

## HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board Minutes – 5 March 2015 at 10.30 am, at Acorn Tourism, WEC, Flimwell



Samantha Nicholas  
Clerk to the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Present:           Members:  
                  Cllr B Kentfield           Rother District Council (Chairman)  
                  Cllr Mrs J Davison       Sevenoaks District Council (Vice-chairman)

Also Present:  
                  Jason Lavender           AONB Director (job share)  
                  Gerry Sherwin           AONB Business Manager

### Apologies

1. The following persons gave their apologies for absence:

Cllr B Acraman, Cllr C Hersey, David Marlow, Cllr Mrs S Tidy, Cllr M Balfour, Thomas Alty, Sally Marsh.

### Members' Interests

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

### Minutes of the Management Board meeting held on 5 November 2014

3. It was agreed to amend to p.6 to clarify that Councillor Soyke was not in attendance at the meeting but had contacted the Unit concerning changes to Gatwick flight-paths.
4. It was noted that the Members present agreed that in their opinion the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2014 are a correct record.
5. It was agreed that an email should be sent to Management Board Members who were unable to attend highlighting the points of interest arising from this meeting.

### Budget overview

6. Gerry Sherwin reported on the budget information for 2015/16. Defra has indicated, but not confirmed, that their contribution to the core budget is likely to continue to decrease after 2015/16. No figure has been given by Defra but should they follow the pattern of the last five years, it would be at a rate of 5% each year (this would be cumulative i.e. 20% reduction of the 2015/16 contribution at the end of four years).
7. The budget for 2015-2016 has been submitted to the local authorities and to date no issues have been raised.
8. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is re-structuring the finance department teams and it will be known by June which finance team will be responsible for the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

9. It has been confirmed that the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee will not be required to use an external auditor from 2015/16 onwards and this saves £4,000. The AONB Unit needs to consider whether the current internal ESCC mechanism will be robust enough for its needs and whether we can move to a 3 year external audit cycle. A paper will be presented to the Management Board in June to be taken to the JAC in November 2015.

#### Officer Steering Group update

10. The OSG met on the 24<sup>th</sup> February. The Planning and Design sub-group of the OSG has been looking into the merits of establishing a design review panel for the High Weald to consider significant development proposals and provide advice to local authorities and applicants on design matters. The sub-group has looked at existing design panels in the south-east and the OSG is keen to investigate further how an independent High Weald Design Panel, facilitated by the AONB Unit, could be established. The Members present thought it was an ambitious idea but it would be beneficial to pool and involve a wider range of expertise, particularly in the current financial climate.
11. The sub-group has also proposed a series of succinct planning and design advice notes jointly prepared by the AONB Unit and the LPAs to highlight AONB-specific issues associated with development and using local and national research and evidence. Jason Lavender felt that the AONB Unit's limited resources need to focus on areas where they are likely to be most beneficial and advice notes can be a good way of providing consistent advice across a wider number of planning applications. The OSG will propose issues of the greatest priority so that the AONB Unit can begin work on the advice notes.
12. The AONB Unit is exploring the use of a web-based GIS system to allow AONB data to be shared with members of the OSG, which would be accessible to the OSG using a desktop application.
13. The AONB Unit has offered to organize and run relevant training for the JAC and the OSG on wide ranging topics of interest including the natural environment, rural economy, live/work opportunities, land use statistics, solar farms, self-build and AONB landscape components. The Members agreed that this would be useful especially for any new Councillors that may join the JAC after the general election.
14. The Members were informed that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) has been given to each OSG member to be signed by the appropriate person at each local authority.

#### Restructuring the AONB Unit

15. The Management Board was reminded of the background to the AONB Unit restructure. Since 2010, the AONB Unit has accommodated cuts of £70,000 to Defra's contribution to the core budget by not recruiting to vacant posts, reducing costs, and generating new income. It is likely a further £50,000 (at least) reduction to the contribution will be made during the years 2015 to 2018. In response to this a report was presented to and approved by the Management Board in March 2014, and this considered the impacts of the cuts to the core budget and proposed a number of options to safeguard the service the AONB Unit provides.
16. One of the options proposed is a restructuring of the AONB Unit and a business case supporting this has been submitted to the host authority ESCC for scrutiny. It is hoped

that this proposal can be shared with the staff in April and a formal consultation with the staff will run during the summer with the aim of implementing the proposals in the autumn.

#### Current projects

17. Rachel Bennington joined the AONB Unit in September 2014 working three days a week and has continued the well-received High Weald Hero primary school programme.
18. The feasibility and implementation report on 'Restocking in the High Weald' is completed and will be issued shortly. This work has built on the recommendations of the first report and the AONB Unit continues its work to secure the funds and the political support to set-up and implement a 30-month pilot scheme. Over the autumn and winter the Brede Farm Habitat Project has contributed £40,000 to support habitat creation and improvement works on farms in the Brede Valley. A further five applications requesting support have been received and will be assessed by the grant award panel on the 20<sup>th</sup> March.
19. 250 people attended the Wadhurst Star Party held at Uplands Community College on 25 February 2015. This was initiated and organised by the AONB Unit in partnership with Wadhurst Astronomical Society, Wadhurst Primary School, the Parish Council, Uplands Community College, and the South Downs National Park Authority. The next stage is to support Wadhurst Community to become an International Dark Skies Community.
20. A section of existing electricity transmission line near Battle Abbey, the site of the 1066 Battle of Hastings was shortlisted, out of seven AONBs, as part of National Grid's Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project. The Unit was involved with National Grid consultation workshops on 24 February 2015 at Battle Abbey Memorial Hall.
21. English Heritage has invited the AONB Unit to move to the 'Field Systems in the Weald' second stage of a bid for funds to understand better the field systems in the Weald – historic character, significance, and sensitivity to change. This work will, among other things, provide guidance and information for planners, land managers, and farmers.
22. The AONB Unit will be leading and supporting a range of public and community events in 2015/16 such as the Coast to Countryside Walking Festival and the Into the Trees woodland festival.
23. The Living Woods project is nearing the end of its third and final year and there has been a flurry of interest from landowners asking for advice and guidance before the project closes.

#### JAC meeting to be held on 27 March 2015

24. Unfortunately the venue for the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee meeting has had to be changed. It will now be held at the Llama Park, Wych Cross, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5JN.
25. There will be two presentations – one on Gatwick Airport and the other on the Living Woods project: Gatwick and Living Woods presentation.

#### Next Management Board meeting

26. 24 June 2015 at Flimwell precise time and venue to be confirmed.