

**Minutes of Isle of Wight AONB Partnership Steering Committee Meeting
Thursday 17 July 2008 - Innovation Centre, Newport**

Present:

Tony Tutton	Chairman
Denis Russell	Vice-Chair/Community and Parish Portfolio Holder
Jill Green	Recreation Portfolio Holder
Steve Blamire	Tourism Portfolio Holder
David Groves	Rural Business Portfolio Holder
David Court	Coastal Portfolio Holder
Richard Grogan	Nature Conservation Portfolio Holder
Vicky Basford	Historic Environment Portfolio Holder
Andy Gordon	Natural England
Jackie Kelly	Natural England
Wendy Perera	Isle of Wight Council
Nicky Rogers	AONB Planning Officer
Fiona Hanna	AONB Communication Officer
Carrie McDowell	AONB Assistant

The Chairman welcomed Jackie Kelly to the meeting, who is a new representative from Natural England replacing Julie Danby.

1) Apologies

Geoffrey Case	Farming and Landowning Portfolio Holder
Bill Murphy	Isle of Wight Council
Councillor Vanessa Churchman	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.

There were some minor amendments as follows: Recreation - The Round the Island walk was not actually a race; visit from Helen Phillips - the wording implied the Historic Environment Portfolio holder was present, whereas she had actually sent her apologies to the meeting.

Comment to Local Authority by the AONB Partnership regarding education consultation:

We have until 26 September to comment on this current consultation. FH will draft a comment, to be circulated to the Steering Committee for approval prior to sending it to the Local Authority. It was agreed we include in our comment the importance of the issues of transport, with potentially more children travelling longer distances to their schools, and offer to participate in any future education forums to debate potential solutions.

Portfolio Holders contact with partners in their portfolio: this is ongoing, as some have made contact either individually or at the stakeholder workshops.

Shoreline Management Plan Group: DC attended the first meeting, and will provide a report in the section on Stakeholder Updates.

Progress with abattoir: WP advised she has been chasing for information on this subject but with no success to date, so this query will be escalated to a higher management level.

3) **Financial Report**

A question was asked as to whether the late arrival of funding from Natural England, had made any impact on the running of the AONB Unit. It was advised the Unit had been very careful with spend to date, and the interim assistance from the Local Authority had been very helpful. FH reported that at the end of the first quarter everything is on track.

4) **Quarterly Report for Natural England**

This report was circulated prior to the meeting, which provides an overview of the work done by the Unit, in relation to the programme set out in the annual funding bid to Natural England.

The Steering Committee expressed their thanks to the AONB Unit team, for all their hard work in keeping everything on track in the continued absence of a Lead Officer.

5) **AONB Lead Officer post**

The closing date is 18 July, and we will not know how many applications have been received until these have been collated by Human Resources. WP confirmed she is aware of at least one applicant, although there have been lots of hits and expressions of interest on the IW Council website. A question was asked as to what would happen if there was only one applicant, and the interview panel felt they were not suitable. WP suggested we wait and see if there were any suitable applicants and if not, there may be a case for reviewing the remuneration of the members of the AONB Unit, to take account of the length of time they had been without a Lead Officer. It was suggested that if there are no suitable applicants, would it be prudent to arrange for a temporary secondment to the Lead Officer post. It was pointed out that filling posts on a temporary basis, has proved very difficult in other areas of the Council. Concern was expressed about any delays in the Management Plan Review Process, but WP was confident this would be delivered on time.

It was agreed we should await the outcome of the current round of interviews and if there are no suitable candidates, a special meeting of the Steering Committee may be required to review the way forward.

Update: we can confirm that six applications were received and four applicants invited for interview, with Fiona Hanna being offered the position.

6) **Annual General Meeting/Open Forum/Portfolio Holder elections**

A paper on this subject was circulated to the meeting, as there is concern at the potential for six changes of Portfolio Holder at the next election. As it is possible the AONB Team will not be at full complement until mid-October, it was suggested it would be prudent to request agreement from the Partnership to continue with the status quo for one year.

There was much discussion on this subject as this is the second time this has been done, and concern was expressed that we should be seen to be adhering to the democratic process as laid down in the constitution. However, we need to find some way of ensuring the problem of large numbers of portfolio holders being re-elected at one time does not recur, to ensure the stability of the Steering Committee.

It was agreed the two Portfolio Holder posts of Nature Conservation and Rural Business will go forward for re-election at this year's Annual General Meeting, as they have already been extended for two years and cannot be extended further. In respect of the remaining posts for

re-election (Chairman and Portfolio Holders for Community and Parish, Coastal and Farming and Landowning), it was agreed that some should be extended for one year and the remainder for two years. FH will liaise with the current post holders as to how this can be achieved, and any decision will have to be ratified at the Annual General Meeting in October.

With regard to the Annual General Meeting and Open Forum, the format has been adjusted in accordance with last year's consultation. The Open Forum will now commence at lunchtime and finish at 4.00 p.m. with a quick break followed by an Annual General Meeting of around one hour to deal with the business side, finishing at 5.30 - 6.00 p.m. The Committee discussed suggestions on the theme, topics, subjects and speakers for this event, as follows:-

- oil/ economic drivers/credit crunch, and how these are fuelled by climate change
- landscape/biodiversity/Historic Environment issues and changes
- renewable energy
- implications for Woodland Forums, Forestry Commission and potential harvest of woodland products
- pressure on water - Water Board
- sustainable tourism and its influences on the AONB
- make it positive about living landscapes and communities
- look at the positive side of green tourism
- review research being done by Natural England, looking at areas for possible wind farms including the Solent
- how do you own your AONB?
- sustainable transport
- living with climate change and saving resources - SE AONBs and English Heritage have some relevant material in this area

7) **Steering Committee Member Updates**

Recreation - represent AONB on Local Access Forum; will be attending a seminar on 12/13 September organised by the Ramblers Association; also led a memorial walk in the AONB. Am a Trustee on the CPRE Executive Committee, providing verbal reports on AONB. For the first time there was a conflict between CPRE/AONB, in respect of the Couthy Butts application.

Coastal - DC attended the second meeting of the Shoreline Management Plan Steering Group, chaired by Peter Marsden of the IW Coastal Centre. Shoreline Management Plans are key to the future of how we deal with sea level rise and coastal protection, and the discussions were very useful. It was recognised, however, that this is a big task with so many different issues and viewpoints to be fed into the process, but Defra's concept of amalgamating coastal protection and flood management was beginning to take shape. There was recognition that previous incremental developments had a damaging impact on some Special Protection Areas, but the next stage of the process will be much stronger to stop this from happening. The background work and research already completed, will be taken into account in the work on SMP2.

Concern was expressed about links into IW Council strategic documents, and whether the AONB Steering Committee should make a comment on this. It was advised that the AONB Unit, D Court and a representative of the IW Coastal Centre, would be looking at links to AONB plans and what we are hoping to deliver within SMP2.

SCOPAC Full Conference coincided with the IW Festival, and the chaotic traffic on the ferries meant DC was unable to attend. SCOPAC will continue to have an elected membership, and there may be areas of their research and development the AONB Partnership might be able to make use of, with a pot of money available for suitable research projects.

Rural Business - the recent stakeholder meeting on Farming and Forestry again highlighted the fact that these industries still face problems with regard to lack of infrastructure, such as an abattoir and wood processing plant. The cost of sending animals to the mainland is increasing, with Island farmers facing the added problem that they pay twice, once to send the animals to the mainland and again for the meat to be returned. This means it is cheaper to buy meat from Hampshire farmers, than those on the Island. More education is required regarding the health benefits of locally sourced food and with schools, to show children where their food comes from linking the farm to the plate.

Historic Environment - working on a short extension project using SDF funding to get all the documents relating to the Historic Environment Action Plan available online. There will be a launch targeted at Senior Councillors and Officers in October; the production of a booklet similar to that produced for the Biodiversity Action Plan, with a light touch steering people towards the website. Ruth Waller will be take the HEAP for adoption to a Senior Management Officer meeting, with the intent it will provided background evidence for the Island Plan.

As a separate issue, concern has been expressed regarding poor general maintenance at Carisbrooke Castle, in terms of areas of stonework and ash trees growing on the top of the flat area behind the stone revetment. Perhaps it would be possible for the AONB to make contact regarding this lack of maintenance. Also at Appuldurcombe, where a local farmer owns the land, but the house is in the guardianship of English Heritage, the interpretation board is in very poor condition.

DR also commented that the condition of some of the hedgerows on the Island is very poor, and there are problems with the increased growth of ragwort.

Nature Conservation - the Duke of Burgundy butterfly which was present on seven sites has not been seen for two years, and is now regarded as extinct on the Island. This has occurred due to poor land management, in spite of strenuous efforts by organisations and local groups to ensure its survival, and being an area which is an SSSI. Two other species, the Small Pearl Bordered fritillary and Glanville fritillary are also vulnerable, and there is concern these should not suffer the same fate. Would like to be able to reassure those organisations within the wider area of Nature Conservation, that the AONB Partnership will support any activity to protect these species, and argue against any activity that might damage the current populations. The loss of a species is detrimental to the health and habitats of the wider countryside and once lost, can never be recovered. Protecting vulnerable species needs to be highlighted in Environment Forums, and the Island Strategic Partnership need to look at this especially in connection with Eco-Island. Members of the Committee were happy to provide such an assurance.

Natural England commented they had made consistent efforts to work with the landowner in question, including offering a Woodland Grant Scheme and Wildlife Enhancement Scheme, but with little success. Under the CRoW Act, it is possible to impose a management scheme on a landowner and failure to carry this out can result in a Management Notice being issued, whereby Natural England would do the work themselves and charge the landowner. With hindsight, perhaps this course should have been pursued at an earlier stage in its negotiations with the landowner, as it is important to build positive relationships with landowners to protect biodiversity, and stop this type of situation happening in the future. It was suggested that perhaps an article could be put in the next issue of *Finest Landscapes*, to highlight the importance of managing the landscape.

West Wight Landscape Partnership (WWLP) have received funding of £1.7m, with some 16-17 Projects planned, some of which will be in the AONB. It is important for us to keep a watching brief on these, to ensure projects are sympathetic to the area and the AONB. It was advised

that the AONB were involved in the project bid, are on the WWLP Board, and could assist with funding part of the learning programme through the Natural England Project Grant.

Natural England - Graham Bryant has now moved to another post, and it is intended Jackie Kelly will take over from AG in a phased approach to be completed by October 2008. Rachel Bosanquet will be working on Countryside Stewardship agreements, and it is intended there will be another full time member of staff covering SSSI's, AONBs and agri-environment schemes.

Regarding HLS, what came out of the targeting exercise will be honed to cover AONBs, although the target areas had to have regional priorities. The area designated on the Island was much smaller than expected, but FH and Colin Pope have made proposals for the area to be increased in size.

Tourism - a new Head of Tourism has now been appointed, (John Metcalfe), but there are many internal factors that will have an impact in this area and the implications of this are uncertain. The state of the economy may affect certain areas, although the Council have for the first time in eight years run out of Tourist Guides. An agreement has been reached with the local Chamber of Commerce, whereby they concentrate on producing accommodation and tourists guides, with the Council developing tourism as a whole and increasing investment on the Island. SB is now confident this is the right structure, and we can move forward with a new image campaign. It was advised for the first time during this year's Walking Festival, visitor numbers exceeded the number of Island residents taking part in the event.

8) **Management Plan Review - Update**

Several stakeholder meetings have taken place, all very different but providing a lot of useful information to feed into the new Delivery Plan, and the online consultation has now finished. Comments are due to be received from the key organisations of Natural England, English Heritage and the Environment Agency. Thanks were expressed to all Portfolio Holders for their assistance with the stakeholder meetings.

9) **Any Other Business**

a) **SDF and AONB Small Grant Fund/Landscape Improvement Grant**

We have received a proposal under the Sustainable Development Fund, to fund for small scale works, which would previously have been put forward under the old Small Grant Fund. This would fill the gaps in HLS and ELS programmes where small schemes fall through the net, having a negative impact on the landscape. Concern was also expressed about gaps appearing through HLS targeting. At the recent Sustainable Development Fund Panel meeting, there were concerns on this application regarding the lack of accountability and potential double administration charge. It was agreed at that meeting to raise the subject at this Steering Committee, to canvas the opinion of members. Following discussion, it was agreed the project could go ahead, and that it was appropriate for it to be run via the Wildlife Trust with AONB Unit input. FH/RG would negotiate on the amount of funding to be granted, and details of the scheme.

b) **Move to three year funding and service level agreements**

This will provide us with more flexibility in terms of the way we distribute our funding, as instead of receiving a specified amount for the Core Budget and funding streams, we will receive one amount of money and will be able to make decisions about how it is

spent. Current indications are that we will receive 95% of the current amount, with an additional grant of 5% based on delivery, but concern was expressed this did not make any inflation provision. There will be a new agreement between Natural England and the IW Council, and this is currently being reviewed by the Council's Legal Team. We will also have to provide Natural England with a business plan on a three year basis.

c) Regional Tourism Bid to RDPE (SEEDA)

This is a collective project whereby nine AONBs in the South East are applying for funding from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), and the paper circulated to the meeting provided details of the project objectives, project audience, elements and evaluation. Concern was expressed that nowhere in the document does it address the problems of carrying capacity on sites in protected landscapes, and the impact of potentially doubling the number of visitors. It was advised the idea was to reduce the impact on protected areas, by encouraging different markets. It was also felt the bid should include a definition of the word "sustainable" in terms of AONBs. It was agreed to take this bid forward, which will include a Business Plan being developed by Laura Newland. If the bid is successful, we will be able to set our own priorities and deal with any specific concerns.

NR advised the meeting that an application has been received regarding the Rowridge transmitter, requesting an increase in the size of the mast from 150m to 184m. There will also be additional lighting and more support for the concrete bases. It is intended that views from various vantage points will be included in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

The article in Geographic magazine was well received, and it was also advised that Martin Munt had written a very useful paper on geology.

Dates of Future Meetings

2008

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 1.47 p.m.