

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE



12 November 2014 Meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee held at the Crowborough Centre, Crowborough, East Sussex.

Present:

Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council, Chairman
Cllr Mrs J Davison	Sevenoaks District Council, Deputy Chairman
Cllr Mrs S Tidy	East Sussex County Council
Cllr B Acraman	West Sussex County Council
Cllr L Dunbar	Tandridge District Council
Cllr L Kitchen	Horsham District Council
Cllr M Sydney	Surrey County Council
Mr J Seymour	Natural England

Officers:

Mr T Alty	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms R Childs	Kent County Council
Mr D Greenwood	Surrey County Council
Mr D Scully	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Mr J Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Ms S Marsh	AONB Director (job share)
Ms G Sherwin	AONB Business Manager
Mr T Dyer	West Sussex County Council

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Councillor R Street, Councillor M Balfour, Councillor J Soyke, Councillor G Thomas, Councillor R Taylor, Councillor Mrs R Moore, Councillor Mrs S Murray, Councillor C Hersey, Mr P Newdick, Mr M Davidson, Mrs Alison Field, Mrs V Pullen, Mr R Edwards, Mrs K Sharp. Mrs H French

2. MEMBERS INTERESTS

2.1 It was noted that there were no declarations of interest raised by the Members.

3. URGENT MATTERS

3.1 It was noted that no urgent matters were raised by the Members.

4. MINUTES OF THE JAC MEETING – 26 March 2014

4.1 RESOLVED to agree the Minutes of the meeting of 26 March 2014 as a correct record.

5. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD which were tabled at the meeting– 5 November 2014

5.1 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Management Board held on 5 November 2014 as a correct record.

6. **MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP – 25 September 2014**

6.1 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Officer Steering Group held on 25 September 2014 as a correct record.

7. **AIRSPACE AND NOISE MANAGEMENT OVER AONB**

7.1 Airspace and noise management issue was raised at the Management Board meeting of 5 November. The Members had a wide ranging discussion around the impact of changes to flight paths over the AONB. It was highlighted that there had been a marked increase in complaints about aircraft traffic noise especially in Kent and Tunbridge Wells constituencies.

7.2 RESOLVED to note the Members agreed that the Unit will draft a response to the Airport Commissions consultation for the Chairman to sign. It will be circulated to the Members prior to being sent:

- I. The principle of airport expansion
- II. Relative tranquillity and the impact of noise on the quiet enjoyment of the High Weald AONB
- III. The impact of any further development at Gatwick airport or of supporting infrastructure on the High Weald AONB.

8. **CONSTITUTION**

8.1 RESOLVED to note the report and the Members agreed to the amendments of the constitution for the election process for Management Board Members to a bi-annual process.

8.2 Councillor Mrs J Davison announced that she would be retiring in May 2015 and has requested to remain on the Joint Advisory Committee as Sevenoaks appointed Member. The Members welcomed an independent Member if they have been appointed with the same level of authority as an elected Member.

8.3 RESOLVED to note the Members agreed that the process of appointing Members would remain the same.

9. **REVENUE BUDGET 2015/2016**

9.1 The Finance Manager, Thomas Alty, reported to the Members the key areas of the draft Revenue Budget 2015/16:

- The draft revenue budget would be presented as a balanced budget.
- The budget confirmed that Defra contribution will remain at £214,700 for 2015/16, and it assumes the local authority contributions would remain at £84,700.
- Staff budget will increase by £5,000 with the expected pay-rise of 1%
- The Unit are confident that they will be able to generate additional income of £10,800 to meet the shortfall in the budget.

9.2 The key risks and financial implications:

- Inflation will remain at 0% and accommodation costs and service costs will not increase

- Government policy changes indicate that redundancy costs arising from reducing Defra contributions will not be considered eligible for grant aid. The JAC therefore needs to retain a minimum reserve of £95,000 to meet redundancy costs.
- The forecast reserves at 31 March 2015 are £103,900 and this will not allow much flexibility with utilising the reserves if a shortfall in the budget occurs in the future.
- Beyond 2016/17 there is no clarity around the level of Defra funding.
- Thomas Alty thanked Gerry Sherwin, AONB Business Manager, for her excellent support with managing the budget.

9.2 RESOLVED to note the report and:

- I. Approve the draft Revenue Budget for 2015/16
- II. To commence the budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra.

10. HIGH WEALD AONB WORK PROGRAMME FROM APRIL – SEPTEMBER 2014

- 10.1 Gerry Sherwin presented to the Members the High Weald AONB work programme which is submitted to Defra every 6 months. The presentation was divided into the key High Weald audiences: landowners, young people, visitors, policy and decision makers, community and income generation.
- 10.2 Gerry Sherwin welcomed the Councillors to submit any work programmes that the Unit should focus on so this can be part of the programme for 2015/16 which will be submitted to Defra early in 2015.
- 10.2 Councillor Tidy asked whether with the Brede and Battle Habitat Fund if there are any grounds work they would also look to instigate an archaeological watching brief. Jim Seymour confirmed that where it is appropriate they would suggest this type of activity during the application process.
- 10.3 Councillor Kitchen asked whether the Unit had any contact with Buchan Park and Leechpool Nature Reserve in the past six months. Councillor B Acraman confirmed that since Phil Haskell's death, the education officer role had not been replaced. The Unit has discussed working with Buchan County Park to address any education requirements.
- 10.4 The Members thanked Gerry Sherwin for presenting such a comprehensive presentation, highlighting the depth and breadth, of the Unit's work over the past 6 months.
- 10.4 RESOLVED to note the report and;
- I. The presentation will be available to Members and Officers.

11. HIGH WEALD AONB UNIT STAFFING UPDATE

- 11.1 Rachel Bennington has been recruited as the Education Officer working on the High Weald Heroes project and Georgina Strapp is working two days a week on an internship with the AONB Unit to cover the work of the vacant communication post.
- 11.2 RESOLVED to note the report on staffing update.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

12.1 RESOLVED to note the report on risk management and the associated risk management matrix.

13. **AOB**

13.1 The National Grid has announced that the High Weald AONB is one of the 8 locations to potentially receive funding from a project to reduce visual impact of overhead lines. Jim Seymour confirmed that the project was derived by an independent consumer survey which confirmed that consumers wanted funds to be utilised to reducing the visual impact of power lines across the landscape. If the High Weald AONB is successful the National Grid has set aside funds to support any AONB core work on this project.

13.2 Councillor Sydney enquired about the Units progress on the alternative funding options that were discussed at the Management Board Meeting on 5 March 2014.

13.3 Sally Marsh reassured the Members that the Unit is looking at all options to maximise income generation for core and project work. Sally Marsh confirmed that they had previous experience with running a High Weald Business, Friends Society and the High Weald Landscape Trust. The Unit is increasing the 'Friends' support through social media and has been successful in generating additional income through Surrey Hills Management Plan and development of Wealden Walking Festival website.

14. **PRESENTATION**

14.1 Casper Johnson East Sussex CC Archaeologist presented to the Members highlights from the archaeological discoveries at the excavation sites around the Bexhill bypass.

- The drier colder period of birch and pine was right at the end of the last ice age before temperatures and sea levels began to rise.
- A possible trackway or timber structure found at one of the excavation sites is likely to be of Neolithic and Bronze Age date but the survey team are awaiting the detailed results of C14 and dendro dating.
- Evidence shows Farming started in the Neolithic period and more importantly the key aspects of farming are likely to have been taken up slowly amongst essentially Mesolithic hunter-gatherer-fisher communities after c.4000BC (i.e. during the period we call the Neolithic).
- Several Bronze Age Barrows and a major iron-workings has been surveyed which has led to a greater understanding of these sites operated in the High Weald AONB.