

**NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY  
COUNCIL OF PARTNERS  
Corn Exchange, Hungerford  
5<sup>th</sup> July 2022  
Draft Minutes**

<b>Present</b>	<b>Initials</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Ms Sarah Nichols	SN	Chair
<b>Local Authority Members</b>		
Cllr Paul Miller	PM	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council Vice Chair Council of Partners
Cllr Rhydian Vaughan (Deputy)	RV	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Steve Ardagh-Walter	SAW	West Berkshire Council
Cllr Gary Sumner	GS	Swindon Borough Council
<b>Community &amp; Parish</b>		
Mr Jonathan Welfare	JW	Advisory Member
<b>Farming &amp; Rural Business</b>		
Ms Lucy Charman	LC	CLA Advisor deputising for Tim Bamford Advisory Member
<b>Recreation &amp; Tourism</b>		
Ms Susie Brew	SB	Advisory Member
<b>Nature Conservation</b>		
Dr Katrina Easterling	KE	Advisory Member
Tom Hayward	TH	Advisory Member
<b>North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust (NWDLT)</b>		
Mr Donald Sherlock	DS	Representative (Chairman NWDLT)
<b>In Attendance</b>		
Ms Haidrun Breith	HB	Oxfordshire County Council Officer
Mr Garry King	GK	Hampshire County Council Officer
Mr Henry Oliver	HO	Director NWD AONB
Ms Corinna Woodall (Virtual input)	CW	Senior Project Development & Funding Officer NWD
Ms Penny Dixon	PD	Partnership Coordinator NWD
Mr Robert West	RW	Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer NWD
Ms Katharine Cook	KC	FIPL Business Support Officer NWD
Ms Ann Shepley	AS	Communications Officer NWD
Ms Rebecca Davies	RB	Principal Landscape and Planning Officer NWD
<b>Observer</b>		
Mr Matt Moore	MM	Associate Director, The National Collection

## 1. Welcome and apologies

<b>Apologies</b>		
Cllr Juliet Henderson	JH	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Sally Povolotsky	SP	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Nabil Najjar	NN	Wiltshire Council
Cllr Dr Paul Barrow	PB	Vale of White Horse District Council
Mr Christopher Slack	CS	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council Officer
Mr Tim Goodridge	TG	Test Valley Borough Council Officer
Ms Lynn Trigwell	LT	Wiltshire Council Officer
Mr Dominic Lamb	DL	South & Vale District Councils Officer
Mr Paul Hendry	PH	West Berkshire Council Officer
Ms Claire McCorquodale	CMcC	Partnership Coordinator NWD
Mr Tim Bamford	TB	Farming & Rural Business Advisory Member CLA
Dr Michelle Leek	ML	Natural England
Mr Chris Musgrave	CM	Farming & Rural Business Advisory Member
Cllr Phil North	PN	Test Valley Borough Council
Mr Nick Mottram	NM	Oxfordshire County Council Officer
Mr Don Heath	DH	Community & Parish Advisory Member
Mr Paul Hendry	PH	West Berkshire Council Officer
<b>Did Not Attend</b>		
Cllr Elizabeth Gillespie	EG	South Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Catherine Webber	CW	Vale of White Horse District Council (Deputy)
Ms Sharon Egan	SE	Community & Parish Advisory Member
Cllr Keith Williams	KW	Swindon Borough Council (Deputy)

The Chair welcomed Cllr Steve Ardagh-Walter, Local Authority Member for West Berkshire Council and Penny Dixon new Partnership Coordinator. She introduced Mr Matt Moore, Associate Director of The National Collections Centre, Science Museum, Wroughton, who was attending as an observer.

## 2. Declarations of Interest – None.

## 3. Constitutional Items (paper 1)

Paper 1 was not needed. Matt Moore attended the meeting as an observer to inform his decision about his potential application to join the Council of Partners.

The Chair reiterated the request made at the previous meeting that members pass details of potential candidates to her or to the Director as there are still several vacancies.

**Action 6: Send details of potential candidates for Council of Partners to PD – ALL**

## 4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting 8th March 2022 (paper 2)

The minutes were taken as read. Cllr Paul Miller proposed the minutes were accepted; Jonathan Welfare seconded.

## 5. Matters Arising (paper 3)

The Chair gave verbal updates:

- Item 1 Timetable & actions updated: additional information re Action 1 were provided by the Chair under Agenda Item 9 IUCN Green List Pilot Update & Discussion.
- Item 2 HO has submitted the response to Landscape Review - Closed

**Action 7: An updated version of Actions & Matters Arising to be distributed with the minutes. PD**

## 6. Chair's Report followed by Partnership Round Table (papers 4, 4A – 4F)

### Chair's Report (paper 4)

Laura Farris, MP for Newbury, met SN, HO and Town and Manor of Hungerford officers to visit the Sparkling Streams works at Eddington Mill.

Lord Benyon has engaged in discussions about Sparkling Streams and the Glover Report. He was interested in the review of governance. He has been sent information about Sparkling Streams, the SEEPL response to the Glover call for evidence and the IUCN Green List pilot.

As part of the Walking Festival the seven AONB MPs were invited to come on a walk, four were available and attended. The initial suggestion had been to form a North Wessex Downs AONB all-party group of MPs, however they decided that it would be more effective for NWD AONB to liaise with them more informally, whether individually or collectively.

IUCN Green List Pilot Update was addressed under Agenda Item 9

The Chair invited questions; none were raised.

### **Local Authorities: -**

**Basingstoke & Deane BC.** PM referred to the update report provided to the meeting in March. He noted that Michael Gove's Levelling Up Bill has impacted housing applications. BDBC has been taking a very robust position to the way this is being handled and opportunistic planning applications that have been made. He feels the numbers are very pertinent. BDBC are trying to drive numbers down and there are two opportunistic applications that they would like to stop.

**Hampshire CC.** GK stated that there were no significant changes since the report provided in March. Hampshire's waste plan will be entering the committee cycle in the next few weeks. RV said the 20mph speed limit committee are sitting, he does not feel that this should be seen as a panacea for everywhere. Signage had been mentioned by Cllr Juliet Henderson. GK said he would send an update report to PD

**Oxfordshire CC** (paper 4E will be distributed with the minutes)

HB referred to OCC new tree policy which includes a "presumption in favour of trees" ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Cabinet, 26/04/2022 14:00 \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](#). Oxfordshire

Local Nature Partnership has been re-established after a dormant period – link from paper 4E, [Oxfordshire Nature Partnership | Wild Oxfordshire](#).

OCC has taken some steps re Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The Council is the provisional responsible authority for the Oxon LNRS and is currently waiting for the Defra guidance expected in the autumn. The Authority is running later than hoped in developing its strategy due to time pressures. There are still a lot of steps to go through. OCC is starting to convey their strategy to LAs. The Council website has Green infrastructure information in the 2017 TVERC ANGSt report and Making the Case for Investment in Green Infrastructure in Oxfordshire [Green infrastructure and access to nature | Oxfordshire County Council](#)  
OCC is putting monetary values against infrastructure.

**South Oxfordshire DC** No one attended from South Oxfordshire DC.

**Swindon BC** – (paper 4C & Annex A map)

GS referred to the circulated report (4C), highlighting 3 points. (1) The grant funded climate programme extends to a large area. (2) There is a planning portal for the public enquiry re the airfield site earthworks. (3) The impact of streetlighting. The 10-mile boundary is shown in Annex A map. There might be a link to FIPL. HO suggested there might be opportunities to revisit the Urban Fringe Action plan produced jointly with SBC and others some years go with reference to the AONB's nature recovery ambitions. HO asked who is the best link to SBC and the Great West Community Forest now that Jonathan Wilshaw had left.

**Action 8 Confirm new officer representative on the Council of Partners for Swindon BC and best contact regarding trees. GS**

**Test Valley BC** (paper 4D)

No-one attended from Test Valley BC, paper 4D had been emailed to all members of Council of Partners.

**Vale of White Horse DC** (paper 4B)

No-one attended from Vale of the White Horse DC, paper 4B had been emailed to all members of Council of Partners.

**West Berkshire Council** – (paper 4F to follow)

SAW explained that he has replaced Hilary Cole who has retired. He is portfolio holder for Environment also which is a useful overlap with North Wessex Downs AONB. He apologised that no paper had been submitted (Paul Hendry has since advised that he will be sending this w/c 11<sup>th</sup> July) SAW stated that a framework Natural Solutions Delivery Partnership has been formed. HO attended this. Ed Cooper is coordinating and synchronising with landowners, ARK and others. Initial focus will be on estate to the east of the district. West Berkshire will share details at the next Council of Partners meeting.

Hampshire CC is also affected with West Berkshire Council by “nutrient neutrality” requirements. Government, especially Defra has insisted on thorough assessments of the impact of nutrient input on rivers including the Lambourn and Pang in West Berkshire. This has resulted in a large number of developments being paused until it has been clarified whether investigations have been done thoroughly enough to satisfy these requirements. Tees and Norfolk are working through complex questions. Horse manure is the key issue in West Berkshire; the impact of cow manure has been analysed.

**Action 9:**

**Share details of Natural Solutions Delivery Partnership at Meeting 8<sup>th</sup> November SAW**

**Wiltshire Council** No-one attended from Wiltshire Council.

**Advisory Members: -**

**Farming & Rural Business** LC explained that she is deputising for TB, she is anew CLA advisor and not fully prepared to update the meeting.

**Nature Conservation**

TH flagged up uncertainty about possible changes in Government position and the risk that Biodiversity requirements might become watered down.

KE queried whether the draft Nature Recovery Plan will link with contacts on butterflies and Butterfly Conservation Trust for Thames area with NWD AONB. BCT has huge expertise and many volunteers.

**Action 10: Networking (A) Nick Bowles & Sarah (B) Sarah to link with Wiltshire chair of BCT.**

Newbury Weekly News engage through the Arts. Nicola Chester *On Gallows Down* about the 3<sup>rd</sup> battle of Newbury, works of this kind stimulate interest in trees and local conservation. Perhaps NWN might interview Nicola & engage with AONB about relevant local sites. e.g. *Camp Albion* at The Watermill Theatre about the Battle of Newbury, possible links to the website from Arts suggesting related visits.

**Action 11: – Investigate possible links from Arts events & promotions based on sites in NWD AONB to our website AS**

Approval has been gained from Parish Council for 60m of hedgerow to join two hedges using whips from the Woodland Trust. May be a future exemplar. KE noted there have been x2 planning applications in East Garston on the water meadows by the river Lambourn. AS has had some involvement with Nicola Chester & a brief conversation about writing for the website. Currently Nicola has a book launch in progress but might make a brief blog. HO mentioned Butterfly Conservation had formed part of an abortive Lottery Fund bid for the Land of the White Horses project in 2020; this involved work with both Wiltshire and Berkshire Butterfly Conservation.

**Action 12: Speak with Corinna re opportunities; see whether FIPL funding might be available KE**

**Recreation & Tourism** SB: Pewsey has discussed Great Bedwyn footpaths approach with Judy H. Pewsey has now launched a new 72-mile Pewsey Vale walking & cycling route. Members are welcome to visit. SB is speaking with RW about incorporating footpath improvements under FIPL. Volunteers have offered to help. PM stated that towns such as Whitchurch (a pivot point) in B&DBC see themselves as SE gateways into NWD AONB. It is a good idea to signpost NWD AONB to the public. Cycling & walking review had been stopping at AONB boundary; B&DBC wishes to market the AONB gateway role. SB: Pewsey has not developed wider picture. DS advised NWDLT has applied to GWR to get information boards at rail stations in NWD AONB and for nine stations on the edge of the AONB to have information available.

**Action 13: PM & SB to discuss signposting prior to meeting Nov 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Community & Parish** JW stated that Sparkling Streams projects from NWD AONB had been a “blinder”. At a recent legacy meeting Hungerford Town & Manor confirmed this was a worthwhile programme which gave good outcomes, came in under budget and on time. It should be taken forward as a model for other projects on chalk streams. Visitors are coming to see Eddington Mill as an exemplar. The proposed wetland creation at Undy’s Meadow on the edge of Hungerford was another ongoing project.

**NWDLT** (Paper 4a) DS referred to this report.

**7 End of Financial Report 2021-22** (paper 5) HO - Defra gave a significant additional financial contribution (approx. £35k) close to the end of year. NWD managed to allocate successfully, including commissioning ARK to build a rain garden at Chilton Foliat Primary School. This illustrates the importance of having projects ready to go in order to be in a position to use funding when it becomes available at short notice. Now aim to develop more projects prospectively. SN highlighted the importance of building relationships to enable this.

**8 Budget Update** (paper 6) HO explained there has been difficulty producing a final budget. Most figures have now been provided by Wiltshire Council and Defra. Now drafting a detailed budget.

**Action 14: Finalise budget and circulate once information available HO**

Defra budget has been increased by 14%; this requires Local Authorities to match the same notional figures. Swindon BC and Test Valley BC have confirmed they will match. PM, Basingstoke & Deane BC and GK Hampshire CC confirmed they will also match funding.

**Action 15: Remaining LAs to confirm to HO that they will match budget increase. LAs**

**9 IUCN Green List Pilot Update & Discussion** (Paper 7 & presentation)

SN presented slides summarising background, progress to date and next steps (to be circulated after the meeting). She reiterated that the IUCN Green List is the internationally recognised gold standard re management of nature conservation; few places in the world meet this standard currently. NWD AONB are piloting this standard. Requirements for good governance and greater scrutiny are likely to increase in UK.

Howard Davies, former CEO of NAAONB, has now facilitated three workshops to take this forward. There are four pillars to the Green List: -

- Good governance
- Sound design & planning
- Effective Management
- Successful conservation outcomes

Some clarification has been made to the relationships in the initial document on governance.

SN sees Council of Partners active involvement in engaging in workshops and contributing to the new governance model as essential. The four key future plans for NWD AONB are: -

- AONB Management Plan
- Partnership Plan
- Business Plan
- Action/Project Plans

Next steps are:

- Agree & tighten the Partnership goals with measurable timelines
- Review the Governance framework
- Update the Partnership Plan
- Develop a Business Case

PM said the Business Plan produced by the Director and AONB team will need inputs from all Council of Partners members and will expect member of the AONB Partnership to lead some tasks for this to succeed. SN referred to a creating a clear line of sight to delivery, understood by all.

Communications and advocacy will be important; needs to be transparency to the public. Improved health & wellbeing will need engagement with Integrated Care Systems (*which have replaced CCGs*). There needs to be improved spatial planning.

Need to align AONB policy across relevant authorities to ensure delivery. HO stated that protected landscapes are under enormous pressure e.g. planning which relates to the Glover recommendation to strengthen AONBs. Consistent policy also aligns with Glover, a good example is the Good Lighting Guide.

SAW asked if there is any order of precedence between the items. SN said no.

KE queried whether there is any weighting or significance to the order of goals & whether this impacts the message. SN said workshop did not prioritise goals. SN wishes to align AONB policies. KE commented that delivery is a vague word. SN sees the next steps as needing the active engagement of representatives from all groups of the Council of Partners. Next step is to agree goals and then review governance, there will inevitably need to be updates to the Partnership Plan & Agreement – HO. RW asked for timescale. SN: asap. Meeting with Howard Davies Wed 6<sup>th</sup> July will incl timescale.

SN asked whether LAs had any questions or comments. None raised

**Action 16: Circulate SN presentation to Council of Partners for feedback PD**

**Action 17: Partners to review slides & presentation & feed in their comments by 31<sup>st</sup> July ALL**

**Action 18: Each LA to nominate x1 representative for workshop - ALL**

**Action 19: Arrange next workshop with representative from each LA & advisory members to confirm or amend goals and decide what is achievable by when PD/HO/SN/PM**

**Action 20: Partnership Plan & Agreement updates HO**

**Action 21: Develop Business Plan HO**

**10 Nature Recovery Plan** Paper 7 & presentation (to be circulated)

CW presented the draft Nature Recovery Plan for NWD AONB via audio link. The objective is to produce a final Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB area. CW was unable to hear those in the Town Hall clearly, so questions were answered by colleagues or captured for her to address later.

JW observed that this is another body of work; he asked whether we have sufficient resources to deliver? CW said this is aspirational, intention is to obtain funding to support delivery. It is not a plan for AONB team to deliver in isolation, rather to identify what's needed and harness what funding opportunities exist or arise. It will be helpful to identify resource requirements and establish a framework; also helps to capture & synthesise ideas of all involved.

HO said no, we do not currently have the resources. However, he pointed out that there will be multiple elements with different timescales; the Green Recovery Challenge Fund and FIPL might be possible sources for some elements. RW is developing a business case for the AONB to provide a land management advice service, further ahead this could provide a framework within & around the AONB. FIPL are currently working with x10 farmer clusters around the AONB. Potential AONB role in prioritising investment in ELMS might increase. JW stated this requires full buy-in from all members, there is a risk that organisations might not be able to provide staff time.

GK agreed this is not the AONB team working in isolation, all partners must buy into this. It is effectively a bid for resources. It will also help influence priorities locally and synergies. GK is on the Cotswolds National Landscape Board, whose members are much more involved in the AONB's work than in the North Wessex Downs. Need greater involvement from all members.

SN would appreciate a chat with GK.

TH felt this is a well written, comprehensive document. It will be very interesting to explore how we could build wider nature recoveries in/out of AONB. Query why not have a GIS officer which who also supports the FIPL Programme to provide that type of spatial landscape view. HO would desperately like one. PM why not commission GIS facility, evaluate cost/benefits of this approach? Without modern GIS cannot envisage. GIS enables this; LA recruitment is slow and cumbersome.

HO we have commissioned work when needed e.g. for FIPL & Dark Skies, to date avoided commercial rates by using partners or charities.

**Action 22: SN asked for Information Officer recruitment to be prioritised HO**

KE: who will be in wider consultation? What are timescales? End is not 25 yrs from now but 2048. Would like it to be sooner as loss of species is becoming more desperate. Also need to focus on prevention as part of plan e.g., preventing further loss. CW acknowledged this.

**Action 23: Feedback and any further questions to CW via email by 31<sup>st</sup> July – ALL**

**Action 24: Form workgroup to support workshop input to final draft. CW**

**Action 25: Final draft of Nature Recovery Plan circulated to COP prior to meeting Nov 8<sup>th</sup> CW**

**11 Sparkling Streams** (paper 8, presentation & case study)

AS presented slides. She thanked CW for doing brilliant job in pulling together four partners, winning funding and delivering this programme. Note that information can also be found on NWD AONB website [www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/our-work/our-current-projects/discover-streams/](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/our-work/our-current-projects/discover-streams/) & [www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/successful-400k-sparkling-streams-project-comes-to-an-end/](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/successful-400k-sparkling-streams-project-comes-to-an-end/) Work at Eddington Mill has opened a new stretch of chalk river (the original, pre-mill Kennet) which has enabled fish to get to the Shalbourne and & river Dun for the first time in 600 years.

**Action 26 – email Sparkling Streams presentation & case study PD**

**12 Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL)** (paper 9 v2, presentation)



RW presented slides and referred to paper 9. Funding totals approx. £1.725 million over three years to March 2024 - a significant amount. It supports national themes and the delivery of the local AONB Management Plan. Since the slides and report were prepared expressions of interest have continued to increase. There are now 11 farmer groups and over 150 enquiries re project funding.

The team has gained much experience and would like to continue to apply this in and around the AONB so are developing a business case for a potential commercial offering post-March 2024 which would provide income to the AONB. RW would welcome comments and suggestions from partners.

**Action 27: Suggestions and commercial advice from members of COP re consultancy to RW**

**Action 28: Commercial Proposal to be presented at COP meeting Nov 8, 2022, RW/KC**

**Action 29: Distribute FiPL presentation to COP PD**

**13 Planning Update** (paper 10) RD There has been greater focus on climate change, environment, and landscape. There has been a flow of appeals – re 26 homes in Highclere and Cholsey for 320 homes which abuts the AONB. RD has also commented on the draft West Berkshire Local Plan. In Bishop's Cannings a pub has applied for a change of use for a field to be used as a campsite with bar & marquee. The site is next to the church and there appears to have been no regard to impact on this, the surrounding landscape or infrastructure.

JW asked whether RD can cope or are more resources required? RD applies a RAG assessment to planning applications. She receives about 80 – 100 consultations per month. The appeals have caused a backlog: currently she is working on items from Oct which should have been addressed in Dec 2021. The Bishops Cannings development was not sent by Wiltshire Council but a neighbour to the site.

HO commented that if the AONB were to be made a statutory, consultee additional resources would be needed.

**14 Director's Report** (paper 11) HO wished to record his thanks to those who have been involved in the Walking Festival, in particular Jacky Akam who organised the festival and partners who supported the walks. 28 walks have taken place; an AONB team member was present on virtually all walks. This is an annual event but requires significant time to arrange and run. If it is to take place next year HO would want some external funding and believes there might be the potential for commercial support.

There is a possibility that Defra might be about to give National Parks and AONBs significant funds for Access, probably with the bulk of funds (approx. £250k) this year and some in year three but nothing in year two, making it difficult to recruit staff to expand our capacity. This might link to signage, health & wellbeing, BME communities in surrounding towns, the White Horse Way, National Trails, and other projects.

**Action 30: Would an LA be willing to host an employee for year 2? - LAs**

**Action 31: Send thoughts on projects that need Access funding to HO – ALL**

**15 50 Years Achievement Summary** (paper 12) was taken as read.

**16 Annual Forum** HO explained that Lord Benyon is not available am Nov 25<sup>th</sup> but might be pm & there is a possible opportunity to combine with a Dark Skies event jointly with Marlborough Town Council after the meeting. Alternatively the date might have to be

moved. Suggestions for stimulating and provocative speakers about “the next 50 years” welcome.

**Action 32: Note 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022 pm in diaries – ALL**

**Action 33: Send proposals for interesting speakers to HO/PD – ALL**

**17 AOB** None

**Date of next meeting November 8<sup>th</sup> 2022 10.00am – 1.30pm**

**Council Chambers Basingstoke & Deane Council Offices, Basingstoke, Hants.**

**Forum planned for November 25<sup>th</sup> 2022 Afternoon/evening - subject to confirmation of venue.**

The meeting closed at 12.33

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