

COUNCIL OF PARTNERS MEETING
Tuesday 4th July 2023

Present	Initials	Representing
Ms Sarah Nichols	SN	Chair
Caroline Svendsen	CS	Natural England
Cllr Colin Phillimore	CP	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Cllr Juliet Henderson	JH	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Kiera Bentley	KB	Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Nabil Najjar	NN	Wiltshire Council
Community & Parish		
Jonathan Welfare	JW	Advisory member
Dr Katrina Easterling	KE	Advisory member
Simon Pike	SP	Advisory member
Farming & Rural Business		
Rosie Salt-Crockford		CLA
Historic Environment		
NWD Landscape Trust		
Donald Sherlock	DS	NWD Landscape Trust
Nature Conservation		
Tom Hayward	TH	Advisory member
Recreation and Rural Tourism		
Susie Brew	SB	Advisory member
In Attendance		
Mr Christopher Slack	CS	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Mr Dominic Lamb	DL	SODC & VoWH
Mr Eden Speller	ES	Swindon Borough Council
Ms Lynn Trigwell	LT	Wiltshire Council
Mr Henry Oliver	HO	Director
Ms Corinna Woodall	CW	Senior Project Development & Funding Officer
Ms Claire McCorquodale	CMC	Partnership Coordinator
Mrs Katharine Cook	KC	FiPL Business Support Officer
Ms Ann Shepley	AS	Communications Officer
Howard Davies	HD	Independent
Sue Croker (observer)	SC	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies Pamela Ciurtin (TVBC), Garry King (Hants CC), Cllr Sally Povolotsky (OCC), Haidrun Breith (OCC), and Sharon Egan (advisory member).

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest

3. Constitutional Items

Paper 1

Following the local elections in May there have been a number of changes of representatives for the local authorities. SN recorded thanks to Cllr Paul Miller for his work over the years.

Cllr JH proposed by JW as vice-chair to the Council of Partners and seconded by TH. Nick Down farming representative was proposed by JW, seconded by DS. The Membership of MWG has changed and Lynn Trigwell has joined the group, proposed by JH and seconded by JW.

Andi Witcombe, NFU representative, has left and her successor Katie Davies has been nominated by NFU.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Paper 2

The meeting approved the minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2023 - proposed by DS and seconded by TH.

5. Matters Arising

HO feedback from ALL on business plan. Not much feedback but MWG have offered to help progress it. Meeting tba.

A request for contributions has been sent to all local authority officers. CM, the PCO, confirmed that it had been done.

6. Chair's Report followed by Partnership Round Table

Paper 3

SN thanked PM for his valued work over the years especially with the IUCN |Green List work in the last two years.

There have been changes of Councillors at partner local authorities so SN and HO will be briefing new councillors. HD is to brief on Green List Pilot at the meeting today.

Partnership working is key to the way forward. Identifying risks to partnership is a significant piece of work at the current time. AONB team have been working hard with a special mention given to Corinna Woodall for the Nature Recovery Plan, Jacky Akam for the Walking Festival, and Rob West and Katharine Cook for the implementation of FiPL.

SN raised the question of preferences for digital or face-to-face meetings. Hybrid meetings are successful in some arenas, but the general feeling was that the Council of partners works better as either a digital meeting or face-to-face, especially given the village hall venues usually used. In winter online meetings maybe better and more practical. There was concern about the environmental footprint of members travelling to distant remote locations for every meeting – some local authorities now preferred virtual meetings as the default format. Planning a five-six hour commitment needs to be done well in advance.

Hybrid meetings might need to be in rooms with special facilities such as council chambers which would involve significant travel for the core AONB team.

Partnership Round table reports

Dominic Lamb – SODC and VOWH are producing nature recovery plans which will have regard to NWD AONB plan.

Chris Slack (BDBC) reported that Robert West is now part of the team at Basingstoke and Deane. There is a review of the green infrastructure strategy and a nature recovery plan is under way.

JH (HCC) – Hampshire County Council had been discussing that National Parks and AONBs should be working closely together.

LT (WC) – The process for drawing up a Nature Recovery Plan has been started. A Local Nature Recovery Strategy officer has been recruited and started yesterday. A Design Guide is out for public consultation at present. The Wiltshire Local Plan will be released for public consultation in Sept. There are new policies around Biodiversity Net Gain and Dark Skies.

ES (SBC) - A green strategy will be agreed in near future.

CS (NE) - staff at Natural England have been reduced. There is more money available for projects but insufficient staff to deliver. **So small projects under £20K may be eligible for funding – so please apply if you have a project.**

SP WBC – a new councillor has not yet been appointed to CoP following the change of administration, A Rights of Way improvement plan will be submitted imminently. The Local plan had been reviewed but another review may be undertaken following the change of administration.

7. Report to IUCN on Green Listing of UK Protected Landscapes

Paper 4

Presentation by Howard Davies, independent environmental advisor, member of the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas and ex-CEO of the National Association for AONBs.

AONBs are deemed by the IUCN to be Global Category V Protected Areas so not just nationally important but they also have recognition the international level. National Association for AONBs supports each area having its own flavour and priorities rather than a nationally set format. The protected areas are recognised for the interaction between people and landscape.

Green List pilot came about to try and raise the profile of AONBs.

National Parks are reported on formally to national level at regular intervals. There is no such equivalent reporting for AONBs. The aim of the IUCN Green Listing is to identify the connection between global targets for the environment and the local work in the protected areas. In the UK the DEFRA Environmental Improvement Plan sets out the national targets. At the AONB level the AONB Management Plan covers all the priorities for nature in the AONB. This has to be reduced down to a manageable work plan for the AONB team with the resources available.

The 4 pillars of the IUCN listing that each landscape will be measured against are. good governance, sound design and planning, effective management, and successful conservation outcomes. The NWD Partnership's priority goals and objectives have been set out under each pillar. These were signed off and agreed at the last CoP meeting. They will be included in the Partnership Plan. This process is to help prioritise the work of the AONB Unit rather than trying to establish priorities through the AONB Management Plan, which is for the whole landscape and the responsibility of all relevant bodies.

Natural England are currently drafting new AONB Management Plan guidance, as well as an outcomes and monitoring framework. . The aim is to align the DEFRA measurements and objectives with NE priorities and the AONB's work. If there is appetite to use this in other AONBs then the IUCN will work to support this, developing a UK-wide plan for national landscapes. There would be resources available at a national level to support this work.

Questions were asked by the members of the CoP.

Where does central govt fit in this and would a change of administration make a difference? The UK respects the IUCN as a global body and should continue to work with them in the future. The process of looking at IUCN listing as been highly beneficial to the AONB regardless of future funding and resources, Natural England reported that they are keen to look at the work done and DEFRA will be guided by Natural England.

Does the AONB feel that this has been beneficial and are they working to implement the results that have come out of the process? Will the work done tie into the outcomes and monitoring framework that is being developed by Natural England? It is through the Nature Recovery Plan that we will will address some of the issues.

ACTION Next steps – feedback on draft report via HO in 2-3 weeks' time. Once report has been agreed then an online meeting with IUCN.

HD added a request to not look at the detail. He would like feedback on: What is the appetite and what is the commitment to delivery – the criteria are set out by the IUCN. The benefit to the AONB is that this is a tested standard making a good way forward and the Government will at some stage be wanting to report on 30 x 30 targets. National Parks and AONBs are not going to be reporting as a whole. The yardstick will be is there effective management in the nationally designated? If the AONB decides it has a better standard and approach then that can be followed.

Will this framework deliver goals 1 & 2? is a key question. Using the process has forced a review of the work being done and how it is delivered. There are cost implications of maintaining the standard and review process of IUCN listing. The proposal is for a review every five years. If there is an appetite in the UK then an expert advisory group will do a five-yearly review. Central govt should provide financial support for the process. Protection of the landscape should not be taken for granted. Cat V status will be reviewed in the near future to see if UK still meets criteria, particularly in the wake of HS2 and other major infrastructure projects.

8. Risk Register – for discussion

Paper 5

Report by the Management Working Group

This will be a standing item in the future. Are the risks identified the right ones for the AONB?

Broadly in priority order. Category, risk identified and mitigation.

The recent local authority elections have raised the question Is the induction process able to cope with large numbers of new members?

The risk level needs to be identified as low/medium/high with an indication of where we are and where we are going with risk. There needs to be clarity of the governance structure and decision-making – is the structure fit for purpose? The meeting asked for clarification on the status of advisory members when voting takes place.

Action: HO to continue to develop the document with support from MWG and CoP member with relevant expertise and bring it to a future meeting.

The risks need to be related to the current programme of work. How are we currently delivering the AONB work – the mitigation column would address the issues of present delivery. There should be a discussion of risk when the future work programmes are discussed and an assessment of who will carry the risk. Performance indicators will enable the measurement and communication of achievement.

Funding – core funding and the local authority match. Should the team continue to top up the local authority match? This needs to be revisited. There needs to be a reserves policy and redundancy costs have not been clarified. There is no clarity on what would happen if projects backed by external funders do not deliver.

There is a need for income to employ the staff needed to do the work. Staff should be shown as a separate risk.

Relationships with other bodies.

Political turbulence – changes at national govt and local authority level are different and should be listed separately.

GDPR is financially high risk due to fines involved but failure of duty of regard is a greater risk to the landscape. Wiltshire Council regards the AONB as an independent data controller but as there is no legal entity it leaves a lack of clarity. It prevents access to the RPA land ownership data which could be very useful in developing and delivering projects. The proposals to provide advice for fees would expose the AONB to commercial risk, This needs to be assessed and measured.

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a joint advisory committee with no legally agreed status. The Act setting up AONBs does not give clarity. Natural England should request the Government to clarify. The host authority and other local authorities do not have clarity on redundancy for AONB staff. When DEFRA became responsible for the AONBs, they refused to accept the redundancy resolution that had applied in the past. CS (NE) has agreed to make further enquiries.

9. Nature Recovery Plan: Priorities for Implementation – for approval

Paper 6

Report by Corinna Woodall, Senior Project Development and Funding Officer

The latest draft of the NWD AONB Nature Recovery Plan was sent out yesterday evening. The draft Plan had previously been out to consultation. Comments have been reviewed and integrated into this version.

30 by 30 target to manage 30% of land for nature by 2030.

Currently 13% priority habitat is good for nature in the NWD AONB. If woodland is added in the this rises to 17%. Some land that is currently managed for nature may not be managed long-term. Protected Landscapes should maybe be aiming for 40 by 30 to off set the lower amount of management for nature in non-Protected Landscapes.

The NWD AONB covers 1,730 sq km in total; so 30% would be 520 sq km which needs to be managed for nature. 285 sq km has been achieved to date; an additional area of 235sq km needs to be added to achieve this target – to give an idea of scale this an area 3½ times the size of Newbury ever year for next 7 years.

The AONB sits on two Local Nature Partnerships in the area and is looking to increase this. As far as resources allow, staff are supporting the development of local strategies with NE. CW request CoP to approve priorities for the current year.

What is the average size of area for individual agreements? This will inform how many agreements need to be set up to achieve the amount of land.

New land management schemes (ELMs) should be part of the land counted but as these aren't finalised its hard to estimate how much land will be in these agreements. The 10 farmer clusters in the AONB cover 65% of the AONB. The AONB is requesting help to translate the AONB Nature Recovery Plan into plans for the farmer clusters. The FiPL grant also provides a resource to deliver this target. The constraint is that the land should be tied up for 30 years, Set out targets for total land each year and track achievements by landscape type.

Monitoring will need to be shared with LAs.

Needs to convene the lead LNRS so that monitoring is agreed and done once.

Chalk grassland is only 3,500 hectares. This should be a priority as we are a strategically placed area between the Cotswolds and the South Downs and so should be able to report on the effects of the climate change on the downland. One option would be to use NE funds to pay for GIS mapping to get an initial view.

10. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme 2022-23 report – for information

Presentation by Katharine Cook, FiPL Business Support Officer

KC set out the four pillars of the FiPL Programme for the new faces in the room. Overall £3.5m Figures £348,947, £732,720, current year £1,029,835

And additional year of grant with £1.35m funding was announced in spring 2023 for the year 2024-25.

There is a Local Assessment Panel made up of farmers and relevant organisations who determine the distribution of grants. To date there have been 220 Expressions of Interest and 81 projects funded in total. They are spread throughout the AONB with a wide range of projects from river restoration to beaver reintroduction, disease-resistant elms, equipment for regenerative farming, pollinator habitats and education on land management for the equine sector.

The team are looking for ambitious large-scale projects. A side-effect of the funding has been an increase in the number of farmer clusters in the AONB.

Is there an initiative to tackle issues for smallholdings and LA land for example abattoir facilities for smaller farmers? Currently the long distances that have to be travelled to abattoir facilities mean that small landowners feel they have to choose between conscience and money. A webinar could be organised for smaller landowners. The issue around the legal entity is holding AONB back from identifying and communicating with smaller landowners as there is no access to the RPA data at present, despite DEFRA offering and encouraging its use by protected landscapes.

A feasibility study on nitrate neutrality issues was suggested.. FiPL have asked Thames Water if they will work in partnership on this.

11. National Landscapes Rebranding – for approval

Paper 7

Report by the Ann Shepley, Communications Officer

The National Association for AONBs has developed proposals to rebrand AONBs as National Landscapes. This initiative would implement one of the recommendations made by the Glover Review (2019) and is funded by DEFRA. As part of this, new logos have been designed for all AONBs to a national format to make the brand more coherent across all of them. This is intended to raise the profile and increase the recognition of the value of work undertaken by AONBs. It was discovered that the younger age range has poor brand awareness of AONBs. In all age ranges the awareness of National Parks is about double that of the awareness of AONBs.

The national initiative will go ahead whatever happens in the North Wessex Downs, but it is the Partnership's decision whether or not to accept and adopt the rebranding locally, for the North Wessex Downs. The statutory AONB designation remains regardless of the adoption of the national rebranding. It was suggested that in the recreational context the title of national landscape may be less attractive to the general public. The Vale of White Horse representatives raised concerns about the similarity between the logo and the Vale of White Horse logo. The meeting agreed that the decision will be deferred until this is resolved

ACTION: HO, KB and DL will need to get confirmation on this before a decision can be made.

KE requested mock ups on letter heading etc to see how the presentation would work on letters and business card etc. There was disquiet about the separation of the words North Wessex and Downs as it does not give a full description of the area. There may be some flexibility in the layout of the landscape version

DEFRA are offering some funds to replace branding but this will not meet all the costs. The font has been selected for accessibility purposes.

The new logos could be announced nationally in the near future. It is thought that there is an ambition to launch the logos in September at the AONB annual conference.

12. Budget Update and 2022-23 End of Year report – for information

Paper 8

Report by Claire McCorquodale, Partnership Co-ordinator

13. Planning Update – for information

Paper 9

Report by the Rebecca Davies, Principal Landscape and Planning Officer

ACTION - Add to the paper what the planning decision was for future papers.

14. Director's Report – for information

Paper 10

Report by Henry Oliver, Director
No comments

15. Any Other Business

KE - Can we monitor tree-cutting to ensure that tree planting is not replacing existing trees that have been cut down? Hard to achieve but mapping would help considerably in this area. As the canopy can be measured to assess this.

Annual Forum – Weds 11th October at Sheepdrove Organic Farm on Nature Recovery. The leaders of each local authority partner will be invited. The event is open to all CoP members.

SP – local access forums interest spreading. Funding from NE for support for these. Draft woodland management plan from Bagnor Estate submitted to LAF.

KB - raised a concern for smaller community groups e.g. Letcombe Brook group. How does that feed into CoP? JA in regular contact. Chalk stream targets have brought them onto the AONB radar to work together on delivery of NR Plan. How do we support these groups who are so busy delivering that they don't have time to apply for funding?

TH - can the AONB share more info on the Cumulus Consulting data for baseline data for NR. This is bringing together in one place the baseline data for the AONB.

ACTION SN induction of new members needs to be undertaken

Mondays are a good day to visit the team at the office.

Meeting closed at 12.45pm

Date of next meeting: 7th November 2023