



## HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

14 November 2012 Meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee held at the Bellbrook Centre, Uckfield

### Present:

Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council, Chair
Cllr R Bullock	Kent County Council
Cllr Mrs J Davison	Sevenoaks District Council
Cllr C Hersey	Mid Sussex District Council, Vice Chair
Cllr Mrs E Kitchen	Horsham District Council
Cllr Mrs R Moore	Wealden District Council
Cllr Ms S Murray	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Cllr Mrs J Soyke	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Cllr R Street	Hastings Borough Council
Cllr M Sydney	Surrey County/Tandridge District Council
Cllr Mrs S Tidy	East Sussex County Council

### Officers:

Mr M Davidson	Hastings Borough Council
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Mr D Greenwood	Surrey County Council
Ms A Howell	Mid Sussex District Council
Mr J Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Ms S Marsh	AONB Director (job share)
Mrs K Philips	Kent County Council
Ms V Pullan	East Sussex County Council
Mr D Scully	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Mr A Shaw	AONB Unit
Ms G Sherwin	AONB Business Manager

### 1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received from the following Members, officers and co-optees:

Councillor Balfour, Councillor Blake and Councillor Mrs Blake; Ms H French, Mr D Marlow, Mr P Newdick, Mr D Phillips; Mr F Davies - Natural England.

## 2. MEMBERS INTERESTS

2.1 All Members declared a personal interest in Item 8 in that they were members of local authorities that contributed to the finances of the High Weald AONB.

## 3. PRESENTATIONS

### Rural Tourism

3.1 Alison Burgh of Acorn Tourism did a presentation to the JAC about the latest tourism trends, with the increasing popularity of staycations, and the demographics and expectations of visitors to the High Weald. Sustainable tourism, which has a low impact on the environment and local culture while generating income, was discussed, along with schemes to accredit and certify businesses and enterprises. The different approaches to tourism across the AONB, with individual local tourism structures in place in each county, were highlighted.

3.2 The features that support the High Weald Story were set out, such as: walking, cycling and riding; vineyards and gastronomy; woodlands; ecocamping and other unusual accommodation and the catering for the disability market.

3.3 Different approaches to measuring tourism and its effects were suggested, such as numbers of visitors, their profile and spend; employment figures; investment in the local area; community engagement and environmental impact. Potential desired objectives and targets of a tourism strategy were also suggested such as transport management, behaviour change, sustainable businesses and local ambassadors for the landscape.

### Agriculture

3.4 Anthony Weston of CLM gave a presentation on agriculture in the High Weald in the context of the imminent changes in European policy. A new framework to be in place until 2020 is due to be implemented in 2014.

3.5 The difficulty in getting farms in the High Weald into schemes such as Environmental Stewardship, given the landscape features and normally small nature of the individual farms. The national decline in profitability of livestock farming and strengthening of wheat prices, not traditionally successful in the High Weald, were noted.

3.6 The research of Kent County Council into their rural economy was highlighted, as were alternative methods of dealing with catchment sensitive farming and the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

3.7 Details of the Greening, or Ecological Services, agenda were set out which will form 30% of a single farm payment and will be obligatory unless a farm is 100% organic. Farms will have to demonstrate crop diversification, retain permanent pasture (from a 2014 reference) and use 7% of land as an ecological focus area.

#### Biodiversity

3.8 The AONB Director undertook the presentation on behalf of Natural England. He set out the broad context that targets established in 2001 were not being met for a number of reasons, including size of protected areas, and that there are notable success amongst the continuing losses of biodiversity.

3.9 A foresight report indicated the increasing pressures on land use as: population increase; economic growth; environmental change; food and energy security; new technologies and sustainable intensification of farms.

3.10 The changing policy landscape was referred to, in particular CAP reform, the Growth agenda increasing demands for certain product, climate change, the NPPF and effects of Localism and the Growth and Infrastructure Bill. With regard to specific developments affecting biodiversity the presentation mentioned the Natural Environment White Paper and the Lawson Review and its recommendations for a landscape-wide view. The implications and challenges to protected landscapes, in the light of changes to Environmental Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship were set out.

3.11 The Ecosystems Services approach was defined as the benefits nature provides to humans and sub-divided into provisioning services, regulating services, cultural services and supporting services. The importance of exploiting the landscape in the best way, working with farmers, foresters, field sports and land owners was stressed.

#### 4. WORKSHOPS

4.1 Members and officers divided into two groups for workshop discussions based on the presentations.

#### 5. MINUTES OF THE JAC MEETING – 23 MARCH 2012

5.1 RESOLVED to agree the Minutes of the meeting of 23 March 2012 as a correct record.

#### 6. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD – 23 OCTOBER 2012

6.1 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Management Board held on 23 October 2012.

7. MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP – 12 OCTOBER 2012

7.1 RESOLVED to note the Minute of the Officer Steering Group held on 12 October 2012.

8. MATTERS ARISING

8.1 None.

9. DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2013/14

9.1 The Committee considered a report by the Deputy Treasurer which presented the Draft Revenue Budget for 2013/14. The Finance Manger explained that a balanced budget had been prepared on the basis of partner authorities maintaining their contributions at present levels, no inflation on expenditure and a 5.5% reduction in funding from DEFRA. Savings of £9000 were proposed with £3000 on staff, £2000 on accommodation and office equipment and £4000 on partnership running costs. The Finance Manager explained the impacts of the Single Status pay review on the staff budget, with an increase of £7300 to be funded through the identified savings, leaving a nett saving of £1700.

9.2 The Finance Manager drew the Committee's attention to the Table at 4.1 of the report which indicated that further savings of £18000 would be needed to produce a balanced budget for 2014/15, based on local authorities maintaining their contributions at current levels. He identified areas to examine to produce those savings: staffing, accommodation, reserves and self-funded projects to contribute to core costs.

9.3 The Business Manager presented a breakdown of the budget for the High Weald Heroes. She explained that it was hoped that a new Education Officer could be appointed, either as a result of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, or from a commitment from the partner authorities to the project, which had generated very positive feedback to an evaluation in the summer.

9.4 RESOLVED to (1) approve the draft Revenue Budget for 2013/14; and  
(2) approve the commencement of budget consultation with local authorities and Defra.

10. MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

10.1 The Committee considered a report introduced by the AONB Director who presented the background documents and set out the scope of the Review. She

explained that the Introduction had been revised with input from the Officer Steering Group and Management Board, taking into consideration policy changes since the previous edition of the Plan.

10.2 The Director reported that specialists had been engaged to advise on issues likely to drive change to inform the review of the Plan's forward targets for 2019, which will then be reviewed by the OSG. The formal consultation on the revised Plan is scheduled for Spring/Summer 2013, and options for the consultation strategy are being considered in the absence of the Anvil as a communication tool. Individual partner authorities are expected to adopt the final plan by Spring 2014.

10.3 RESOLVED to (1) note that progress on revising the Plan is on track;  
(2) note that the revised text of the Introduction section has been approved by the Officer steering Group;  
(3) note the Plan's supporting documents including the Performance Monitoring Report, Condition Monitoring Report, Strategic Environmental assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment; and  
(4) request that the Management Board discuss the consultation strategy for the Plan at their next meeting.

## 11. HIGH WEALD AONB JAC PROJECTS

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the AONB Director which set out the projects currently underway in the context of the increasing difficulty in generating funds.

11.2 The Director set out that the unsuccessful Landscape Partnership Scheme bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund would be resubmitted in a modified form, following a meeting with HLF to discuss the reasons the bid was turned down.

11.3 The Committee congratulated the Unit on the varied programme and the legacy booklet for the successful Weald Forest Ridge project. The Committee discussed the issues of eco-camping and Raising Our Game.

11.4 RESOLVED to note the report.

## 12. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AONBS UPDATE

12.1 The Committee considered a report from the AONB Director regarding the work of the National Association for AONBs, and the range of activities it supports. Members' attention was drawn to Richard Benyon's attendance at the National Association's AGM, and Cllr Sydney's position as a Board member.

12.2 RESOLVED to note the report.

13. HIGH WEALD AONB UNIT STAFFING UPDATE

13.1 The Committee considered a report by the AONB Director which highlighted the staff changes since the last JAC including the departures of Patricia Tillman, Laura Sweeting, Dr Philip Sansum and Ruth Childs, and the retention of Simon Aguss to work on the Brede Valley LPS Bid.

13.2 The report produced by Dr Vorley on the future of livestock farming in the High Weald is to be made available.

13.3 RESOLVED to (1) note the report;  
(2) thank the staff and volunteers for their valued contributions.

14. RISK MANAGEMENT

14.1 The Committee considered a report and Risk Matrix by the AONB Business Manager. The AONB Director outlined the work done in line with ESCC policies in mitigating the risks identified.

14.2 The Committee discussed the Unit taking on responsibility for the clerking service, and requested that the situation be monitored.

14.3 RESOLVED to (1) note the report; and  
(2) request that the Management Board meet to review significant risks as required and develop options for their management.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

15.1 To be agreed.