

**HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board  
Minutes - 25 June 2014 at 10.30 am, at Acorn Tourism, WEC, Flimwell**



Samantha Nicholas  
Clerk to the High Weald AONB  
Joint Advisory Committee

Present:           Members:  
                      Cllr Mrs J Davison                   Sevenoaks District Council (Vice-chairman)  
                      Cllr Mrs S Tidy                       East Sussex County Council  
                      Cllr B Acraman                       West Sussex County Council

Also Present:

                      Jason Lavender                   AONB Director (job share)  
                      Andrew Shaw                    Planning Officer, AONB  
                      Thomas Alty                       Finance Officer, East Sussex County Council

Apologies

1. The following persons gave their apologies for absence:

Cllr B Kentfield, Cllr M Balfour, Sally Marsh, David Marlow

Members' Interests

2. There were no declarations of interest from the Members of the Management Board.

Minutes

3. The minutes of the last meeting, held on 5 March 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee – Annual Return 2013/14

4. Thomas Alty reported on the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee - Annual Return 2013/14 to the Members of the Management Board.

Statement of Accounts: Section 1

5. In this particular financial year - funding was split between: 65% Defra, 4% HLF, 23% Local Authorities and 8% other. Total funds for statement of accounts 2013/14 was £432,700
6. The reserves carried forward at 31 March 2014 are £97,717
7. It was reported that there was a surplus of funds £8,484 for 2013/14.
8. Thomas Alty confirmed that the balances & receipts have already been approved and signed off by the Treasurer.

The Annual Governance Statement – section 2

9. Thomas Alty reported that there was a robust financial control system in place and this was supported by the close working relationship between the Unit and the financial team at East Sussex County Council (ESCC).
10. Cllr Bill Acraman enquired behind the reasons for reduction in core activity expenditure from 306,000 to 295,000. Thomas Alty responded that this was due to reduction in accommodation and staffing costs. Jason Lavender confirmed the staffing costs reduction was due to not being able to appoint staff within the given timeframe.
11. **Action:** The Annual Return 2013/14 was agreed and signed by Vice-chairman, Cllr Mrs J Davison.

#### The Internal Audit

12. Thomas Alty reported that internal audit service had not identified any significant internal control issues in relation to the JAC. The key findings in the executive summary and audit opinion stated that the auditors were again able to give full assurance on the effectiveness of the internal controls at High Weald AONB.
13. The Vice-chairman of the Management Board, on behalf of the Members of the Management Board, thanked Thomas Alty and Gerry Sherwin for the excellent management of the finances, and wish to pass on their thanks to the East Sussex County Council finance team for their continued support.

#### Major Infrastructure - Gatwick second runway

14. Jason Lavender explained that Cllr Bill Acraman had raised the issue of the likely impact on the AONB if a second runway was located at Gatwick. A discussion took place around the key issues with the process to date which has led the Davis Commission to choose the following locations, Heathrow, Gatwick and Inner Thames estuary, as potential sites for a second runway.
15. West Sussex and East Sussex have agreed in principle to support Gatwick as a potential location for the second runway. However, this was deemed by the Members as not necessarily the view of the local MPs. The Members reported that although noise and pollution would have an impact on the AONB in specific areas, the most significant direct and indirect impacts would be due to the building of new and major infrastructure.
16. **Action:** It was agreed by the Management Board that the Unit should take an independent factual position on the impact of a second runway at Gatwick. This position will be reported at the next JAC to decide whether it supports or rejects the Management Board's recommendations.

#### Major Infrastructure - Oil and Gas Exploration

17. Jason Lavender presented to the Members a research document on unconventional hydrocarbons in the Weald <http://www.highweald.org/downloads/publications/uk-landscape-research-reports.html>. The paper outlines factual information on oil and gas, including shale gas exploration in the Weald.

18. Dr Jenny Huggett, a leading geologist in oil and gas exploration, has visited the Unit to discuss the impacts of oil and shale gas exploration on the High Weald landscape. Given the current understanding that the geological characteristics found in the Weald will make commercial and viable exploitation, using 'fracking', very unlikely. Conventional extraction of oil, however, remains an option but this is subject to more rigorous regulation and a reduced impact to the landscape.
19. The Members agreed that the Unit should take an independent role gathering factual information on unconventional hydrocarbons and possible future impacts on the AONB. This position will be reported to the Joint Advisory Committee in November to decide whether it supports or rejects the Management Boards recommendations.
20. Cllr Bill Acraman informed the Members that West Sussex County Council has a series of information meetings on shale gas extraction. The Unit was encouraged to contact Neil Border for the date of the next meeting.

#### Planning Protocol

21. Andrew Shaw took the Members through the proposed review of the existing planning protocol which establishes complementary working arrangements between the Joint Advisory Committee through its Units staff and Local Authority Members. Due to a current Memorandum of Understanding not being in place, it was acknowledged that a revision of the planning protocol is required to set out a shared understanding with partnerships when the Unit consults on development proposals affecting the High Weald AONB; and liaises on Local plans, draft plans, strategies and supplementary planning documents.
22. The Members amended page 2, bullet 4, to include 'at the discretion of the local authority'.
23. **Action:** Andrew Shaw will present a paper at the next Officer Steering Group (OSG) Meeting on 25 September.

#### MOU/SLA to support the AONB Partnership

24. Jason Lavender confirmed that Defra has decided they do not wish local authorities within each AONB to reinstate a Memorandum of Understand (MOU) between themselves and the local authorities. The Unit will now draft a proposed agreement to be used between the local authority partners and the AONB Unit to for discussion at the next OSG.

#### Current projects, project development and staffing update

25. Jason Lavender updated the Members on staff changes and current projects.
26. Peter D'Aguilar who had been appointed as the communication officer in February has left after being offered a permanent position at a school in Mayfield. As only a short-term contract can be offered for this position, the Unit is not intending to appoint another officer, but will need to utilise current staff to absorb the communication workload.
27. Janice Cooper was appointed at the High Weald Heroes education officer in February but due to a large range of commitments decided to resign. The Unit

has decided to recruit another officer and expect to have one in place in September.

28. Kent Farmstead Guidance Event organised and run by the AONB Unit on behalf of the High Weald JAC, the Kent Downs JAC and English Heritage, which took place on 20 May, has had very positive feedback. An English Heritage article recently highlighted the importance of farmsteads in the current landscape.
29. An update on Living Woods was reported. An importance of Bees event was held on 9 May at Fore Wood, RSPB Nature Reserve, which was developed from the Community Landscape Fund project, Hairy-horned Mason bee. Matthew Pitts, Living Woods officer, has produced a series of YouTube videos to engage with landowners on subjects including meadows flora and wood harvesting. The Living Woods officer is also working with GCSE students from the Skinners School, Tunbridge Wells, to design and build a solar wood drying kiln.
30. The consultants working on the 'Restocking the High Weald' will be reporting to a meeting of specialists on the 16 July.
31. The new Leader Programme is to include West Sussex part of the High Weald Leader for the first time.
32. The Elderflower festival which celebrates family outdoor experiences in the landscape, held the largest recorded picnic at Ashdown Forest in May. Over 3000 people attended and local producers donated food for the picnic. The Unit supplied High Weald promotional items to raise awareness of the AONB.
33. Gerry Sherwin attended a meeting with a new community led tourism group at Kingscote Valley. They are keen to promote attractions within the valley south of East Grinstead. This may lead to an opportunity to work with the already established Ashdown Forest Tourism Association.
34. Gerry Sherwin also attended a business mentoring workshop. This allowed representatives from AONBs to discuss opportunities with representatives from business and the private sector that already have an affiliation with AONBs.
35. East Sussex County Council Economic Scrutiny Panel has invited Jason Lavender and Sally Marsh to their next meeting in September to discuss the rural economy.
36. The CLA claims that many of its membership are struggling to get planning permission to diversify their businesses. The CLA state that many planning authorities consider AONBs and National Parks to be no go areas for development of any kind. CLA Members are being asked to send in examples which will be sent onto the Planning Minister, Nick Boles, for his information. Jason Lavender will send the CLA request to the JAC for Members' information and views.
37. Annual review for 2013/2014 is completed and hard copies are to be sent to JAC Members and Officers; and a pdf version will be placed on the High Weald website. Cllr B Acraman requested that Charlotte Eastley and Andrew Ekinsmyth of WSCC also receive a copy.

38. The following items were suggested for the JAC Agenda:
- Major infrastructure – Gatwick second runway and unconventional hydrocarbons research
  - Planning Protocol

#### Risk Management

39. Jason Lavender presented the Risk Assessment and declared that there have been no changes since the previous meeting.

#### AOB

40. Cllr Lindsey Dunbar has been elected to represent Tandridge District Council on the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, replacing Cllr Sydney.
41. Thanks will be sent to David Phillips on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee for his many years of service, as he is retiring in June.
42. Dates confirmed for future meetings:  
Management Board – 15 October 10:30 am Acorn Tourism  
Management Board - 5 March 2014  
Joint Advisory Committee – 12 November PM  
Joint Advisory Committee - 26/27 March