

**HIGH WEALD JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Management Board**  
**Minutes - 26 June 2013 at 10.30 am, at The Woodland Enterprise Centre, Flimwell**



Samantha Nicholas  
Clerk to the High Weald AONB  
Joint Advisory Committee

Present:           Members:  
                  Cllr B Kentfield           Rother District Council, Chairman  
                  Cllr M Balfour           Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council  
                  Cllr J Davison           Sevenoaks District Council  
                  Cllr S Tidy                East Sussex County Council  
                  Cllr E Kitchen            Horsham District Council

Also Present:

                  Jason Lavender           AONB Director (job share)  
                  Sally Marsh              AONB Director (job share)  
                  Andy Fowler             Senior Finance Officer, East Sussex County Council  
                  David Marlow            Chair of OSG

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Christopher Hersey.

Members' Interests

The Members of the Management Board declared an interest in item 4 on the agenda in that they were all Members of local authorities that contributed to the finances of the High Weald AONB JAC.

Minutes

1. The minutes of the last meeting, held on 27 February 2013 were agreed as a correct record.
2. It was reported from the actions of the minutes of the last meeting that Gerry Sherwin has made contact with representatives from some public health bodies and the close contact with both the NFU and CLA has been developing well.

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee – Annual Return 2012/13

3. Andy Fowler reported on the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee – Annual Return 2012/13 to the Members of the Management Board.

Statement of Accounts: Section 1

4. In this particular financial year - funding was split between: 55% Defra, 17% HLF, 24% Local Authorities and 4% other. Total funds for statement of accounts 2012/13 was £605,000
5. The reserves carried forward at 31 March 2013 are £89,233
6. It was reported that for projects there was an underspend and £3, 819 which has been transferred into reserves.
7. Jason Lavender reported that the gross income generated through HLF projects is accounted for across all cost areas.
8. Cllr Sylvia Tidy emphasised that staff costs have lowered to 55% but productivity has remained the same which is all credit to the hardwork of the team.

9. Andy Fowler confirmed that the balances & receipts have already been approved and signed by Treasurer.

### The Annual Governance Statement – section 2

10. Sally Marsh reported that the additional cash funding was partially due to the resubmission of the HLF bid for Battle & Brede LPS. Part of this sum is an advanced contribution of £300,000 towards Battle & Brede Landscape Partnership Scheme. This is to be held as match funding for the Battle & Brede projects if the HLF is successful. If the bid is not successful then it will be used to support project work in the Battle & Brede area. It was also reported that High Weald Heroes project had to be resubmitted and the variances in cash will depend on the successes of the bids the Unit has submitted.
11. Andy Fowler reported that additional cash reflected in section 8. total cash and short term investments, was unique to this year's financial calendar and that it had to be accounted for in a different manner to the accruals.
12. The Members agreed that there was a need for further clarification of this cash amount in the supporting information of the Annual Return 2012/13
13. **Action:** Andy Fowler confirmed that he will ensure the Annual Return will be updated with this information.
14. **Action:** The Annual Return 2012/13 was agreed and signed by Chair, Cllr Brian Kentfield
15. Andy Fowler reported on the staffing restructure of East Sussex County Council Finance team and highlighted that there will be a consolidation of the current team structure. Andy Fowler confirmed that he will ensure a smooth transition to the newly appointed finance officer who will be managing the Joint Advisory Committee once the restructuring has been confirmed.
16. The Chair of the Management Board, on behalf of the Members of the Management Board, thanked Andy Fowler and the East Sussex County Council finance team for their continued support.

### Budget overview, business strategy and issues

17. Sally Marsh reported on the Business strategy review and took the Members of the Management Board through one of the options that the Unit may have to pursue based on the following assumptions:
- Defra 5% reduction per annum;
  - Zero inflation,
  - Local Authorities' contributions remaining at current levels.
  - Living Woods and Low Weald Officer Projects contributing to office costs
  - Rental is reduced by £5,000
  - Reduced project support £13,000 which will lead to a net saving of £90,000 in 3 years

Sally Marsh and Jason Lavender requested that the Management Board approve transfer of project funds to core if required. This is due to the reduction in budget and that future funding bids such as HLF will not cover core staff costs.

18. The members considered this scenario and agreed that this flexibility in the movement of funds, under Defra's current guidance, is essential to ensuring the Unit can operate effectively.
19. Cllr Jill Davison reported that she is attending the EU Funding seminar at Great Danes and will report back at the next Management Board meeting.
20. Cllr Sylvia Tidy reported that there may be an opportunity for the Unit to be involved with the running of the Leader plus funding in its new form.

21. The Members discussed the use of the reserves and when we may be required to use this option. Jason Lavender confirmed that the Unit would look into the directive for use of the reserves.
22. Sally Marsh reported that Tom Surrey of Defra has recently written to all the English AONB partnerships to clearly state the value of AONBs and their partnerships. Jason Lavender reported that the Minister stated that AONBs are seen as part of future plans in decision making process in Government.

#### External funding:

23. Sally Marsh reported on a draft external funding report, undertaken by Kent AONBs, on behalf of the AONBs looking at best practise.  
The draft report investigated suitable options for AONB partnerships to generate further income from external funds. While this work is very welcome and has been useful, Sally felt it was important to note that the suggested options are largely aspirations and also that the High Weald AONB Unit have tried and tested many of the suggestions at various points over the last 15 years. The draft report indicated that there was no single fix and the solutions were not transferable as each AONB had different strengths and circumstances. The report outlines key areas of external funding are trading arms, community interest company and trusts. Sally Marsh highlighted that the Unit has already participated in many of the best practices including; setting up High Weald Furniture; Friends of the High Weald and the High Weald Landscape Trust, but these all required considerable support from core Unit staff to set up and maintain.

The members discussed this report Cllr Elizabeth Kitchen and Cllr Matthew Balfour raised concerns that that pursuing funding from interested parties may affect the JAC's independence.

24. David Marlow reported that Rother District Council was scrutinising what is an essential core fund and they are required to justify this. The Community structure levy may lead to the Unit's expertise being recognised and in next 5 years it could generate some external funding.

#### Officer Steering Group (OSG) Update

25. David Marlow reported back that they had had an excellent OSG Meeting held on 25 February 2013 and that there had been a positive discussion on the revision of the Management Plan. David Marlow also offered his thanks to the Unit for incorporating the changes efficiently which has allowed the sign off process to go through with the individual local authorities very smoothly.
26. It was reported that there was concern that the permitted development right changes had been passed and that this may lead to a loss of employment opportunities in rural areas.
27. It was reported that following the meeting the Unit would aim to hold meetings with planning officers in each local authority to provide support, guidance and advice on the High Weald AONB. Rother DC has already received a visit from Andrew Shaw.
28. Sally Marsh passed thanks on to David Marlow for exceptional management of the OSG meetings.

#### AONB Management Plan review 2014

29. Sally Marsh took the Members through the timetable for the Management Plan review. The Unit will be holding surgery sessions on 9 July and these have been advertised through website, LA authority press, Enews to parish clerks. Sally Marsh reported that there had been feedback on the difficulty viewing the maps electronically and this will be resolved.

#### Amendments of the MP:

30. Cllr Jill Davison was not keen on the phrase on page 4 of the draft Management Plan "The terrible state of its roads and backward nature of its agriculture. Over 50% of the High

Weald landscape retains its medieval character to do..." and suggested it required rewording or moving. Also, the protected landscape map on page 22 was not easy to interpret as it was on the next page and could it be moved;

Cllr Sylvia Tidy advised that:

Page 28 – target 2019 is one or more river restoration scheme target too low. The layout of page 54/53 could be improved by changing the order of the tables, which should make it easier to understand.

**Action:** Sally Marsh confirmed she will add these into the changes for the final Management Plan.

#### Current projects, project development and staffing update

31. Jason Lavender reported on some of the JAC's current projects:
32. Second application B&B LPS was submitted at end of May. Simon Aguss will be employed to develop B&BLPS scheme if successful or will develop projects in Battle & Brede area using a similar structure to current Sustainable Development Fund. Cllr Sylvia Tidy commented that if this route was to be taken consideration to one higher profile project rather than smaller low impact projects may be advantageous.
33. Low Weald Ancient Woodland Restoration officer will be hosted at HW Unit and will compliment the current work of the Unit to support landowners restoring ancient woodlands and provide advice and guidance on related issues, such as tree diseases.
34. Our Land – 60 plus businesses have been recruited by the High Weald Unit and are featured on the High Weald section of the Our Land website
35. The AONB Unit's report on the current state of livestock farming in the High Weald and options for its revival has been well received in very many quarters both locally and nationally and was submitted as part of the AONB Unit's response to the Future of Farming Review Group's call for views. Greg Barker MP has been kept informed and he is keen to use his influence and contacts to support the Unit and this report. It is hoped to let a contract in September to take the report to the next stage to assess the viability of the proposals within the report and financial support for this has been secured from the economic departments of both KCC and ESCC.
36. High Weald AONB JAC has been invited again to co-sponsor the Kent Landscape, Food and Farming Award.

#### Draft Management Board & JAC Agenda

37. The following items were suggested for the JAC Agenda:
  - Management Plan, Business Strategy and Business Forecast
  - Presentation from English Heritage and Brendan Chester-Kadwell– National guidelines for Heritage survey
  - Presentation from Forestry Commission on Tree Pathogens.

#### Risk Management

38. Jason Lavender presented the Risk Assessment and Cllr Sylvia Tidy commented that it was positive to see it in green.

#### AOB

39. Samantha Nicholas reported on the feedback from the JAC meetings questionnaire on the Councilors' preferences, which were: agree dates in advance; lunch if it can be afforded; and at least one meeting a year at Flimwell. Samantha Nicholas reported that the JAC Meetings could be held at Acorn Tourism on the WEC site, which has a room with better acoustics and large enough to fit the numbers required.
40. Officer Steering Group, Management Board and JAC meetings are also to be set in advance. Samantha Nicholas confirmed that the next JAC will be held at Acorn Tourism on the WEC site.
41. Dates put forward:
  - Management Board - 8 October 12.30 lunch for 3pm finish
  - Management Board - 5 March 2014
  - Joint Advisory Committee – two optional dates 6/8 November 2013
  - Joint Advisory Committee - 26 March 2014