

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
Minutes of the meeting at Folly Farm, Stowey, Pensford
13th March 2015

Present:

Partnership Committee:

CLlr Dawn Hill	Somerset County Council (Chair)
Sarah Jackson	Mendip Hills AONB
CLlr Nigel Taylor	Somerset Parishes Representative and Mendip District Council
Janice Gardiner	Avon Wildlife Trust
CLlr Dennis Davey	Sedgemoor District Council
CLlr Liz Richardson	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Sue Murtagh	Bath and North East Somerset Council Officer
CLlr Ann Harley	North Somerset Council
Katie Spencer	North Somerset Council Officer
Graham Price	Mendip Society
Chris Lewis	Somerset CPRE
Simon Larkins	National Trust
David Clark	Mendip District Council Officer
James Small	NFU
Jake Chant	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Mike Adams	North Somerset Parishes Representative

Other Attendees:

Mark Minkley	Bath and North East Somerset Council officer
Nichola Penn	AONB Volunteer Coordinator
Paul Bryan	AONB Planning Liaison Officer
Stuart Bardsley	Discovering Black Down Project Officer

Apologies received from:

Barry James	Somerset County Council Officer
Michele Bowe	Somerset Wildlife Trust
CLlr Ron Forrest	Mendip District Council
Richard Curry	B&NES Parishes Representative
Julie Cooper	Sedgemoor District Council Officer

Summary of Actions

Item No	Item	Actions	
4.	AONB update	SJ to report back to partnership on progress on Mendip Hills NIA in November.	SJ
10.	Date of meetings next meeting	November 12 th 2015, March 17 th 2016	ALL

Item No	Item	Notes	Action
1.	Apologies	Apologies noted from a number of members (listed above). Welcome to Simon Larkins NT, Jake Chant (standing in for Michele Bowe -SWT), Mark Minkley (B&NES)	
2.	Minutes of the meeting held 13th November 2014	The minutes of 13th November 2014 were accepted as a true and accurate record. Proposed by Cllr Denis Davey seconded by Cllr Liz Richardson	
2.1		Matters arising: 5.2 Action- letter had been sent to N.Som and response received (19.1.15) stating that unable to sign the Statement of Intent but would contribute £2000 for 2015/16.	
2.2		Cllr Ann Harley – wished it noted that since 2011 when N.Som withdrew from last Statement of Intent, N.Som had continued to provide contributions that totalled approximately £20,000 and continues to undertake all sorts of work in the AONB including highways and green spaces aswell as planning application work and finger post restoration in partnership with the AONB. In being treated differently from other local authority partners who had signed the SOI, she felt that N.Som might decide to withdraw from the partnership.	
2.3		NT speaking as MDC representative in absence of Cllr Ron Forrest stated that he would not want to see N.Som leave the Partnership and recognised that if N.Som withdrew from Partnership it could have serious consequences, possibly Defra funding but suggested SJ might wish to comment on this. NT also expressed concern that the Officer Support Group is making decision on who Vice Chair should be and that the Partnership Committee should not be used for rubber stamping OSG decisions.	
2.4		DH stated that the recommendation from the OSG is not an instruction. Further to this SJ stated that in the agreed Minutes of the last meeting Ref Item 3 <i>‘both Ann Harley and the Partnership felt that it was not appropriate for AH to stand again for Vice Chairman’</i> and the action agreed	

2.5		was for <i>'the Officer Support Group to consider the matter of the Vice Chairman position and bring a recommendation to the March 2015 Partnership'</i> which is what they had done. Also SJ stated that as N.Som are not a SOI signatory their contribution of £2000 does not assist in drawing down funding from Defra and therefore makes no contribution to the staff costs of the AONB Unit.	
2.6		GP stated that it is essential that N.Som stay a Partnership member and that membership should be disassociated from that although he recognised that funding is critical to the future of the Partnership.	
2.7		AH stated that funding of the Partnership should not be tied to LAs or Defra and needed to try to be independent and look 'outside the box' and was not sure if this had been looked at.	
2.8		DH stated that the AONB has been looking at alternative funding and with projects like Black Down had been successful and actively managing cuts. Proposal to elect Cllr Liz Richardson as Vice Chair unanimously agreed.	
3.	Officer Support Group – Paper A	GP questioned 'significantly reduced level of service to N.Som and how this would be identified.	
3.1		SJ explained that in order to ensure that the local authority partners who had signed the SOI remained funding partners, there has to be a different level of service or the SOI signatories would question why N.Som receive same level of support yet do not contribute at the same levels.	
3.2		NT accepted that it would be up to SJ to decide where N.Som would not receive same level of service. SJ gave recent example where she had informed N.Som that the AONB Unit could not respond to a specific request from their tourism officer to provide information to return information to Visit England for a particular campaign N.Som were involved in. SJ have suggested to N.Som that they may wish to specify where their £2000 contribution is	

3.3		allocated eg to pay for planning officer time or contribute to a Delivery Plan project eg special qualities publication. Partnership agreed to revise the wording of recommendation to ‘may be significantly less service delivered in their area’ and agreed other recommendations to approve amendment to Terms of Reference and Business Plan 2015-18. Proposed by Cllr Nigel Taylor seconded by Cllr Liz Richardson	
4.	Presentation - Shifting focus in UK agriculture and its impact on the landscape – James Small	James Small NFU presentation was a comprehensive overview covering the wide range of issues affecting agriculture in the UK including global markets (eg Ukraine grain supplies effected by current conflict, OPEC fuel prices. Below are a selection of points covered: New Zealand produces 3% of world’s dairy produce but 30% of tradeable dairy commodity as produce milk powder. In the UK most of milk is liquid and stays in this country. China caused price impact as their demand for milk powder stopped as had enough causing drop in prices as milk powder in the market needed to be sold elsewhere. Weather impacts on farming – apart from localised flooding in Somerset 2013 and 2014 have been good growing years with no major disasters, this has led to surplus in production. Flooding in Somerset and impact on agriculture brought world attention and people recognised value of agriculture, the natural environment and communities. Funding for capital projects funds new schemes but not what we already have. Increasing wealth in the world – Africa’s increasing wealth of the population will lead to increased living standards /demand for better food/more choice and demand to buy cheaper . This will limit what is available to us to buy. UK population is due to increase from current pop of 65	

		million to 85 million in 2080. This will impact on environment as demand for housing. Need to plan now for future as not that far off. Retailers cutting prices – the market is not growing - eg Lidl and Aldi lower prices as take less profit. Tesco shareholders demand higher prices to secure higher profits. This is likely to lead to less range of products on shelves. Import pressure- if cheaper from elsewhere they will come into this country due to customer demand. Need to link customer/consumer loyalty with British produce. If people want to keep the quality countryside there needs to be support for local produce. Agriculture cannot compete on the world market. Evident that people want to support British and support landscape. Can UK be self sufficient in food? In 2013 we would have been able to provide food until 7th Aug in 2080 it would run out on 16th June . Currently couldn't supply range we currently buy eg pineapples but could look to develop more produce. Can we increase productivity? We can be more efficient at what we do. Currently at limit of what we produce per area without scientific development eg GM . If return to be worthwhile depends on price. If energy prices come down fracking not attractive but if energy prices high then it is attractive. CAP does it work – we have not run out of food. Europe will not get rid of it as is the only Common Policy across the European Union. 48% of the spend of the Union is tied up in CAP. James would like market to be more open and greater member state flexibility. NFU is lobbying organisation in which individual businesses operate – Farmers markets supported by network. NFU do not get involved but support FACE- Farming and Countryside and Environment making connection between land and produce. Climate change- living with change now – increase in diseases coming in from Europe that have spread from	
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		Africa. Ecosystem services- looking to compensate farmers for doing things differently but does not match prices or volatility of world markets. Bigger farms – New Zealand worried about corporate USA farms – vast amounts of cheap fuels, animals indoors low cost. Will UK respond? 1000 cattle shed application near Wells opposed by local people but buying practice doesn't reflect their desire to see the countryside free of large buildings – support family farms. Will see different business models – family farms ending – need to look at business not keep it in the family – will impact on the landscape. Cannington College seen growth in student numbers as more interested in research and development. Will we see an increase in farm building in the Mendips-? There has been a loss of 7 dairy farms in Mendips in the last 10yrs- their land is now rented out to a large dairy farmer who is not interested in buildings. The hobby farmers on Mendip are not looking to grow the business therefore do not require more buildings. There has been consolidation of farms – a particular farm now has 300 cattle that did have 100 having bought cattle from dairy farms that have closed.	
5.	Mendip Hills AONB- Paper B	SJ ran through key projects mentioning WELNP conference – Mark Minkley asked about potential Mendip Hills NIA with Severnside Wetlands being launched at the conference. SJ said Severnside seen as priority as no existing partnership and due to lack of time from Mendip Hills due to number of projects SWT,AWT, AONB are all currently working on. Having been accepted by LNP the Severnside Wetlands NIA would now be recognised in local plans so has some weight and with funding applications. Severnside had tested out proforma and process. Mendip Hills AONB Partnership recognise the value of NIA status and want to progress application with WELNP. Action: SJ agreed to report back to partnership on	SJ to update in Nov

		progress on Mendip Hills NIA in November.	
6.	AONB Special Qualities presentation – Paul Bryan	PB gave an update on special qualities work and listed others liaising with on developing ideas. SL mentioned National Trust work in this area with regard planning applications and management plans and asked to be added to Paul’s consultation list. NT said having seen the work Paul was doing he had been able to refer to importance of views out from the Mendip’s with regard planning applications on the Levels. He invited Paul to visit Westbury quarry to see the views from there. DC advised caution that the special qualities were not seen as ‘the bible’ for all. SJ mentioned that it will be continually evolving and that local opinions will be considered. Paul aware that currently they are largely from his perspective and need to be ‘tested’. Publication would be key special qualities- reason for designation.	
7.	B- Lines presentation- Janice Gardiner	Janice Gardiner presentation – B Lines –wildlife corridors connection Cotswold and Mendips. JC mentioned James Smalls work with SWT Seeds for Change and JG said that AWT working with farm at Herons Green Farm. B- Lines staff are keen to talk to groups, parish councils to publicise the project and get people involved. Chew Valley Forum – MM mentioned would be good group to talk to.	
8.	National Association for AONBs Sarah Jackson, AONB Manager	Due to meeting running out of time, SJ informed the meeting that the latest update from the NAAONB would be emailed to them.	
9.	A.O.B	A.O.B - DH thanked those members who will not be at future meetings following elections including Cllr Denis Davey SDC	
10.	Date of next meetings	November 12 th 2015, March 17 th 2016	All