



High Weald Officer Steering Group

Notes of a meeting of the High Weald Officer Steering Group held on Monday 25 February 2013 at the High Weald Unit, Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell

PRESENT:

David Marlow, Rother District Council (Chair)
Kirsti Johnson, Sevenoaks Borough Council
David Greenwood, Surrey County Council
Alma Howell, Mid Sussex District Council
Jenny Knowles, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Sally Marsh, Co-Director High Weald Unit
Paul Newdick, Tandridge District Council
David Scully, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Andrew Shaw, High Weald Unit
David Phillips, Wealden District Council
Virginia Pullan, East Sussex County
Ruth Childs, Kent County Council

Topic	Action
1. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING	
David Marlow welcomed Samantha Nicholas, Team Support Officer, High Weald AONB Unit who will be taking over the secretariat role from ESCC officially in April 2013	
Thanks were passed to Simon Bailey for his role in supporting the OSG/JAC.	
1.1 The Minutes of the meeting of Wednesday 17 October were agreed as a correct record.	
1.2 David Greenwood provided an update that Surrey CC have successfully secured Countryside Management Apprentices for 3 years.	
2. APOLOGIES	
2.1 Apologies for absence were received from: Murray Davidson, James Seymour, Jackie Lewis, Kate Philips, Helen French .	
2.2 Kirsti Johnson is replacing Helen French, whilst Helen is on maternity leave	

3. AONB Datasharing

3.1 Alma Howell opened the discussion to the group on datasharing High Weald AONB key components data with the group. Mid-Sussex have integrated these GIS data layers with their current data. Alma took the group through the example of Ardingly Parish Neighbourhood Plan, who found the interpretation and guidance a very useful part of the evidence base.

3.2 Alma Howell asked the other authorities present whether they had access to this data and how this information may be used to support the decision making process. All welcomed receiving this data . There was recognition that the Ancient Woodland data and its significance is well established and that the data for the other key components may not be so established

David Scully – Tunbridge Wells uses the data as part of a landscape biodiversity report for each site to inform planning officers and was concerned that all components should be given full consideration.

David Phillips said the information was very welcome and shows how the HWU has learnt much about the AONB but the data is being under-used by the local authority development departments. He also added that a mandate ought to be established stating that the datasets are very positive and rather than representing the ‘dead hand of AONBs’ they instead provide information that is of assistance in assessing proposals against the test of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. and this has a positive impact on Neighbourhood planning. He went on to say it would be a positive move to inform planning members on the existence and use of the High Weald data.

Sally Marsh thanked the OSG for the support shown for the datasets adding that while they are not yet perfect or complete, they do help with the advice given on development as a whole. David Marlow agreed saying that this is a priority and if the data is not included as part of local authority decision-making, then we are all missing a trick.

3.2 The grouped discussed additional elements that would enhance the

data:

David Scully indicated that the descriptive text and metadata content is useful and gave an auditable route to testing the robustness of the data. Tunbridge Wells would wish to integrate the data with their own data sets for it to be most effective

Next steps:

AS/SM

AONB Unit to contact authorities to check whether these datasets are available and how to supply it (with supportive interpretation) and arrange lunchtime meetings with planning officers to develop their understanding of how these datasets can be integrated into their working practises.

4. BUDGET

- 4.1 All authorities have signed off budget for 2013/2014
Sally Marsh indicated that there was a reduction of funds from Kent CC.
- 4.2 Sally Marsh also passed on her thanks from Gerry Sherwin for the financial assistance the authorities have given for High Weald Hero's education programme.
- 4.3 David Scully highlighted that Tunbridge Wells is still to provide its approval on HWH.

5. MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEWING

- 5.1 David Marlow introduced the options for OSG consideration of the MP and suggested that, rather than defer until after JAC, it should aim to recommend the MP for approval, with any agreed amendments, for consideration by JAC in march. This would help keep to programme. It was agreed. SM
- 5.2 David Marlow took the group through the Management Plan. The following amendments were agreed:
Opening foreword by Richard Benyon. Having heard that the ministerial foreword had been written for the use of all English JL

- AONB partnerships Jason Lavender agreed to forward the OSG comments to NAAONB regarding NPPF context, noting it was unlikely these could be incorporated into the Minister's text.
- 5.3 It was agreed that an additional non-technical summary detailing the plan preparation process and development of the targets and indicators, and the consultation actions would be provided
- 5.4 2.3 Perceptual & aesthetic quality:
It was agreed that there would be a glossary and to add perceptual and aesthetic quality.
- 5.5 Water Systems and climate – Top 5 issues for Geology...
*It was agreed to insert an additional word in bullet point 1: understanding the for small scale **mineral** extraction...*
 In response to a comment by David Scully that there was a specific issue about abstractions especially for ground water, it was agreed that this be incorporated into the in the top 5 issues (logically in point 4).
- 5.6 Settlement: DP
 The group discussed that there were several issues which should not be removed and would be better retained within amended Top 5 points. David Scully highlighted, after Brendan Chester Kadwells talk about the large % of new builds onto existing properties, that the previous point should be retained: *Inappropriate new development e.g. large sized...*
 Alma Howell also highlighted this for *Inappropriate design...*
 David Phillips highlighted, through his experience with Heathfield, that there was an issues of meeting housing need, especially affordable housing.
 David Marlow suggested wording of an issue relating to sub urbanisation and the pressure to residential intensification unrelated to land management. It was also suggested that the changes could be accommodated by combining 3 and 5 and that 2 was more a land management issue to be addressed elsewhere.
- The above points were accepted and it was agreed that David Phillips will suggest revised wording to reflect these points.**
 (THIS HAS BEEN DONE – SEE ATTACHED SHEET)
- 5.7 Settlement Objectives S1:

The group discussed the number of farm buildings that are being under-utilised and the reference to *small settlements* confusing. It was agreed to replace *small* with *rural settlements*; also the addition of word in last point - of Bird and *bat* boxes, which should relate to all developments not just small settlements.

5.8 Settlement Objectives S2:

Bullet 4 - It was agreed to clarify what is meant to potentially refer to *'looking at character in assessing the sustainability of rural developments'*

(The group discussed Incorporation of landscape/townscape character as a dimension within assessments of sustainability, but *Sally Marsh felt it better simply to use 'character' as the correct terminology*

5.9 David Marlow suggested an additional Objective, which was agreed:

To give explicit regard to the key components of the natural beauty of the High Weald in the planning of development for towns and villages in and adjacent to the AONBd

Settlement objective S3

Ruth Childs expressed the need for quality spatial design and layout and suggested broadening the indicator of success based on the original one, but covering layout as well as design'.

5.10 The group discussed Design awards for the High Weald character components and potentially speaking with other AONBs such as Kent Downs. The authorities currently have these awards but that to achieve this as a 5 year target was too great.

It was agreed to add in a target to develop a High Weald design guidance document.

5.11 Routeways:

The group discussed the boundary issues which are arising along ancient routeways with closed board fencing and the impact this has on rare woodland indicators which are often found along these routeways.

It was agreed that reference to 'boundary treatments' be added to

- bullet 2 in the Top 5 issues
- 5.12 Woodland, W1:
 David Scully highlighted that that woodlands are not actively managed. Jason Lavender highlighted the issue of deer management will have a bigger impact on woodlands than tree disease and that unmanaged woodlands maybe a requirement. It was noted that an additional target for support on management of deer populations has been highlighted (under objective W2bullet 6). It was agreed that the indicator of success for Objective W4 should refer to 'utilising *locally sourced* wood fuel'
- 5.13 Field & Heath:
 It was agreed to add in to the glossary the term permeable and to insert the word 'ecology' before 'permeability' in the rationale for FH3. as it has other meanings.
- 5.14 Field and Heath, targets
 The group discussed the point, *preparation of a Weald wide connectivity map*.
 Sally Marsh indicated this was due to the CAP reform and ecology focussing on EFAs. The nature reserves should be put in as they may be targeted for funding.
- 5.15 Ruth Childs explained to the group that KCC have developed a connectivity map which shows the types of habitats and gaps between. This is seen to be a complementary device and could usefully integrate with GI strategies being undertaken by LPAs. It was agreed that it would be good to have a demonstration of this at a future meeting. AS
- 5.16 Public Understanding and enjoyment,
 Targets: UE4: 2019
A requirement for accommodation providers and attractions ...implement 'green' travel plans...
 David Phillips highlighted that we cannot make existing accommodation providers and attractions provide a travel plan. It was agreed to amend bullet 7 to refer to *to encourage existing and new accommodation providers and attractions....*
- 5.17 Public Understanding, 1st page in green strip
 David Phillips highlighted that we should remove or reword *poorly*

behaved pets. Also the group agreed to replace '*unusual*' accommodation with '*distinctive*'.

- 5.18 The group discussed the issue of achievement of targets with resources declining and whether these are realistic: SM/JL
It was agreed to pass this comment to JAC about the sheer volume of work in line with the declining resources.

General points

- 5.19 The group discussed that the European leader programme maybe single pots and we need ensure that a significant slice of funding is allocated to the National designated landscape.

It was agreed that the HWU would incorporate the above amendments into a revised draft Management Plan to be circulated to assist OSG members in making individual comments. Officers to send new amendments to the Unit to be by **Wednesday 6 March** so that the plan can be updated and presented for ratification by the JAC Meeting on 25 March with subsequent launch of the public consultation draft in May 2013.

6. PLANNING REFORMS
- change of use, office to residential
- change of use, redundant agricultural buildings

- 6.1 David Marlow asked the groups which authorities have put in their areas for exemptions: AS

It was deemed useful that the authorities sent copies of their exemptions to the Unit to forward to the NAAOB.

7. PRESENTATION FOR COMMUNITY LEAD SETTLEMENT CHARACTER STUDY - Brendan Chester-Kadwell

Brendan Chester Kadwell presented to OSG Rolvenden Historical Settlement Study. This was supported by SDF funding and is being developed for a wider audience with support from English Heritage. He covered the Historical background, survey methodology; survey areas and settlement findings, issues that have arisen ie farmsteads character has changed due to the AOC.

The group indicated that this was a very interesting project that

highlighted key issues with the High Weald such as suburbanisation.

7.1 Paul Newdick highlighted that it would be good to have a study to the west of the AONB, in the greenbelt, which predates AONB policy, to see if the survey has the similar findings.

7.2 Sally Marsh informed the group out that English Heritage are supporting a template to role out to other Parishes

8. PROJECT UPDATES AND OFFICER FEEDBACK/PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Project updates and project development will be placed on the agenda for the next meeting

9. Items for Management Board and Joint Advisory Committee

9.1 Sally Marsh informed the group that the draft Management Plan will be available at JAC but the background document with the Maps and figures is still under production.

9.2 Jenny Knowles requested that we could circulate the Project Plan to the officer group to ensure dates are set in the calendar. SM

Consultation May of JAC paper.

Launch of the public consultation of Management Plan is planned for May 2013.

10. OTHER UPDATES/AOB

10.1 Alma Howell announced that she is leaving Mid-Sussex and taking a position with English Heritage as an assistant historic buildings inspector for the Southeast.

David Marlow thanked Alma for all her support during her time on the OSG.

11. NEXT MEETING

11.1 Date in May 2013 and venue to be arranged.

Wording of settlement issues drafted by David Phillips, agreed by David Marlow

Top 5 issues:

- Pressure for residential intensification unrelated to land management outside of towns and villages, leading towards suburbanisation of the AONB countryside
- Balancing the identified social and economic need for housing, notably affordable housing, within and adjacent to the AONB with conserving and enhancing landscape character through sustainable development of settlements;
- New development, including large properties, which fails to respect AONB character in terms of scale, design or materials, and is unrelated to local needs;
- Continuing pressures on the availability of affordable homes, including for rural workers available to manage the landscape, leading to growing social exclusion;
- The need to have regard to historic settlement form as well as wider sustainability considerations in the planning process to inform development options and enhance design quality;

(NB The issue of 'Reduction in the capacity of farmsteads to support land management as a consequence of the re-development of redundant farm buildings, leading to an increase in new farm premises or processing space in open countryside' is an agricultural issue and come under 'Field and Heath')

