



HIGH WEALD MANAGEMENT BOARD

24 June 2011 at a meeting of the Management Board held at The Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell.

Present: Members

Cllr Mrs S Tidy	East Sussex County Council, Chair
Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council
Cllr Mrs E Kitchen	Horsham District Council
Cllr Mrs J Davison	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr C Hersey	Mid Sussex District Council

Also present:

Jennie Barnes	East Sussex County Council
Jason Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Sally Marsh	AONB Director (job share)
Gerry Sherwin	AONB Business Manager

Apologies

1. The following Members of the Management Board had offered their apologies for absence:

Cllr Mrs J Fox

Interests

2. The Members of the Management Board declared an interest in items 4 and 5 on the agenda in that they were all Members of local authorities that contributed to the finances of the High Weald AONB.

Minutes

3. The minutes of the last meeting, held on 25 January 2011, were agreed as a correct record.

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee – Annual Return 2010/11

4. Jennie Barnes, Senior Finance Officer – East Sussex County Council, presented the draft Annual Return for 2010/11. She informed the Board that there was a total reserve of

£82, 887, and that there had been a surplus of £15, 908 due to savings made on staff and consultancy.

5. The Board discussed the issue of interest accrued on the JAC's reserves, and it was agreed that the matter would be investigated.

6. It was AGREED that the Return for 2010/11 and the Annual Governance Statement be signed and submitted to the external auditors.

Budget overview and issues

7. Gerry Sherwin, AONB Business Manager, set out the budget position to the Board. She reported that the forecast was up to 2015, the date to which DEFRA contributions are known, based on a 22% reduction over four years. She highlighted that savings of £60-70, 000 over the four years would have to be found, based on Local Authority partners maintaining their contributions.

8. The Business Manager presented the options and challenges for savings to the Board, such as scrutinising core activities, staffing options in the light of changes to funding for specific projects, the communications budget, the clerking service and an office move.

9. The AONB Director set out the position with regard to the tenancy, and the options for fund raising through trust funds and business partnerships were discussed.

10. The capacity of the core staff to continue the work of the Unit and manage fundraising was discussed, as well as the issue of securing funding from DEFRA.

AONB Management Plan Review 2014

11. The AONB Director set out the procedure of consultation for the five-year review of the Management Plan, and suggested that the review this time should be more modest. She pointed out the benefit of adopting an objective-led approach with the last Management Plan, with the reduced impact on staff at the Unit and the Local Authority partners involved in conducting the review.

12. It was AGREED that the JAC should consider a paper regarding the proposal.

High Weald response to Natural Environment White Paper

13. The AONB Director reported the Unit's response to the Lawton Review to the Board, and the subsequent White Paper which has proposed the establishment of Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) and Nature Improvement Areas (NIA). The LNP would be offered £20, 000 to encourage partnership working along the lines of the AONB model, with a wider remit. The NIA would be allocated £500, 000 over three years for ecological restoration.

14. The Board discussed the possibility and consequences of bidding for such status, with emphasis on the LNP, as the focus of the Unit's work will be on fundraising and the review of the Management Plan which link to the objectives of the LNP.

Feedback from POST Note event

15. The AONB Director updated the Board with feedback from an event related to the publication of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) Note on “Landscapes of the Future” to which the Unit had been asked to contribute. The event was attended by peers, MPs, NGOs and civil service officers.

Officer Steering Group update

16. Paul Newdick, Chair of the Officer Steering Group, was not present but a short statement, attached to the minutes, was read out. The Board discussed the options for circulating the final report of the OSG.

Project and staffing update

17. Gerry Sherwin reported on an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Living Woods project to be run with the co-operation of the Woodland Trust and Surrey Hills AONB. She commented that the current round of applications was the most competitive she had experienced.

18. The Board expressed their thanks to Gerry for her work in securing funding.

19. Gerry Sherwin outlined a project that was being developed to widen partnership working with the parishes in the AONB based on the model of the successful High Weald Heroes, offering the parishes a range of activities across a range of community groups. The Board welcomed this of this project, which coincides with the development of the localism agenda.

20. Sally Marsh set out the outline of a project in the Rother river valley involving Hastings Country Park, Wakehurst Place and the Natural History Museum.

Risk management

21. Sally Marsh reported that the key risk was the loss of project staff with the ending of funding for specific projects. She reported that the Weald Forest Ridge Project Manager had been offered an extension to his contract for a further six months, but that the project would have to be wrapped up in nine months. It was hoped that the team could be kept together if the Rother valley project were successful.

22. The fibre optic cable link was discussed and it was anticipated that work would be done in the autumn as the link was necessary to the new landlords to attract further tenants.

23. The Memorandum of Understanding was discussed. The final version has yet to be produced but it is understood that DEFRA are investigating alternative arrangements to a formal agreement.

Items for JAC Agenda

24. A draft agenda will be circulated to the Management Board.

AOB

25. The Business Manager outlined the progress with the annual review and changes to method of distribution of the review.

26. The Director set out the progress of the Ancient Woodland Inventory and partnerships with local universities. The Director also highlighted two forthcoming events: the High Weald Energy Day, at which Greg Barker MP is expected, and the CLA Game Fair at Blenheim Palace, at which Jason Lavender is to represent the National Association of AONBs.

Next meeting

27. Date to be arranged.