



## HIGH WEALD AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

25 March 2013 Meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee held at the Council Chamber,  
East Grinstead Town Council, East Court, East Grinstead

### Present:

Cllr B Kentfield	Rother District Council, Chair
Cllr M Balfour	Tonbridge and Malling Borough 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 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
Mr R Edwards	CLA
Mr J Seymour	Natural England

### Officers:

Ms R Child	Kent County Council
Mr M Davidson	Hastings Borough Council
Mr A Fowler	Finance Manager, East Sussex County Council
Mr D Greenwood	Surrey County Council
Mr J Lavender	AONB Director (job share)
Ms S Marsh	AONB Director (job share)
Mr G Mee	Assistant Director ETE, East Sussex County Council
Mr P Newdick	Tandridge District Council
Ms S Nicholas	AONB Unit
Mr D Scully	Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Mr A Shaw	AONB Unit

### Also present:

Dr B Vorley	International Institute for Environment and Development
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1. APOLOGIES

1.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Councillor Blake and Councillor Mrs Blake; Councillor Taylor; Ms V Pullan.

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.

2.2 Councillor Tidy declared a personal interest as the owner of a small farm in the High Weald.

2.3 Councillor Balfour declared a personal interest as a retired land agent.

3. VICE CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

3.1 Councillor Hersey thanked Alma Howell of Mid Sussex District Council and long standing member of the Officer Steering Group for her contribution to the High Weald AONB, and the JAC wished her well in her new role at English Heritage.

4. PRESENTATIONS

**Restocking the High Weald**

4.1 Dr Bill Vorley of the International Institute for Environment and Development gave a presentation to the JAC about securing the future of livestock farming in the High Weald's working landscape. A copy of the presentation is included in the Minute Book. He set out the unusual nature of the High Weald as a medieval pastoral landscape within the south-east of England. The decline in livestock numbers was set out: 24.1% reduction in cattle and 31.6% in sheep. The impacts on the landscape, with the degradation of grassland, and on economic resilience were considered.

4.2 Dr Vorley set out his methodology for addressing (1) a more productive use of the available grassland resource, with space for new entrants into livestock farming, and (2) a reformed Environmental Stewardship policy that is better adapted for lowland pastoral small farm landscape.

4.3 The rise in non-farmers owning farmland and the increase in numbers of farmers approaching retirement were set out, as were the barriers to young people entering farming, such as aversion to long-term tenancies and financial constraints. A potential solution has been proposed by which underused land could be matched with young farmers to contribute to the maintenance of the landscape, build soil

fertility and produce high quality red meat. This would take the form of farm business tenancies or shared farming arrangements which would be mutually beneficial to non-farming landowners and young farmers.

4.4 The suitability of Environmental Stewardship schemes to farms in the High Weald was examined, together with the pattern of distribution across the AONB. It was noted that under half of the AONB's agricultural area is under Stewardship and that this was concentrated in the north west and south eastern parts of the High Weald. The difficulties facing small farms trying to enter Stewardship schemes were set out. An approach to lobbying was suggested, focussing on rebalancing the application of Stewardship to its original intentions, improving the 'fit' to small farms, raising expectations from mainstream permanent pasture and locally adapted Stewardship to produce a more bespoke agri-environmental scheme.

4.5 In conclusion Dr Vorley suggested that the future of the High Weald landscape must come from the farming community, to help young people in need of a foothold into farming address the growing amount of pasture in need of animals as a route to sustainable intensification.

4.6 The Committee warmly welcomed this report, Dr Vorley's involvement, its initial findings and the work the AONB Unit has done to gain local and national support for the findings. The Committee also discussed the scope of the next stages and potential partners. It was suggested that the issue be brought to the attention of the South East Local Economic Partnership, and to approach them for funds and support for a feasibility study and a pilot scheme. The practicalities of the agreements supporting the proposal were discussed by the Committee, and how to allay concerns regarding tenancies and to promote the scheme as a practical way to utilise land to non-farming landowners.

4.7 The Committee also discussed the application of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the discretion available to member states concerning the split between direct payments and agri-environmental schemes. Mr Seymour of Natural England confirmed that grassland farming was a live debate across the Country, and that it was an apposite time to influence policy development.

### **Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme - Conclusions**

4.8 Jason Lavender gave a presentation setting out the achievements and outcomes of the Weald Forest Ridge Landscape Partnership Scheme (WFR). A copy of the presentation is included in the Minute Book. The background of the scheme was outlined and the overarching theme relating to the maidens of the four medieval hunting forests. In total the scheme supported 31 projects and involved 20 separate organizations working together.

4.9 An example was given from each of the five themes: enhancing publically accessible sites; understanding and conserving the historic environment; public celebration and learning; learning in schools; and training and skills.

4.10 The key achievements were set out in terms of the biodiversity and access improvements with maintenance invested with Delivery partners for 10 years; with project outputs such as guided walk leaflets produced, archaeological toolkits and the LIDAR survey; with resources being published online, and having enhanced people's understanding of heritage and increased the skills base.

4.11 The Director distributed examples of the legacy booklet which had been delivered to 130,000 households within the WFR area, as well as deposited with libraries, tourism information centres and visitor centres.

4.12 The Committee expressed their thanks to Simon Aguss, the Scheme Manager, and the delivery partners of an enjoyable and inspirational scheme.

5. MINUTES OF THE JAC MEETING - 14 NOVEMBER 2012

5.1 RESOLVED to agree the Minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2012 as a correct record.

6. MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD - 27 FEBRUARY 2013

6.1 RESOLVED to note the Minutes of the Management Board held on 27 February 2013.

7. MINUTES OF THE OFFICER STEERING GROUP - 25 FEBRUARY 2013

7.1 RESOLVED to note the Minute of the Officer Steering Group held on 25 February 2013.

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. Andy Fowler of East Sussex County Council explained that a balanced budget had been prepared, taking into account nett savings of £1700. He identified the pressures to be expected in the next year, and the means by which to address those pressures.

9.2 Looking forward to 2014/15 the Finance Manager identified a potential deficit, owing to reduced funding from DEFRA, of £20,400 with the potential for further pressure from scheduled Single Status Reviews. In view of this the Committee will need to consider further options to cut further in future years to avoid depleting the reserves.

9.3 Reserves were reported as standing at £88,100, which could cover the potential shortfall and retain the recommended 5% minimum level of reserves. Alternative options, such as revisiting the allocation of funds from DEFRA between the core budget and project fund were presented, with the proviso that this might affect the ability to secure matched funding.

9.4 The Committee discussed the impact of removing the budget for website development. The Director assured the Committee the content of the site would be kept up to date and remains as vibrant and interesting as it is currently.

9.5 Councillor Sydney expressed his concerns regarding the likely future national cuts to funding given his position on the Surrey Hills AONB Joint Committee and the National Association for AONBs. Alternative models of funding such as Community Interest Companies and Community Trusts were suggested as potentially suitable, as well as exploiting the High Weald brand commercially. Both Jason Lavender and Sally Marsh assured the Committee that future funding has been and continues to be the subject of long-running discussions and that a number of seemingly straight-forward options had been trialled by different AONB partnerships in the past without lasting success. It was suggested that the Management Board considers the issue.

9.4 RESOLVED to (1) approve the Revenue Budget for 2013/14;  
(2) thank local authorities and Defra for their contributions towards core costs and High Weald Heroes; and  
(3) request that the Management Board considers strategic future funding options and solutions.

## 10. MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

10.1 The Committee considered a report introduced by Sally Marsh, which presented the proposed version of the draft Management Plan for consultation. Sally explained that the Introduction had been revised with input from both the Officer Steering Group and Management Board, taking into consideration policy changes since the previous edition of the Plan. New five year targets have been developed.

10.2 The Committee discussed the inclusion of green travel plans for small businesses. It was confirmed that they would be encouraged to develop one, rather than it being a requirement.

10.3 RESOLVED to (1) approve the consultation draft of the Management Plan and to agree to proceed with the public consultation, subject to final approval by:

- i) The Chairman
- ii) The Management Board
- iii) The Chairman of the Officer Steering Group

(2) note the Plan's supporting documents including the Performance Monitoring Report, Condition Monitoring Report, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment.

## 10. HIGH WEALD AONB JAC PROJECTS

10.1 The Committee received a verbal report by Jason Lavender, which set out the projects currently underway within the context of the increasing difficulty generating additional funds.

10.2 The Co-Director explained that last year's unsuccessful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Landscape Partnership Scheme centred on Battle and the Brede Valley would be revised and resubmitted to the HLF by the end of May. Should the revised bid also fail, the AONB Unit will aim to use the match-funding already raised to support landowners and farmers in the area on farm conservation and habitat projects.

10.3 The Co-Director explained that the funds provided by some of the JAC partners in support of the High Weald primary school project High Weald Heroes currently allowed the Unit to recruit a part-time officer for two years. A funding bid to the HLF is being prepared with the aim of securing a full-time officer for three years.

10.4 A third bid to the Skills for the Future element of the HLF was outlined and aims to provide a number of apprenticeships for young people wishing to begin a career in the woodland/forestry industry. The outcome of the bid will be known at the end of May.

10.5 The considerable achievements of the sustainable tourism project "Our Land", a collaboration of south east AONB partnerships and a private business were outlined. The Director reported that Gerry Sherwin, the AONB Business Manager had been asked to join a new steering group to assist with the expansion of the scheme to the rest of England.

10.6 The 2012 Kent Food, Farming and Landscape Award had been sponsored by the High Weald and the Kent Downs AONB partnerships. Jason Lavender and the Cllr Kentfield attended the awards dinner in March to represent the JAC. The High Weald's involvement was well received and it was agreed that the JAC should look to jointly sponsor the same award for 2013 and also aim to do something similar for Sussex.

10.7 RESOLVED to note the report.

## 11. HIGH WEALD AONB UNIT STAFFING UPDATE

11.1 The Committee considered a report by the AONB Director which highlighted the staff changes since the last JAC, which included the recruitment on a fixed-term contract of Charles Winchester to work on Management Plan review and the

volunteer work of Dr Bill Vorley, Michael Satchwell, Eugenie van Heijgen and Andrew Warren-Payne. .

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

## 12. RISK MANAGEMENT

12.1 The Committee considered a report on risk management and the associated risk matrix.

12.2 The likely continued reduction in funding was highlighted as the key risk. The Director reported that a reduction in the rent of the Unit's office at the Woodland Enterprise Centre had been successfully negotiated.

- 12.3 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.

## 13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 Date in October 2013 to be agreed.