trail, and feels it is part of our duty of care to protect the environment for recreational use.

It was felt to be vital that we have a representative from Tourism on the Steering Committee, especially as Tourism is such an important part of the Island economy. It was advised that the AONB Unit had written to the Head of Tourism about a new Portfolio holder, but possibly due to the internal changes within Tourism, we have not yet received a reply. It was agreed the AONB Unit would make contact with Councillor Hunter-Henderson, who is the elected member responsible for Tourism.

**Action:** ***AONB Unit to contact Councillor Hunter-Henderson***

A question was asked about the implementation of the Brown Sign policy, following the work undertaken by the AONB Unit and Tourism. It was advised that responsibility for implementing this policy, which has been adopted by the Council, lay with the Highway Authority. Some work has already taken place in certain areas e.g. Brading, but the pace of change is moving very slowly. DC asked about the AONB view on this subject, which was that consultation should be on individual applications, and that signage should only be used to direct visitors to the location of a tourist attraction, but not for general advertising.

**Community and Parish** - the recent meeting of the Association of Town and Parish Councils, again expressed concern about speeding on rural roads, particularly following the number of fatal accidents over recent months. Councillor Churchman advised that the Council intend to trial 20 mph speed limits outside six schools, following extended powers provided to Local Authorities under new Government legislation.

These comments initiated a general discussion regarding highways, and JB commented that a letter had been sent to the Chief Executive regarding highways and signage, together with a copy of the document recently published by Dorset AONB entitled "Reclaiming Rural Highways", although no reply has yet been received. A copy of this document was requested by Councillor Churchman.

**Action:** ***Copy of "Reclaiming Rural Highways" to be sent to Councillor Churchman***

Andrew Pegram also gave a talk to the Association regarding the problem of untrimmed and overhanging hedges, although concern was expressed about the cost of this type of work. The Council do have powers to enforce landowners to improve the situation, but these are rarely used. It was suggested that a piece could be included in the next AONB Newsletter, regarding the responsibilities of landowners to keep hedges tidy.

Comment had also been made about light pollution from the proposed cricket pitch at Blackwater, which would be visible from areas of the AONB.

**Nature Conservation** - The recent coastal access paper has led to concerns about disturbance and damage to sensitive estuarine habitats. Access to the Island's coastal path could be difficult for those landowners where coastal erosion has caused the footpath to disappear. JB mentioned that there are agreements with some coastal landowners and the Rights of Way Section, to re-align eroding Rights of Way further inland.

**Historic Environment** - VB advised that the Historic Environment Action Plan will be available as a web-based rather than a paper document. At the meeting of the HEAP Steering Group, there was discussion on particular issues both inside and outside the AONB, which impact on the historic environment and how these can be addressed in terms of forward planning.

**Natural England** - the point was raised about extended protection work that has taken place at Castlehaven without consent. The additional area of protection does not fall within the current consent, and it should be removed. The problem of enforcement was discussed, and it was agreed the AONB Unit should make contact with the Enforcement Team in the Local Authority, to make strong representation that improvements are required in this area.

**Action:** **JB to contact Enforcement Team**

AG advised that the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), have objected to the Core Strategy formulated by the Local Authority. GOSE requires the Core Strategy to be more specific with regard to levels and location of development. If the Local Authority is more specific, it will fall foul of the Appropriate Assessment as required by the Habitat Regulations and would, therefore, be considered unsound by the Planning Inspectorate. Unfortunately, the Core Strategy was formulated before the requirements of the Habitat Regulations came into place.

AG advised that as Natural England (NE) has a landscape function, it can ensure that there will be a legal agreement incorporated into the conditions of the Undercliff Drive planning permission. This agreement will include issues that we consider important i.e. the landscape impact of highway furniture and signage. Under this agreement, the Local Authority will have to consult Natural England before implementing the scheme.

**Rural Business** - as the portfolio holder was unable to attend the meeting, he advised via e-mail that he was extremely disappointed with the situation within IFCA, which bears out his view at previous meetings that it is completely unmanageable in its present form and with its current leaders. He does not believe food and craft businesses sit happily together anyway, as they both have different needs.

**Chairman** - TT advised that he will be taking a three month sabbatical from mid-March to mid-June, so the next meeting will be chaired by D Russell.

**6) AONB Update on current and proposed activities**

Lack of time precluded a detailed discussion on this subject, but the re-vamped Partnership Update is almost complete, and an AONB leaflet describing the work of the Unit will be launched shortly.

**7) Any Other Business**

The Committee agreed that now the representatives from Natural England are based nearer to the Island, future meetings will commence at 10.00 a.m.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.20 p.m.