

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting
Thursday 28 April 2005 – Seaclose Offices, Newport**

Present:

Tony Tutton	Chairman
Denis Russell	Vice-Chair/Community & Parish Portfolio Holder
David Groves	Rural Business Portfolio Holder
Geoffrey Case	Farming and Landowning Portfolio Holder
David Court	Coastal Portfolio Holder
Richard Grogan	Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder
Cat Carkeet	Tourism Portfolio Holder
Nicola Davies	Countryside Agency
Ashley Curzon	Isle of Wight Council
John Brownscombe	AONB Officer
Fiona Hanna	AONB Assistant
Carrie McDowell	AONB Admin

1) Apologies

Adam Wallace	Countryside Agency
Andrew Ashcroft	Isle of Wight Council
Vicky Basford	Historic Environment Portfolio Holder
Jill Green	Recreation Portfolio Holder
Marijke Ransom	AONB Planning & Information Officer

TT welcomed David Groves to his first meeting as the new portfolio holder for Rural Business.

2) Minutes of Last Meeting & Matters Arising

Military Road: there has been no further contact on this issue, but will continue to progress.

Wind turbine application: current situation is a further delay in receipt of the planning application to late summer or early autumn. This is due to problems at Your Energy, with a change of directors and the closure of their Bournemouth office.

Wind turbine at Cheverton Farm: this application was renewed in 2001 and as works have now commenced, no further renewal is required.

Memorandum of Agreement: draft has been circulated, and when the staff changes have been finally clarified, this will be signed off. It will also be updated when the forthcoming changes to the re-organisation of the Countryside Agency are in place. At the recent meeting of South East AONB Officers, the latest information is if Labour are returned to Government, the matter will be concluded at the end of 2005, with Natural England being set up as a separate body.

Leader+ 'Farm Fact File' Project: this has now been completed, with a claim submitted for funding amounting to £3,000. All targeted farming businesses have now had their packs, and the website is up and running. It is hoped this approach can be rolled out to other areas.

Funding regarding public access to the countryside: JB has yet to discuss the Access Management Grant with Rights of Way. It is the responsibility of the local Highway Authority to make a bid for funds, although they may work together with other organisations. At the Local Access Forum it was felt the AONB might be able to assist in the preparation of such a plan, due to their relationship with the Countryside Agency, as the Rights of Way section are currently working on their Improvement Plan. As there is a need for the ROWIMP to be completed as part of the Local Transport Plan to guarantee the long-term viability of the Rights of Way service, they do not have the capacity to progress the funding issue.

However, the material received from the Countryside Agency requires a much larger amount of preparation work to obtain the relevant funding than was first thought to be necessary, and the Unit needs to consider whether to assist in taking this forward. It is not just a question of signs or waymarking, there is a requirement for a stand-alone management plan covering gates, signage, mapping, and long-term site management.

There was much discussion regarding the problems being experienced by landowners regarding encroachment on land not open to public access, gates left open, damage to gates and stiles, due to the lack of relevant signage at the boundaries of open access land. It was agreed JB would meet with Tim Slade, and also take these concerns forward to the next meeting of the Local Access Forum. ND would also take this issue back, and try to find out what is happening in other AONB's.

Action: *JB/ND to further progress funding issues*

3) **AONB Unit Activity Update**

JB read through the circulated paper giving an update of the work of the Unit since the last Steering Committee meeting, and for the whole of last year. There are areas where the Unit has far exceeded their targets, but a small number of areas where progress has fallen short such as the development of accords, photographic record of key views comparison, state of the AONB report, annual progress report, landscape detectives training event and Heritage Coast tideborne litter project.

The meeting congratulated the Unit on the extensive amount of work they had achieved.

4) **Financial Report**

FH circulated the latest Financial Report to the meeting. Total percentage figures have been shown in the year to date spend, providing greater clarity when comparing actual spend against budget. There was additional expenditure on postage due to the circulation of the Management Plan, and in future we will investigate other methods such as a courier service. There is a minor underspend for the year of approximately £35.00, and a vote of thanks was given to FH for her efforts in keeping spending under tight control.

There has been one withdrawal from the Small Grant Fund, with escalating costs cited as the reason. The funds for this project amounted to £2,000, and arrangements have been made with the Countryside Agency to reduce our claim by this amount. Other projects have required less funding than originally anticipated amounting to £750, and it is intended these monies will be re-distributed to those projects whose costs were greater than expected, and with the ability to receive a greater SGF contribution still falling within the funding criteria of the scheme.

5) **AONB Partnership**

a) **Update on Restructuring and 2005/06 funding update**

This was required due to the Unit reaching its three yearly review, and the fact that MR will be leaving the Unit on 22 June 2005. The new staffing structure for the Unit will be as follows - AONB Lead Officer, AONB Planning Officer, AONB Communications Officer and AONB Assistant (part time).

Following evaluation of the above roles, the Planning Officer post was graded as expected, the Communications Officer post lower than expected, and the Lead Officer's post higher than expected. AA and AC have agreed the IW Council will fund the salary increases for the Lead Officer's role for this year and the following two years. The meeting expressed appreciation to IW Council for this additional funding.

Job Descriptions have been drawn up, with advertisements in the final stages prior to sending them to HR. It is anticipated interviews will be held on 13 and 14 June, and JB hoped the new team would be in place towards the end of July 2005.

DR asked about the impact of this re-structure on the staff. The meeting discussed this issue, but the final implications will not be known until the recruitment process has been completed. It was agreed that with the additional IWC contribution, there was scope within the budget to address the cost implications of the final AONB Unit structure. The Memorandum of Agreement between the Countryside Agency and the Isle of Wight Council setting out their joint funding of the AONB Partnership is also dependent upon the final structure of the Unit, and it is expected that this will be resolved by mid to late June 2005.

(b) Feedback on review

A questionnaire and a reminder have been sent to all Partnership members requesting feedback on the work of the Unit. Only 11 replies were received, but all of these were positive and helpful. It was suggested the feedback forms should have been addressed to individuals, which might have elicited a larger number of responses, and also that the lack of replies indicated that the Unit is doing a good job or more people would have complained. It was agreed this issue be raised again at the Open Forum, with an attempt to obtain feedback from delegates.

6) Portfolio updates

Coastal - a paper was circulated giving an overview of attendance at the recent SCOPAC conference, and background information on the original formation of the organisation. It was felt our position as an associate member is sufficient, and that either DC or JB should attend future meetings.

Nature Conservation - Concern was expressed that coastal defence schemes were being proposed in the absence of a finalised Coastal Defence Strategy. A discussion followed, and it was suggested there was a need for better communication with Coastal Management and the AONB. It was felt that the accord to be drawn up by the AONB Unit with the Coastal Management Section should be brought forward. RG also expressed concern about difficulties in obtaining current information regarding the West Wight Landscape Project. AC advised that as Ollie Boulter is working part time for the Council's Planning Policy Department, he could be contacted at the Planning office on Mondays.

Farming and Landowning - following collection problems regarding the disposal of fallen stock, Trading Standards have sent a formal letter to DEFRA for derogation on the Island. This has now been granted, but only for an interim period of three years.

There is much concern among farmers since MAFF was replaced by DEFRA that new regulations are being introduced, but insufficient structures in place to ensure adherence. Particular concern was voiced over the new Rural Payments Agency.

- **Tourism** - Highways have completed a brown sign audit, and out of a total of 848, 230 require repair, replacement or removal. JB has been involved in re-writing the policy on brown signs, which contains a new application process to keep signs to a minimum. In future when a request is received for a new sign, contact is made with CC and a decision taken as to whether it falls within the policy, meaning AONB issues are now built in. The Highways Authority will look at this approach for all signage requests.

Action: **CC to provide copy of new brown sign policy**

Thanks given to JB for attending the workshop for taxi drivers, which generated very positive feedback, as did the event for walkers and cyclists, which was attended by 20 local businesses.

A draft Tourism Development Plan is available on the Intranet, and CC will provide copies of the final Plan, and JB is now a member of the Isle of Wight Tourism Board. There will be a meeting next week of the South East Walks Partnership, with senior people from GOSE, SEEDA and other AONB's. RG mentioned a paper on the effects of charity events on sensitive sites, and JB and CC requested a copy.

Action: *RG to provide copy of paper on effect of charity events*

- **Rural Business** - DG to meet with JB to discuss his role as portfolio holder.

Action: *Meeting to be arranged between DG and JB*

- **Parish** - nothing to report
- **Countryside Agency update** – The new organisation are trying to work towards attending meetings and events as one voice representing Natural England, rather than a representative from each of the organisations i.e. English Nature, Rural Development Service, Countryside Agency Land Access and Recreation Division. This will happen gradually over time, and we will be kept in touch with progress.
- **IW Council update** – The LDF (Island Plan) will be rolling out in mid-summer, with stakeholders and the AONB being involved in the process. There will also be a re-organisation of Planning Services with interviewing for two posts tomorrow, but AC would still line manage the AONB Unit.
- **Chairman's update** - Due to a recent National Trust purchase of the Eastern field near Tennyson Down, an alternative to the steep coastal path via the church at Freshwater had improved access to Tennyson Down for less able visitors. This has also decreased the pressure on the narrow and steep path along the cliff edge.

7) **Recent Publications of Note**

a) **Countryside Agency – Understanding tranquillity**

This paper has resulted from a study in Northumberland and Chilterns, using a new methodology to provide an overview of the main features of what is and what is not tranquil. ND will provide copies of the full document when it is published in June 2005.

DC felt the definition of tranquillity must generally be linked with solitude, creating problems for the AONB, which needs to balance the encouragement of visitors to the Island, with the protection of the landscape and scenery they come to enjoy.

JB said how we manage these issues is important, so we keep the vital characteristics and qualities of the Island's nationally treasured landscape, which is a main feature of the Management Plan. The point was made that visitors who come from more heavily populated areas might consider the whole Island to be tranquil. CC suggested the Head of Tourism should give a paper at the next Steering Committee meeting, and offered IW Tourism offices as a venue for the next meeting.

b) DEFRA - Guidance on Duty of Regard

Copies of this report, which sets out changes in AONB's and how they are monitored, was distributed to the meeting. The report confers a responsibility to monitor and report any potential breaches of the duty of regard, initially to the Countryside Agency (or Natural England) who then report to DEFRA. We will also need to mention this in our Annual Review. In terms of what the end result will be, it was felt there will be a need for gradual development of case law. The guidance gives us the opportunity to raise issues with key stakeholders via the accords, about how we all work together to ensure we meet our responsibilities. JB advised we currently have a case where a decision was made which was felt to be outside the remit of a committee, which may need to be addressed as a potential breach. It is the intention in future, however, to attempt to use the new rules as a means of persuasion rather than just policing.

8) Any Other Business

Pleasure was expressed about Brading Villa receiving a Civic Trust Design Award, and the Unit have made contact with a view to holding a joint celebratory event.

JB and RG had both attended a recent meeting of the Local Strategic Partnership's Theme No 7 Group "An Attractive Island". Debate then followed reflecting on the structure and operations of the LSP to date, the discussions held at the recent meeting and the implications for AONB management. It was felt there was a need for more openness and transparency in the workings of the LSP, and for clear terms of reference for the "Attractive Island" theme.

The Unit have received several letters and e-mails, containing positive responses to the recently distributed Finest Landscapes Newsletter.

Members of the Committee need to consider ideas for the theme of the Open Forum in September, and which portfolios should be up for re-election.

Action: JB to present paper to next meeting

It was agreed the meeting should send letters of thanks to Councillor Butchers and Councillor Jarman for all their help with the work of the Committee. Following the result of the General Election the Unit will write formally to the Council, to nominate two new Councillors to be members of the Steering Committee.

Action: Letters of thanks and re-nominations

A proof copy of the planned Heritage Coast leaflet was shown to the meeting, and it was agreed that Wight Wildlife would be added to the list of organisations. This was well received by the meeting.

9) Dates of future meetings

Details of these were listed on the agenda.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.38 p.m. Venue of the next meeting is to be advised.