

HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE



6 November 2015 Meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee held at Great Dixter House and Gardens, Northiam, Rye, East Sussex, TN31 6PH.

Present:

Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council, Chairman
Mrs J Davison	Sevenoaks District Council, Deputy Chairman
Cllr Mrs S Tidy	East Sussex County Council
Cllr Mrs L Dunbar	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Mrs L Kitchen	Horsham District Council
Cllr Mrs J Soyke	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr Mrs R Moore	Wealden District Council
Cllr R Street	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr H Rogers	Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

Officers:

Mr T Alty	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Ms R Childs	Kent County Council
Mr D Greenwood	Surrey County Council
Mr J Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Ms S Marsh	AONB Director (job share)
Mr T Dyer	West Sussex County Council
Mr M Davidson	Hastings Borough Council
Mrs R Bennington	AONB Education Officer

A. PRESENTATIONS

- A.1 Victoria Williams, Project Director of Great Dixter House and Gardens introduced the Members to a brief history of Great Dixter. The Members thanked Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener, for allowing the Committee to hold the Meeting at the House and Victoria Williams for organising the facilities for its use.
- A.2 Andrew Shaw, the London and South East Planning Advisor, for the National Trust (NT) presented to the Committee - The role of the National Trust in planning and heritage. The presentation is appended - NT and Heritage.
- A.3 The Members thanked Andrew for his informative presentation. The Members were also given a hardcopy of the paper 'Development and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. The Trust commissioned research from planning consultants Green Balance, and this report looks at case studies where significant development has been approved in AONBs. The research finds some shortcomings in the way existing planning policy is being applied on the ground– <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/documents/national-trust-areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-and-development.pdf> - report appended .
- A.5 This was followed by a presentation from Rachel Bennington, Education Officer High Weald AONB, on the current status of the High Weald Heroes programme- presentation appended.

A.6 Cllr R Street requested that he received a list of Primary Schools within Hastings area that the Unit are working with.

A.7 RESOLVED to note the presentation.

1. **APOLOGIES**

1.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Councillor M Balfour, Councillor B Acraman, , Councillor G Thomas, Councillor C Hersey, Councillor M Sydney, Mrs Alison Field, Mrs V Pullen, Mr R Edwards, Mrs H French, Mr J Seymour , Mrs J Hollingum, Mr D Scully.

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. **ELECTION OF MANAGEMENT BOARD MEMBERS**

4.1 The Chairman Cllr Brian Kentfield took the JAC through the nominations for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and six additional Management Board Members after which voting by the JAC Members took place.

4.2 RESOLVED to note that the following Members have been elected for Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Management Board:

Elected Chairman: Mrs J Davison

Proposed by Management Board; seconded by Cllr Mrs L Dunbar

Elected Vice-Chairman Cllr Mr B Kentfield

Proposed by Management Board; seconded by Cllr Julia Soyke

Elected Management Board Member: Cllr Mrs S Tidy

Proposed by Cllr Mrs R Moore; seconded by Cllr B Kentfield

Elected Management Board Member: Cllr M Balfour

Proposed by Mrs J Davison; seconded by Cllr Mrs R Moore

Elected Management Board Member: Cllr M Sydney

Proposed by Cllr M Balfour; seconded by Cllr L Dunbar

Elected Management Board Member: Cllr Mrs R Moore

Proposed by Cllr Mrs S Tidy; seconded by Cllr H Rogers

Elected Management Board Member: Cllr C Hersey

Proposed by Cllr B Kentfield; seconded by Mrs J Davison

Elected Management Board Member: Cllr B Acraman

Proposed by Cllr M Balfour; seconded by Cllr Julia Soyke

4.3 Mrs J Davison as the newly elected Madam Chairman took control of the meeting. Mrs J Davison warmly thanked Cllr B Kentfield for all his work and support as Chairman and for his continued support in his role as Vice-Chairman.

5. **MINUTES OF THE JAC MEETING – 27 March 2015**

5.1 The Unit responded to Cllr Thomas' enquiry, 8.2 of the Minutes, with regard to utilising the 'Living Wage'. Sally Marsh confirmed that the Unit has used the 'Living Wage' pay structure for students and interns that have been supporting the Fields in the Weald Project.

5.2 RESOLVED to agree the Minutes of the meeting of 26 March 2015 as a correct record.

6. **MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD – 14 October 2015**

6.1 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Management Board held on 15 October 2015 as a correct record.

7. **MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP – 30 September 2015**

7.1 The Committee considered a verbal report on the Office Steering Groups (OSG) workplan by the OSG Chairman, David Marlow.

7.2 David Marlow informed the Members that he had been re-elected as Chairman for the Officer Steering Group (OSG) and that there was a newly elected Vice-Chairman, Virginia Pullen, Landscape Architect, from East Sussex County Council. David Scully who was the Vice-Chairman is embarking on a Masters Course and, therefore, due to additional commitments was unable to take over the role as Chairman, but will remain as a representative for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

7.3 David Marlow informed the Members that the OSG meetings have been well attended due to the positive workplan that has been achieved.

7.4 The Group has been focusing on three main areas; prioritising LPAs agreed by the OSG Members to guide AONB Unit work planning, Housing and Renewable Energy emerged as the two highest ranked LPA's; researching best practise with planning policies across the AONB Local Authorities, a draft paper is to be circulated to officers; and investigating the process of setting up an AONB design panel which will support housing development from source and reflect the character of the High Weald.

7.5 David Marlow also confirmed that the Unit has received signed copies of the Service Level Agreement from all of the Local Authorities.

7.6 Cllr Mrs S Tidy asked whether there was a noticeable trend towards Planning Inspectors changing their views on building within the AONB. David Marlow responded that in the majority of the cases the Inspectors support the AONBs. It was suggested that the National Association of AONBs may wish to approach the Planning Inspectorate to offer training to build on their understanding and awareness of these issues.

7.7 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Officer Steering Group held on 30 September 2015 as a correct record.

8. PLANNING AND THE AONB

- 8.1 The Committee considered a verbal report on planning and the AONB by the Unit's Co-Director, Jason Lavender.
- 8.2 Jason Lavender informed the Members that he has been covering the Planning Advisory role since the Policy Officer, Andrew Shaw, had left the Unit eighteen months ago. Since the relaxation of the planning regulations the number of applications received by the Unit for comment has increased in quantity and complexity and often the submissions were of poor quality. The developers often gave little regard to the AONB and only two applications to date have taken consideration of the AONB characteristics in a positive manner. Members of the Public are also becoming better informed and utilising the Management Plan information more effectively.
- 8.3 Jason Lavender also highlighted other areas which may put pressure on the Unit's workload including the possibility of Gatwick being again put forward as a site for additional runways; the continued pressure of fracking applications; and the extension of High Speed 1. There has also been an increase in Solar Farm applications across the High Weald.
- 8.4 The Unit has recently contacted the Parishes within the AONB to offer them support for their Neighbourhood Planning. There has been a positive response from the Parishes and the Unit's Research Officer is currently developing a pack to offer to the Parishes to provide environmental data and other AONB information.
- 8.5 Cllr Mrs L Dunbar commented that the Solar Farms may be less of an issue with the reduction of solar power subsidies. Cllr Mrs J Soyke asked whether the Unit had considered charging for their planning services. Jason Lavender responded that where appropriate this had been taken into consideration and there may be potential to do this at the pre-application stages. Tim Dyer also commented that the reduction in the number of Landscape Architects has restricted Local Authority's ability to effectively respond to the submissions.
- 8.6 Taking these areas into consideration the Unit is looking to work more closely with the Local Authorities on land allocation and SHLAAs as well as developing guidance notes/advice to increase awareness of the AONB characteristics such as eco-camping and solar farms.
- 8.7 RESOLVED to note the verbal report and the Unit's change in Planning Strategy with full support from the Committee.

9. HIGH WEALD AONB STAFFING – 3 YEAR DIRECTION AND RESOURCING

- 9.1 The Committee considered a report on High Weald AONB Staffing – 3 year direction and resourcing by the Unit's Co-Director, Sally Marsh.
- 9.2 Sally Marsh took the members through the background to the changes in the Unit's staffing structure during 2015. The Unit were faced with a number of challenges to deliver the work programme due to the resignation of the Communications Officer after 6 months in the post; the Policy and Research Officer resigned in April 2015, after a lengthy sickness absence; and in May the Administer, Kerry Baldwin, moved into a new post outside of the

Unit. In view of the savings and pressure on existing staff to meet work schedules the formal restructuring process was put on hold pending a review of the budget and work priorities.

- 9.3 The revision in the core team is driven by a renewed focus on supporting Local Authority partners in delivering the Section 85 requirements and therefore a part-time Principle Planning Advisor and full time Landscape Advisor post are being recruited.
- 9.4 Competition for external funding is intense and in order to secure future project funding from funders such as National Grid, water catchment partnerships and Natural England, two new posts have been created. The Land Management Advisor role was advertised and Tamara Taylor joined the team in October. Tamara has an excellent working knowledge of agriculture and countryside stewardship. Matthew Pitts who managed the Living Woods Project has taken on the Outreach Advisor post.
- 9.5 The Committee were informed that the Community Landscape Fund Panel (formerly Sustainable Development Fund) will evolve into a project scrutiny panel which will support externally funded landscape enhancement activities. The Unit has discussed with Mrs J Davison taking on the role of leading this panel which should be in place by January 2016.
- 9.6 The report is reflected in the draft revenue budget for 2016/17 and the staffing changes should be in place by 31 March 2016.
- 9.7 RESOLVED to note the report and agree to the changes to the staff structure which are reflected in the draft revenue budget 2016/17.

10. **REVENUE BUDGET 2016/2017**

- 10.1 The Committee considered a report on the draft Revenue Budget for 2016/17 by the Deputy Treasurer.

Points to note:

- The draft revenue budget would be presented as a balanced budget assuming Local Authorities maintain their core contribution at the 2016/17 level and the use of project reserves.
 - The budget confirmed that Defra contribution will be at £204,000 for 2016/17, and it assumes the local authority contributions would remain at £84,700.
 - The draft budget allows for a smaller core team, reducing 5.5 FTE staff to 4.4 FTE. Staff costs are subject to inflation of 1% and incremental progression as result of revised grades following the Single Status review.
 - Self-Funding Projects budget is attached at Appendix B. The Partnership's project budget has been rationalised into 3 programmes; Management Plan Research and Evidence; the Landscape Enhancement Initiative; High Weald Heroes and Project Development.
 - The Defra grant contribution allocated to Partnership Projects is £38,800.
- 10.2 The draft revenue budget may be impacted by the autumn statement. However, up to a 10% reduction in core budget can be accommodated if required.

- 10.3 The Unit are looking at alternative accommodation which would give a one-off saving of potentially up to £10,000. However, locating a suitable rural location which has the necessary fibre optic connections is proving difficult.
- 10.4 RESOLVED to note the report and:
- I. Approve the draft Revenue Budget for 2016/17
 - II. To commence the budget consultation with the local authorities and Defra.

11. **FIELDS IN THE WEALD**

- 11.1 The Committee were asked to participate in a landscape perception exercise.
- 11.2 This exercise has been rolled out to officers and landowners across the AONB as part of the research basis for the Fields in the High Weald Project. The Members were asked to look at photographs, with limited information, on several different types of land use positioned around a settlement. They then had to discuss in groups which of these areas may be the most appropriate for housing development. – Landscape Perception Images appended
- 11.3 This is part of a wider report on Landscape Perceptions in the High Weald which will be an output as part of the Fields in the High Weald Project and highlights the challenges of making decisions without having the correct information to hand when assessing a site for housing allocation.

12. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 12.1 The Committee considered a report by the Unit's Co-Director Jason Lavender on Risk Management.
- 12.3 Jason Lavender re-enforced that the key risk might be the impact of the Autumn Budget Statement to the core budget. However, the appointment of Rory Stewart as Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in May 2015 may be positive as he is a supporter of AONBs and National Parks.
- 12.1 RESOLVED to note the report and the Management Board continue to meet to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management.

13. **AOB**

- 13.1 The Committee were informed that Ruth Childs, Kent County Council Officer, is leaving her position in December and the Committee thanked Ruth for her work supporting the Officer Steering Group and the Unit.
- 13.2 The next Meeting for JAC will be set by doodle poll – potential date of 23 March 2015 before the Easter Break was recommended.