



HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1 November 2010 Meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee held at the Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell

Present:

Cllr Mrs S Tidy (Chairman)	East Sussex County Council
Cllr R Bullock	Kent County Council
Cllr Mrs J Fox	Wealden District Council
Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council
Cllr Mrs E Kitchen	Horsham District Council
Cllr M Lock	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr R Taylor	Ashford Borough council

Also Present:

Tim Broomhead	South East Country Land and Business Association
Kristoffer Hewitt	Natural England
Janet Whitman	Natural England

Officers:

Mr J Lavender	AONB Director
Ms S Marsh	AONB Director
Mrs S Brierley	East Sussex County Council
Mr M Davison	Hastings Borough Council
Ms B Fazzani	Ashford Borough Council
Ms A Howell	Mid Sussex District Council
Mr D Marlow	Rother District Council
Mr D Scully	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Ms G Sherwin	AONB Unit

1. APPOINTMENTS TO THE HIGH WEALD AONB MANAGEMENT BOARD

1.1 The following members were appointed to the Management Board for the following year:

Councillor Davison, Councillor Fox, Councillor Hersey, Councillor Kentfield and Councillor Kitchen.

2. APOLOGIES

2.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Councillor Balfour, Councillor Mrs Davison, Councillor Hersey, Councillor Sydney, Councillor Mrs Thomas, Ms J Knowles, Mrs J Lewis, Ms K Philips, Ms V Pullan and Ms K Reeves.

3. MEMBERS INTERESTS

3.1 Councillor Lock declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in that he is the Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment at East Sussex County Council.

4. MINUTES

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

5. REVENUE BUDGET 2011/12

5.1 The JAC considered a report by the Deputy Treasurer concerning the draft revenue budget for 2011/12.

5.2 The report detailed the forecast out-turn for the current financial year and the proposed budget for 2011/12. The Deputy Treasurer highlighted that the proposal was that Local Authority contributions remain the same with no inflationary increase. She reported that Natural England had indicated that the Unit should expect a budget cut of 30% over three years at 10% per year.

5.3 The AONB Director stated that the High Weald AONB Unit recognised that each partner authority was in a difficult position, and that once the level of contribution had been determined by each partner, following the consultation on the draft budget, the JAC could be advised of the options available to them.

5.4 The JAC discussed the Partnership Agreement, and the Director explained the latest position that the Agreement was in the process of being signed and sent between the partner authorities.

5.5 RESOLVED to (1) approve the draft budget for 2011/12; and
(2) approve the commencement of budget consultation with the local authorities and Natural England.

6. GOVERNMENT MINSTERS VISITS TO THE HIGH WEALD AONB UNIT

6.1 The JAC heard a report by the AONB Director regarding the visits of Richard Benyon MP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries and Gregory Barker MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy to the High weald Unit.

6.2 The Director reported that the Unit had built up relationships with the ministers over the course of several years and the visits had helped the Unit to reinforce at the highest level their message that the landscape is a life support system that should be exploited responsibly.

6.3 The Director also set out that the Unit had contributed to a draft structural reform plan produced by Mr Barker, especially in the area of responsible land use, and the Minister asked the JAC to comment formally on the proposals.

6.4 The JAC debated matters arising from the report, including European environmental policy such as the Common Agricultural Policy, and publicising the Unit's work and projects on forums such as Countryfile. The Director stressed that all the Unit's projects were integrated and related to the Management Plan and responsible land use.

6.5 RESOLVED to endorse the report.

7. NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS

7.1 The JAC considered reports by the AONB Director on (a) The Rural Coalition Report: The Rural Challenge, (b) the national consultation on "Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Parks or AONBs in England", and (c) the national Policy "Making space for nature: a review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network".

7.2 On the Rural Challenge the Director reported that the work of the Unit on the economic value of small settlements to protected landscapes had been cited in a national report. The Director reported that the Unit was in discussions with English Heritage about extending the survey to larger settlements, and that a methodology needed to be developed.

7.3 The JAC welcomed the report. The Director highlighted the example of the AONB's woodlands being underemployed and the need to house land-based workers in affordable accommodation.

7.4 The JAC debated the issue of agricultural tenancies and the need to understand employment patterns and lives of those that occupy tenancies.

7.5 Mr Broomhead suggested that there needed to be a wider debate and reported that there may be a challenge ahead regarding forestry workers.

7.6 On the consultation on assessing landscapes the Director reported that the guidance was not consistent with the Management Plan, and that it may lead to difficulties on planning decisions. The Director reported that English Heritage had also expressed concern.

7.7 Kristoffer Hewitt, Sussex and Weald of Kent Team Leader for Natural England, explained that the purpose of the consultation was to establish a framework to consider boundary changes and was an attempt to avoid the need for an expensive, drawn-out inquiry process.

7.8 The JAC debated the implications of the guidance, remarking that the implementation of the proposed guidance would affect decisions about land on and outside the boundary of the AONB.

7.9 With regard to the national policy the Director highlighted briefly that AONBs had been set out as an important part of the rebuilding of space for nature and the desire to improve the land through management, supported by economic means and opportunities for commercial businesses to support landscape work.

7.10 RESOLVED to (1) note the reports; and
(2) ask the Officer Steering Group to consider how the Unit's research

evidence on settlement can most effectively be integrated into housing and settlement plans.

8. AONB PROJECTS UPDATE

8.1 The AONB Director informed the JAC about the Annual Review against the Management Plan, the completion of which is part of the agreement with Natural England and which details the Unit's projects.

8.2 The JAC also received a presentation regarding Routeways, a key feature of the High Weald AONB, from Ruth Childs, Research Officer.

8.3 RESOLVED to note the report.

9. AONB BUSINESS UPDATE

9.1 The JAC considered a report by the AONB Director which set out the changes in staffing at the High Weald Unit. The Director highlighted that some of the work done by the volunteers was highly specialised, and would be very expensive to buy in from a commercial source.

9.2 The AONB Director also updated the JAC about the office accommodation. Plumpton College had taken over responsibility for the Woodland Enterprise Centre, and there had been discussions about the installation of a fibre optic cable, which would address the Unit's on-going problems with IT.

9.3 RESOLVED to (1) note the report;
(2) thank Matt Grose, Andrew Wright and Charles Winchester for their valuable contribution to the High Weald JAC; and
(3) welcome the support offered by the volunteers to the High Weald AONB Unit.

10. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD – 21 SEPTEMBER 2010

10.1 Agreed.

11. MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP

11.1 The JAC noted the minutes.

12. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AONBs ANNUAL CONFERENCE - "LANDSCAPE AND NATURE FOR ALL"

12.1 The JAC considered a report by the AONB Director which informed the Committee about the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Annual Conference in July 2010. The conference was held in Hythe, Kent and was jointly hosted by the High Weald AONB with Surrey Hills and Kent Downs AONBs.

12.2 The Chairman thanked the staff involved with the Conference and reported that she had spent a day with delegates on a guided walk led by the AONB Director. The Director reported that next year's conference may be cancelled.

12.3 RESOLVED to note the report.

13. RISK MANAGEMENT

13.1 The JAC considered a report by the AONB Business Manager which outlined the key risks and their management.

13.2 The AONB Business Manager reiterated that the most significant risk is financial, and set out the anticipated cuts in funding from Natural England over the next three years and the impact these would have on the work of the Unit.

13.3 Councillor Bullock raised the issue of external funding, and SEEDA in particular. The AONB Director commented that SEEDA had not been a source of significant funds.

13.4 RESOLVED to (1) note the key risks and their management; and
(2) request that the Management Board meet to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management.

14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

14.1 Councillor Bullock raised the issues of the community right to build and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, part of the coalition government's localism initiative, and whether the JAC should have a view on the matter, and how best to influence the passage of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill through Parliament.

14.2 The AONB Director commented that concerns had been raised by AONB family to the National Association, and that the High Weald are preparing a response. The Director commented on the need to have clear definitions of sustainable development, and for further discussions with officers.