

**NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
COUNCIL OF PARTNERS
9 March 2021 at 10 am
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft 365 Teams**

Minutes

Present	Initials	Representing
Mr E Hiscocks	EH	Chairman
Cllr Anna McNair-Scott	AMS	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Rhydian Vaughan	RV	Hampshire County Council (Deputy)
Cllr Paul Miller	PM	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Cllr Paul Barrow	PB	Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Catherine Webber	CWe	Vale of White Horse District Council (Deputy)
Cllr Hilary Cole	HC	West Berkshire Council
Cllr Christopher Williams	CWi	Wiltshire Council
Cllr Charles Mathew	CM	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Gary Sumner	GS	Swindon Borough Council
Community & Parish		
Dr John Sharp	JS	Advisory Member
Mr Donald Heath	DH	Advisory Member
Ms Sharon Egan	SE	Advisory Member
Mr N Titchen	NT	Advisory Member
Farming & Rural Business		
Mr Christopher Musgrave	CBM	Advisory Member
Mr Michael Valenzia	MV	Country Land and Business Association
Mr Peter Lemon	PL	Advisory Member
Ms Andrea Witcombe	AW	National Farmers' Union
Historic Environment		
Ms Susie Brew	SB	Advisory Member
Recreation & Tourism		
Martin Crane	MC	Advisory Member
North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust		
Mr Donald Sherlock	DS	Representative (Chairman)
Also Present		
Ms Sarah Nichols	SN	Chair Elect
In Attendance		
Mr Christopher Slack	CS	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Ms Haidrun Breith	HB	Oxfordshire County Council
Mr Tim Goodridge	TG	Test Valley Borough Council
Mr Dominic Lamb	DL	South & Vale District Councils
Mr Paul Hendry	PH	West Berkshire Council
Mr Garry King	GK	Hampshire County Council

Mr Richard Broadhead	RB	Wiltshire Council
Mr Henry Oliver	HO	Director NWD AONB
Mrs Susan Clarke	SC	Partnership Coordinator NWD

PART 1

The Chairman opened the meeting by confirming that in respect of items in Part 1 and listed below, contributions, comments and questions had been invited to be submitted by email for action prior to the meeting and that the required responses had been circulated.

The questions and responses are attached to these minutes at Annex 1 to complete the record and have been circulated to those present with the minutes.

- 1.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2020 (paper 1)
- 1.2 Chairman's Report
- 1.3 Budget Update (paper 2)
- 1.4 Planning Update (paper 3)
- 1.5 Director's Report (paper 4)

PART 2

2.1 Declarations of Interest – None

2.2 Welcome

The Chair welcomed Sarah Nichols, the new Chair-designate from March 2021 who will take items 2.9 onwards.

Cllr Charles Mathew and Cllr Anna McNair-Scott indicated that they will not be standing for re-election in May 2021. Martin Crane also finishes his tenure as an Advisory member to the Council of Partners. The Chairman thanked them for their engagement and contribution to the work of the Partnership.

2.3 Apologies for Absence were received from Nick Mottram and Richard Clarke.

2.4 **Constitutional Item** (paper 5)

The Council of Partners (CoP) resolved to appoint Jonathan Welfare to the Management Working Group (MWG) for an initial period of two years.

2.5 **Proposed Unit Work Programme 2021 – 2022** (paper 6)

HO presented the report and explained that the work programme may be affected by uncertainty surrounding the transition to the Environmental Land Management system (ELM) Information is awaited from Defra on the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL) and Countryside Stewardship as we transition to ELM. A free workshop on 23 March hosted by National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) can be booked through the home page of the AONB website. In addition there are free webinars provided by the AONB team to give context to some of the proposed changes in future farming funding support.

Some projects that were not started or on which progress has been affected by Covid-19 have been removed from the programme so that there can be a greater focus on priority areas. In addition larger projects have been split into smaller units to make progress reporting easier. It is also intended to complete a review of the Land of the White Horses project NLHF Stage 1 bid as soon as capacity allows.

The work programme also includes work delivered wholly or in part by external partners, agencies and/or individuals.

The following projects were highlighted:

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (A12)

The current document was published in 2002. Rather than embark straightaway on a detailed review, the Management Working Group (MWG) has indicated that there should first be an review of the methodology of the LCA and the degree to which a full revision is necessary. The costs are uncertain until that review has been undertaken.

Access, Enjoyment & Understanding (B1, B2, B3, B4)

The Walking Festival 2021 has been cancelled as a result of the ongoing implications of Covid-19. Work is under way for a Festival in 2022 and engagement with local groups is very positive.

As a result of meetings held during the summer and early autumn between the Chairman and Leaders of the local authorities the need for more training for members and officers to develop a better understanding of the AONB was identified. On-line training materials are being developed with a focus on the planning system.

Communication (B5 & B6)

December 2022 will be the 50th anniversary of the AONB designation and ideas and thoughts about how best to mark this are being pulled together. If a member of the CoP has an idea about how to mark the occasion, please contact Ann Shepley (Comms Officer).

Covid-19 brought into sharp focus the need to improve the website as a key tool to reach out to the community and to educate those with little experience and understanding of the countryside. There will be emphasis on access and wellbeing. The target date for launch of the new website is September 2021.

Farming and Land Management (B12, B13)

It is intended to work with the Jockey Club and Natural England (NE) to encourage good conservation practice by land managers in the racing community. Good progress is being made in establishing farmer groups but this has identified a shortage of individuals with the skills and available time for facilitation work. To address this a promotional / event is planned.

Since the publication of the work programme a further farmer group has been identified in the Upper Pang. PL recorded his appreciation of the work of the Unit in supporting the development of farmer groups across the AONB.

Landscape Enhancement. (B21, B22)

It is intended to provide simple guidance to the public promoting it through partners to local communities to advise on "Right Tree in the Right Place for the Right Reasons".

Engagement continues with the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to support efforts to secure external funding and oversee delivery of the SDF programme.

Undergrounding: low voltage overhead lines (B23) Visual Impact Programme (B24)
VIP is an opportunity to unlock funding for nature recovery.

A key piece of collaborative work will be the drafting of a Nature Recovery Plan. (B25)

AONB Design Checklist (C1) and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (C2)

Both of these are reliant on securing funding and capacity within the Team. The Design Checklist is intended to complement the Landscape Colour Design Guide helping to educate those involved in design and planning.

The Council of Partners Agreed the Work programme 2021-2022

Michael Valenzia left the meeting 10.30am

Spending Priorities for 2021-22 (paper 7)

The Director explained that it had not been possible to produce a draft budget for the financial year 2021-22 because crucial information is not yet available. Defra have not provided information on the level of grant funding and salaries information is awaited from the host authority. Once these are available agreement can be sought from local authority partners on the level of match funding. Reassurance has been received from Defra that they will be providing grant funding and are working urgently to identify the level of funding that can be offered.

The Management Working Group has steered the development of the proposals and recommends them to the CoP.

In response to new working practices as a result of Covid-19 a view was expressed that office accommodation and associated costs should be examined. Against a backdrop of local authorities reducing their accommodation should the AONB look for opportunities to follow suit? A number of members responded that the availability of space to come together to forge relationships, explore common goals and enable teamwork was vital and there needed to be a balance between the digital and physical worlds. And it was too early to understand what will be needed after Covid-19. However, the situation will be kept under review.

*Andi Witcombe left the meeting 10.59 am
Dominic Lamb joined the meeting 11.02 am*

Concern was expressed about the lack of a published budget and the Director was pressed to produce a budget based on the information held in the knowledge that it will be adjusted. It is vital that good practice is followed and that the budgetary process continues even when a situation has significant unknowns.

The list of spending priorities was agreed to inform the budgetary process and the Director was asked to circulate a budget to the Council of Partners for approval by the end of March.

Dark Skies & Artificial Light Position Statement (paper 8)

The Director recommended the Statement to the CoP with three amendments as a result of the consultation. Opportunities have previously been given to the members of the CoP and MWG to comment and contribute. Some concern has been expressed by the NFU and CLA regarding possible economic impact on rural business; the Director relayed comments submitted by MV in his absence. Conversations and email exchanges have taken place and it is not expected that those concerns will be realised.

This document is intended to guide policy makers, to assist in the preparation of planning applications involving lighting and to assist in the decision-making process. More detailed guidance can be found in *Dark Skies of the North Wessex Downs AONB: A Guide to Good External Lighting*.

The CoP welcomed the Position Statement and the Good Lighting Guide and the elected representatives of the constituent local authorities were assured that officers had been engaged with the development of the Position Statement and Good Lighting Guide, Local Plans are under review so the publication of this work is very timely. In addition, it was felt that this should form part of a member/officer training package.

The Dark Skies & Artificial Light Position Statement was Agreed with the modifications identified by the Director.

Sarah Nichols took the Chair,

SN introduced herself. Cllr Paul Miller followed, thanking Ted Hiscocks on behalf of the Council of Partners for his contribution and steady chairmanship. The Director also thanked him for his outstanding commitment, support and guidance to him and the team. Ted Hiscocks thanked the Council of Partners for the support he had received to enable him to work with the Team effectively over the past six years.

2.1 Appointment of new representative to the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust

It was agreed to appoint Susie Brew as the new representative of the Council of Partners on the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust, succeeding Ted Hiscocks.

Date of Meetings for 2021 Tuesdays 6th July 9th November.

Currently expected to be an online meeting via MS Teams. Covid-19 guidance permitting, we will look to convene face-to-face meetings if possible.

Meeting closed 11.35am



6th July 2021