

**NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY  
COUNCIL OF PARTNERS  
MINUTES of a meeting held at  
Hungerford Town Hall, Hungerford, Berkshire  
on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Present	Initials	Representing
Mr E Hiscocks	EH	Chairman
Cllr Anna McNair-Scott	AMS	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Paul Miller	PM	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Cllr Paul Barrow	PB	Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Hilary Cole	HC	West Berkshire Council
Cllr Fleur de Rhe-Philippe	FdRP	Wiltshire Council
Cllr Rhydian Vaughn	RV	Hampshire County Council
Community & Parish		
Dr John Sharp	JS	Advisory Member
Farming & Rural Business Interests		
Mr Christopher Musgrave	CBM	Advisory Member
Mr Michael Valenzia	MV	Country Land and Business Association
Peter Lemon	PL	
Historic Environment		
Ms Susie Brew	SB	Advisory Member
North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust		
Mr Donald Sherlock	DS	Representative (Chairman)
In Attendance		
Mr Christopher Slack	CS	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Mr Garry King	GK	Hampshire County Council
Mr Jonathan Wilshaw	JW	Swindon Borough Council
Mr Richard Broadhead	RB	Wiltshire Council
Mr Henry Oliver	HO	Director NWD AONB
Mrs Rebecca Davies	RD	Principal Landscape & Planning Officer NWD
Miss Ewa Prokop	EP	Senior Project Development & Funding Officer NWD
Ms Claire McCorquodale	CMc	Partnership Coordinator NWD
Mrs Susan Clarke	SC	Partnership Coordinator NWD

1. Members' interests – none declared
2. Welcome Michael Valenzia, Regional Director CLA.

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3. Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr Mathew	CM	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Martyn	CMA	Swindon Borough Council
Cllr Sumner	GS	Swindon Borough Council
Donald Heath	DM	Advisory Member
Sharon Egan	SE	Advisory Member
Paul Hendry	PM	West Berkshire Council
Richard Clarke	RC	Advisory Member
Nigel Titchen	NT	Advisory Member
Nick Mottram	NM	Oxfordshire County Council

4. Constitutional Items – It was agreed that Dr John Sharp, Ms Susie Brew and Ms Sharon Egan continue for a further two-year term. The CoP (Council of Partners) thanked them for their continued support and engagement.

5. Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019 were agreed and signed as a correct record with the addition of the following under the Partnership Round Table item: “JS mentioned the Race to the Stones - a long-distance race run along the Ridgeway National Trail each July. Several hundred people take part with a large number of followers. It is almost entirely run within the NWD AONB and so far this has not received any publicity. He felt there was an opportunity to get some good publicity and suggested this be followed up”.

6. Matters Arising. EH notified the meeting that the Kennet U3A were hosting a conference on Climate Change on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020. If any member was interested they should please speak to him.

7. The Chairman’s Remarks included reference to the publication of the Management Plan 2019 -2024. He thanked the officers for a successful Annual Forum in November 2019 at Englefield House and notified the meeting that the Forum in 2020 would be held on 6<sup>th</sup> November. He advised the Council of Partners that John Sharpe had attended his first meeting of the Management Working Group and that the Group had reviewed the items on today’s Agenda. He mentioned the success of a fundraising quiz night organised by the Landscape Trust.

8. PM explained that the Cabinet at Basingstoke & Deane BC had adopted the Management Plan as an indication of the importance the Council attached to the green environment and had taken the opportunity to incorporate the Vision into the Green Infrastructure Strategy that was being rolled out across the borough. The borough is an entry point to the south-east and it is working with the parishes to raise the profile and address environmental issues. HO was presenting to Councillors next month.

PB noted that the Vale of White Horse DC had approved the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the Local Plan and had immediately embarked on producing a new Local Plan that was focussed on affordable housing, sustainable energy and nature recovery.

AMS expressed relief that the Wheelabrator Waste-to-Energy Facility at Harwood was not now going ahead at this location.

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FdRP advised that Wiltshire Council are currently consulting on a new Green Infrastructure Strategy and an Open Space Strategy and should be in contact with the AONB Team

RB stated that the organisational arrangements at Wiltshire continued to evolve and he was currently based in the Communities and Neighbourhood Directorate taking responsibility for grounds maintenance across the County.

CBM advised that farmers were not going to taking any significant financial decisions until they were more informed about the implications of the Agriculture Bill and other subsidy issues that were being discussed at government level.

HC explained that as 74% of West Berkshire Council was in the AONB and 70% on a floodplain issues of housing land availability were challenging. The Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) had been published in February and would help in the preparation of the review of the Local Plan for the period to 2036. She understood that the AONB was reluctant to encourage tree planting. Tree planting is only one part of mitigation and the right trees need to be planted in the right places to make a difference.

JS had arranged a meeting with the Harwell Campus Development Board and the Director on 1<sup>st</sup> April. He was encouraged by the Government funding of a new vaccine research & development unit on the site.

SB said Pewsey Area Development Board, Pewsey Vale Tourism Partnership and Pewsey Parish Council had undertaken a survey of businesses and were now collating the responses. Not surprisingly they contained conflicting views. Next steps were being considered.

PL reported that the Southern Streams Farmer Group was up and running. It comprised of 28 farms and 25,000 acres. He was currently sampling the water in the Rivers Dun and Shalbourne that these farms drain into and had not found any problems except for an issue below the sewer outlet at East Grafton that he had reported. He was also looking at the soil health and structure based on the presence of earthworms. He is building a data set of soil health across 25,000 hectares which will be of great benefit to the Southern Streams farming community.

#### 9. Budget Update 2019/2020 (paper 3)

The report was noted that the budget was on target with a minor variation that will be met from unrestricted reserves.

#### 10. Proposed Work Programme 2020/21 (paper 4)

The Chair explained that the work programme had been scrutinised and challenged by the Management Working Group and the Group was fully supportive of the Programme as submitted to the Council of Partners.

The Director presented the Work Programme, the vehicle by which the Management Plan was delivered. For transparency the strategic objectives of the new Management Plan were identified against each activity. Core activities and time-limited projects were included in the Programme to give a complete picture of how the Team were engaged in delivering the Management Plan. The Core activities include those that Defra expect to see whilst projects are responsive to the Glover Review, the DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan and the Agriculture Bill and often include working with partner organisations.

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Major funding streams for some projects such as the farmer cluster work and the GW Landscape Enhancement Project (Mend the Gap) do not pass through the AONB's accounts but nevertheless bring funding into the area.

Working with partners West Berkshire Council is looking at lowland habitat mosaics and developing guidance to steer tree planting to deliver "Right Tree, Right Place" Cllr Steve Ardagh-Walter was also working on this.

Funding from Defra for 2020/2021 explicitly required a proportion of activity to be focussed on biodiversity. There was a general discussion about carbon sequestration; farmers would wait until they understood the financial issues surrounding tree planting or hedgerows. CLA members were holding back until they understood the financial implications. There were issues relating to food security and ash die-back that government should be addressing through funding land management in the future.

The Council of Partners agreed the Work Programme 2020/21.

#### 11. Proposed Budget Allocations 2020/2021 (paper 5)

The proposed budget allocations had been considered by the Management Working Group and were recommended to the Council of Partners for approval. It assumes the maximum Defra contribution to AONB core costs and the Sustainable Development Fund is unchanged from last year at £248,684; this requires 25% matching contributions from local authority partners. The local authority partners will continue with the level of contribution made in 2017/18 with the balance being met from unrestricted income generated by the AONB Unit.

The implementation of the Fundraising Plan will play a role in enabling projects as budgets come under pressure. A bid by the Project Officer for the Dark Skies Project had secured £14,800 from the Arts Council. The Land of the White Horses project Heritage Lottery Fund bid submitted by the Senior Development & Funding Officer is significant: £196,000 for development and £2.4m for delivery. Contact was being made with local authorities to access s.106 monies. EP suggested that any member of the Council of Partners who wishes to assist with fundraising to speak to her or to Jacky Akam, (Project Officer) who will be happy to steer and support.

The Council of Partners agreed the budget allocations for 2020/2021 and noted that the budget would be updated to reflect the appropriate salary costs.

#### 12. Director's Report (paper 6)

The report includes an update on the Work Programme for 2019/2020 and other significant developments. He drew attention to the focus on nature recovery which is included in the DEFRA 25 Year Environment Plan, the Landscapes Review recommendations, the Environment Bill and the NAAONB's Colchester Declaration (July 2019).

The Annual Forum feedback forms were formally analysed to enable us to measure the relevance of the content for our audience. He thanked the staff for what had been a successful event.

The National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP) is progressing with senior National Grid staff visiting the AONB office to brief the Team about the proposals at Roundway Hill. In response to a query from SB it was explained that National Grid had extended the duration of the initiative into RIIO-2 (2020-26) and that there would be further opportunities to bid for Landscape Enhancement Initiative funds.

Farmer cluster work is particularly successful in respect of the Southern Streams and the Ridgeway Farmer Groups with both Facilitation Fund bids being successful.

The Visitor Guide leaflet will be published, supported by a grant from the Greenham Trust secured by EP. The Chairman explained that he, PM and JS had approached three possible organisations for sponsorship and it would take some time to build the relationships.

Network Rail: The Great Western Electrification Project the Director reported that a Programme Manager had been appointed. At a more local level HC expressed dissatisfaction about the steel lineside fencing being used in the Newbury area; the colour guide currently under preparation may be able to help when engaging with Network Rail on these issues.

The Director took part in a workshop run by Wild Oxfordshire and TVERC to try to reach a common view about what a nature recovery network for the county would look like. There were a number of conflicting views and it is unclear how these will be resolved.

#### Planning Update (paper 7)

The Principal Landscape & Planning Officer presented the report which provided information on a range of applications, policy and projects. She drew attention to the Wheelbrator where discussions had been continuing with the applicant.

Some time was being taken up with an application to erect a farm shop at Badbury. Although the owner has given biodiversity gain as a reason to approve there are issues of landscaping and design to be resolved in what is a remote location.

She reported that Burghclere and Aldbourne were both progressing Neighbourhood Plans.

Wiltshire Council had run a green infrastructure workshop for all stakeholders exploring how nature recovery can be delivered through development.

#### The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust

DS explained that the Sustainable Development Fund managed by the Trust was heavily oversubscribed. Grants worth £3,500 had gone to Shalbourne Village Hall and to Wiltshire Ornithological Society. The Trust continued to raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs landscape; it had recently held a quiz night and raised £1,350 for the Trust. The Trust continued to work closely with AONB staff.

DS would be writing to parish council's seeking a £75 annual membership fee. HC advised him to approach them in the autumn when they are setting their precepts.

#### AOB

JS asked for a report to each meeting on fundraising activity.

JW – drew attention to the Beelines project – a Buglife initiative.

FdRP – noted there would be some disquiet from local authorities about their representation in the new governance structures proposed by the Glover Review.

MV – noted that there was a pilot run by Defra using an App to gather data on flytipping on private land to scope the scale of the problem. (note to download the app you have to be an agreed organisation and part of the pilot which runs until summer 2020).

North Wessex Downs Council of Partners 30.06.2020

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Date of next meeting Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June at the Coronation Hall, Alton Barnes

Meeting closed 11.35am