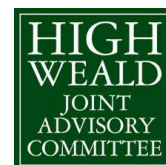


High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee



Minutes of Meeting

Wednesday 29 March 2017 at 10.30am

Holy Cross Priory, Lewes Road, Cross-in-Hand, Heathfield, TN21 0DZ

Members present:

Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council, Vice Chairman
Cllr M Sydney	Surrey County Council
Cllr Mrs L Lockwood	Tandridge District Council
Cllr Mrs J Soyke	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr A Pickering	Ashford Borough Council
Mrs L Newland	Natural England
Mrs A Field	Forestry Commission

Officers present:

Mr J Lavender	AONB Co-Director, High Weald AONB Unit
Mrs S Marsh	AONB Co-Director, High Weald AONB Unit
Ms C Tester	AONB Planning Advisor, High Weald AONB Unit
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Mr D Marlow	OSG Chairman, Rother District Council
Mr D Greenwood	Officer, Surrey County Council

1. **PRESENTATION:** The story of the **Historic Routeways within the Weald – Jeremy Lake**

1.1 Dr Jeremy Lake has been commissioned to research the routeways story in the context of their national significance, supporting the current update of the historic routeways dataset. Jeremy presented the significant events within the routeway timeline and highlighted the importance of the routeways to the development of settlements within the High Weald. The research paper will set the context and background supporting the decision making process for highway improvements, public rights of way diversions as well as new developments.

1.2 The research paper will be available in early Summer 2017. The key research terms will also be built into the Management Plan glossary as part of the review process.

1.3 Cllr Tidy asked whether Dr Lake had specific information on routeways in the Crowborough and High Hurstwood area. Dr Lake confirmed that he was researching pilot areas in the AONB and he could potentially include this area.

1.4 Cllr A Pickering enquired about the importance of 1840s as a cut-off date for the Weald routeways story. Dr Lake explained that around this time the railways were established and with the development of turnpikes the rural areas became more accessible to explore.

2. **APOLOGIES**

2.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Mrs Jill Davison, Cllr M Balfour, Cllr R Street, Cllr H Rogers, Cllr L Kitchen, Mr T Bamford, Mr R Edwards, Mrs V Pullan, Miss J Hollingum, Mr M Nouch, Mr D Scully, Mrs H French.

- 2.2 Cllr B Kentfield chaired the meeting in the absence of Mrs J Davison.
- 2.3 Cllr Michael Sydney announced that this meeting of the JAC would be his last as he will be retiring from his position as Surrey County Councillor for Lingfield District at the forthcoming local elections although he will continue to be actively involved in countryside matters with Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) for Tandridge and Surrey. Cllr Brian Kentfield, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Cllr Michael Sydney for his significant contribution to the High Weald AONB over the past 12 years.

3. **MEMBERS INTERESTS**

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

4. **URGENT MATTERS**

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

5. **MINUTES OF THE JAC MEETING – 16 November 2017**

- 5.1 RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting of 16 November 2017 as a correct record.

6. **MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD – 1 March 2017**

- 6.1 RESOLVED to note the minutes of the Management Board held on 1 March 2017 as a correct record.

7. **MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP – 22 September 2017**

- 7.1 The Committee considered a verbal report on the Officer Steering Group (OSG) by the OSG Chairman, David Marlow.
- 7.2 David informed the Members that the Steering Group had been well attended and local authority officers with design and conservation positions had participated in a discussion on developing AONB design guidance and principles.
- 7.3 David explained that the AONB design guidance and principles is a key piece of work that is essential for the future of ensuring best practise for housing developments within the AONB. He confirmed that there was a consensus from the officers that High Weald design guidance and principles should be progressed in collaboration with a design sub-group. The officers representing the 15 local authorities were keen to hold a design conference to develop understanding on urban and rural design options which could be run in conjunction with the design sub-group.
- 7.4 David was pleased to announce that the Environmental Colour Assessment had been supported by a modest contribution from the majority of the local authorities. This guidance will enhance the local authority's decision making processes when engaging with planning applications.

- 7.5 However, it was explained to the Members that local authority Development Managers are hard placed to use all the information provided due to the number of applications they are receiving. The local authorities therefore welcomed additional training from the AONB Unit on the AONB component datasets. David asked the Members present to encourage their teams in their own authorities to engage with this training as the interpretation of the data is paramount in the success of judging each application.
- 7.6 Cllr Tidy clarified that due to the pressure of housing development within the AONB there should be a balance between medieval landscape characteristics of settlements as well as the more modern issues such as parking. Jason Lavender responded that good master-planning is key and that the local authorities need to convince developers to move away from generic models and think of the local 'sense of place' when designing housing developments. Cllr Kentfield explained that early intervention in the pre-application process is essential to ensuring better development designs and that Rother District Council had been successful with this approach with a recent application.
- 7.7 RESOLVED to note:
The Minutes of the Officer Steering Group held on 22 September 2017 as a correct record.
8. **REVENUE BUDGET 2017/2018**
- 8.1 The Committee considered a report by Finance Manager, Andy Fowler, who presented the Revenue Budget for 2017/18.
- 8.2 Andy Fowler advised that the 2017/18 core budget is a balanced budget which provides the JAC with the capacity to deliver its core function.
- 8.3 It was highlighted in Appendix A – 2016/2017 budget, due to staff vacancies there had been a surplus of £6,100 which will go into reserves. There was also an increase in accommodation costs due to the increased rental costs following the office lease renewal.
- 8.4 In Appendix B - 2017/2018 the Staff costs has increased to accommodate incremental progression, contributions to the pension fund of 20.30% and estimated inflation of 1% for Single Status and LMG salaries.
- 8.6 £42,300 was allocated from the Defra 'single pot' to Projects and successful grant applications, and inclusion of Sussex Lund as a new programme, which has resulted in a significant increase in expenditure on self-funding projects.
- 8.7 RESOLVED to note the report and:
- i. approved the Revenue Budget for 2017/18.
 - ii. thank Defra and partner authorities for maintaining their contributions.
9. **AONB Management Plan Evidence and Guidance Programme – Planning Approach 2017-2020**
- 9.1 The JAC considered a report by Claire Tester, Planning Advisor, on AONB Planning Advice.

- 9.2 Claire Tester explained that this report forms part of the business strategy for the AONB Unit and sets out the proposed approach to planning matters. The report reflects the changing context since the Localism Act in 2011 and brings it up to date with the publication of the Housing White Paper in February 2017 and the potential impact of Brexit.
- 9.3 Locally the AONB Unit has noted a significant increase in the number and the size of housing proposals and site allocations as the AONB comes under pressure to accommodate some of the South of England's housing need. The paper looks at ways the AONB Unit can approach planning matters to assist the local authorities to meet their statutory duty to conserve and enhance the High Weald and meet their objectives in the AONB Management Plan.
- 9.4 It is proposed to do this by:
- I. the production of Advice Notes and factsheets to address emerging issues and to provide support and training to officers and Members.
 - II. to ensure early input to Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans to ensure that AONB policies are met as well as being involved in pre-planning applications. Claire Tester asked Members to urge their officers to ensure involvement from the AONB Unit where possible.
 - III. to work with regional and national parties to influence Government Policy and practice within AONBs.
- 9.5 Cllr Pickering asked whether having a solid Local Plan would supersede the Neighbourhood Planning process. A discussion took place on the importance of Neighbourhood Plans in informing the local communities about the key characteristics of the High Weald AONB and that in the absence of a Local Plan, it can help to protect the community's 'sense of place' through design principles and protection of key areas that the community values. Claire Tester confirmed that the AONB Unit had received around 60 planning applications since May 2016.
- 9.6 Jason Lavender informed the Committee that a 600 house development with a hospice within the AONB boundary at Pease Pottage had been approved by Mid Sussex District Council, and that he believed the development was the largest one within an AONB for many years.
- 9.7 RESOLVED to note to approve the approach to planning matters as set out in the report.
- 10. MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW 2017 – PROGRESS AND ISSUES**
- 10.1 The JAC considered a report by Sally Marsh, AONB Co-Director on the key issues that will impact on the production of the Management Plan 2019 as a 'light touch' review.
- 10.2 The AONB Unit has written to David Henshilwood of Natural England providing a timetable for the review of the Management Plan 2019. This timetable was agreed at the Joint Advisory Committee held on 16 November 2016.

- 10.3 Sally informed the Committee that the launch of the Management Plan in 2019 coincides with the 60th anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which paved the way for AONB designation. National Parks and AONBs are discussing with Defra and others how this significant anniversary could be celebrated.
- 10.3 During the next 18 month consultation period the AONB Unit will be holding a series of High Weald AONB Management Plan (HWMP) review workshops involving experts across the AONB including officers and Members to update the key issues and targets for the HWMP.
- 10.4 The AONB Management Plan review process will be led by Charles Winchester with guidance and support from the Joint Directors, Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender and the Planning Advisor, Claire Tester.
- 10.5 The independent review panel for the Welsh Assembly has now reported and the recommendations for protected landscapes that are being taken forward in Wales are based on the principle that AONBs have a clear role in the future and are well placed to deliver the current priorities for the Welsh government including sustainable management of natural resources and sustainable economic development.
- 10.6 The AONB Unit is developing a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to raise the brand awareness on an AONB wider-scale aiming to coincide with the launch of the AONB Management Plan in 2019.
- 10.7 However, of more immediate and fundamental concern, was the new GOV.uk website formed by amalgamating websites from government agencies and departments. Vital policy documents, underpinning the AONBs' designation, have been removed and are not easily accessible, without a freedom of information request. This process is cumbersome and the loss of access to this information has wide ranging implications for the future of AONBs. In response to this situation the Management Board agreed that a letter about these issues should be sent to Lord Gardiner and copied to the Members of Parliament with constituencies within the High Weald AONB.
- 10.8 Alison Field, Forestry Commission informed the Committee that they had been working closely with the Government website team to ensure that as much as possible could be placed on the central website. However, they would still also have to find a separate site to house other aspects of their day to day advice and were looking to a charitable trust to manage this process.
- 10.9 There was a general sense of agreement that as public funded bodies the policy information should be placed in the central Government Portal. The JAC asked that the letter should be sent to Lord Gardiner and they suggested a few changes to strengthen the tone of the letter to alert Lord Gardiner of the severity of the situation and the wider impact on other Government agencies.
- 10.10 The impact of the increase in planning developments within the AONB and additional evidence will lead to a more in-depth review of the settlement section of the Management Plan.

- 10.11 Brexit and Defra’s potential move towards a Natural Capital approach will be reflected in the AONB Management Plan. Currently it is already largely structured around the area’s natural capital as it emphasis physical landscape components rather than “special qualities” however the review will put greater emphasis on the role of the High Weald’s grasslands and woodlands in carbon sequestration and storage.
- 10.12 There is an ongoing discussion at the NAAONB that new Agri-environmental payments based on a natural capital approach could be administered through the AONB partnerships that would be able to tailor funding to landscape priority areas.
- 10.13 The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping paper runs alongside the HWMP review and will be sent to partners for consultation in April 2017.
- 10.14 RESOLVED to note the report and agreed to:
- i. support the principle of a ‘light touch’ review’;
 - ii. support the allocation of AONB Unit staff resources to the review set out in paragraph 2.1 & 2.2;
 - iii. support the recommendations for the scope of the review set out in paragraph 6.1;
 - iv. agreed the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping paper attached at Appendix A;
 - v. to send the letter to Lord Gardiner AONB Policy Information and GOV.UK, Copied to MPs with constituencies within the High Weald AONB.

11. EXTERNAL FUNDING - SUSSEX LUND

- 11.1 The JAC considered a report by Jason Lavender, on behalf of Gerry Sherwin, AONB Business Manager who was not present at the meeting.
- 11.2 Sussex Lund is a grants programme launched in March 2016 by Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing, co-founders of Arcadia, one of the UK’s largest philanthropic foundations. Sussex Lund aims to improve the present day landscape of the High Weald AONB by making contributions to small, practical projects that have immediate effect and inspire wider change. Last year the Sussex Community Fund managed the £250,000 grants programme but felt that it did not align with their core objectives. The AONB Unit was asked to manage the fund for 2017/18 using the current staff within the AONB Unit. The application period closes on 2 May 2017 and the applications will be formally assessed by the Sussex Lund grants panel in June 2017.
- 11.4 RESOLVED to note the report and to;
- i. welcome the collaborative approach to Sussex Lund, agree the decision-making process and approve the risk management strategy;
 - ii. thank Professor Baldwin and Dr Rausing for their ongoing interest in and support for the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 12.1 The JAC considered a report by Jason Lavender on risk management and the associated risk management matrix.

12.2 Jason explained that the greatest risk to the AONB Unit continued to be the loss of staff particularly given their technical expertise and knowledge and interest in the area. However he was pleased to announce that the AONB Unit had filled the communications role, which had been vacant for some time. The Communication Officer, Emma White, will start with the AONB Unit after Easter and will be working part-time.

12.3 RESOLVED to note the report and:

- i. request that the Management Board continue to meet to review significant risks a required and develop options for their management.

13. AOB

13.1 David Greenwood informed the Committee that Rural Development Programme for England LEADER funding had met to discuss the future of the programme and that there was commitment to be able to access grants until March 2019. However, continued funding would be dependent on the success of the projects coming forward. Grants for local produce and tourism are also still available.

13.2 Alison Field informed the Members of the Countryside Productivity Scheme which is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and another grant source for farmers and landowners in the South East.

13.3 Alison Field informed the Committee that the Forestry Commission is offering a planning masterclass for forestry and woodlands for local authority officers. David Marlow suggested that they may be able to merge several local authorities in a common location as these training sessions would be welcomed. The AONB Unit also offered support in communicating this offer to their contacts.

13.4 Suggested meeting dates will be distributed by doodle poll for the next Management Board meeting to be held in June 2017.

13.5 The Members were also asked to consider whether they wish to apply for Chairman or Vice-chairman or for a place on the Management Board. The elections will be held at the next meeting to be held in November 2017.