

**NORTH WESSEX DOWNS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
 COUNCIL OF PARTNERS
 14 March 2023 at 10am
 Great Bedwyn Village Hall**

Minutes

Present	Initials	Representing
Ms Sarah Nichols	SN	Chair
Cllr Paul Miller	PM	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Cllr Juliet Henderson	JH	Hampshire County Council
Cllr Steve Ardagh-Walter	SA	West Berkshire Council
Cllr Paul Barrow	PB	Vale of White Horse District Council
Community & Parish		
Farming & Rural Business		
Chris Musgrave	CM	Advisory member
Historic Environment		
NWD Landscape Trust		
Donald Sherlock	DS	NWD Landscape Trust
Nature Conservation		
In Attendance		
Mr Christopher Slack	CS	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Ms Haidrun Breith	HB	Oxfordshire County Council
Ms Pamela Ciurtin	PC	Test Valley Council
Ms 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
Mr Robert West	RW	FiPL Officer
Ms Ann Shepley	AS	Communications Officer
Ms Rebecca Davies	RD	Principal Landscape and Planning Officer

1. Apologies for absence – Don Heath, Rhydian Vaughn, K Williams, Katrina Easterling, Garry King, Michelle Leek, Jonathan Welfare, Susie Brew, Simon Pike, Sally Povolotsky, Jacky Akam, Rebecca Davies, Gary Sumner.

2. Declarations of Interest – None.

3. Constitutional Items (papers 1a & 1b)

Chair's first term of office is coming to an end. SN is prepared to continue as Chair. Her reappointment was proposed by PM and seconded by CM and agreed by the meeting.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2022 (paper 1) Jonathan Welfare was added to the attendance list. The minutes were then agreed.

5. Matters Arising to be identified after each agenda item.

6. Chair's report

SN outlined the work to date on the IUCN Green List candidacy. Key milestones have been met and the final report is due end of March 2023.

The business plan will be finalised and put into action in the FY year beg. 1st April 2023. A briefing on the rebranding of AONBs and National Parks as National Landscapes is imminent.

The meeting thanked Rob West for all of his work on FiPL. It was noted that the AONB will be three members of staff down.

The Partnership goals and objectives were presented. The review of Governance is under way. A corporate risk register needs to be completed: in particular funding and staffing need to be addressed.

The membership of the Council of Partners needs to be reviewed and followed by a recruitment drive for more members.

7. IUCN Green List Pilot Update

LT asked if there was a project plan for the Green Listing with key milestones. HO referred to a GANTT chart that was established early in the project.

8. Partnership Plan Goals and Objectives

HO outlined the background emphasising the importance of understanding the role of the AONB in protecting the landscape. He took the meeting through the diagram on p4. Red Box targets will be for the protected landscape not the Partnership or the staff unit.

There is a statutory s.85 duty on Local Authorities to conserve and enhance the AONB landscape. The AONB produces a Management Plan on behalf of the Partnership for the AONB landscape. The Partnership's priorities are expressed in the Goals and Strategic Objectives in the new Partnership Plan. The Business Plan will set out work to be undertaken by the AONB team. It was noted that a risk register needs to be completed for the Business Plan.

The 2017 Corporate Strategy has led to closer relationships with farming such as farmer clusters, Sparking Streams Project and FiPL. CM wished to strengthen representation of farmers and land managers on the CoP. SN asked the CoP members for suggestions. NFU and CLA reps are both on the CoP. Are there other organisations that should be represented?

CW: 5 year Management Plan review is about to be undertaken (as a statutory duty). HO requested local authority input on their contributions to achieving the Partnership's objectives. SN asked local authorities to provide data on nature metrics, JH: Hampshire County Council is restructuring and so she will need to take back points for discussion with the restructured team.

RW stated that the consistency of data measurement and approach to landscape protection across the AONB would improve feedback on how the local authorities' (LAs) financial commitment was being used effectively. RW outlined roles and responsibilities of the LAs in the Partnership Plan. LT added that we are missing a trick if we present this as additional work; it isn't, it's working more effectively together to align AONB activity with LAs' aims, objectives and obligations. Align Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSSs) with AONB objectives. LNRSSs could potentially be funded by developers through Biodiversity Net Gain.

Communication between Partners at LA level could be strengthened to achieve data metrics/ measurement of nature recovery. SN and the Director will raise the importance of LNRS alignment with AONB objectives in forthcoming meetings with council leaders.

HB emphasised the need to look for existing alignment between LAs and AONB as a baseline.

CW added that Goal 6 also part of the Management Plan review.

PC asked what support are LAs giving the AONB at the moment and what additional can be done?

JH proposed acceptance of the 6 goals and PM seconded. The meeting agreed to approve the 6 goals as the core of the business plan.

PC: Be more direct with LA partners: what do we currently get and what's missing, or could be better?

LT suggested a separate meeting to clarify responsibilities between AONB and CoP and to identify resources.

9 Developing Business Plan – for information and discussion

The AONB Business plan is intended to replace work programme. Individual projects many have project plans.

Section 1 Support the Rural Economy: Section 1 a) to k) are set out by DEFRA as the core activities supported by DEFRA funding to the AONB. These tasks take up over 50% of staff time at the AONB.

Section 2 Deliver for nature and climate: This topic fits under the defined objectives.

Section 3 Improve Communications and Advocacy: The elements here don't fit under the objectives but still need to be delivered.

Section 4 Provide Opportunities to improve health and wellbeing: There is guidance and strategies that the AONB has produced and which LAs can help to disseminate. This is increasingly part of social prescribing withing the community.

Section 5 Improve Spatial Planning: The AONB Principal Landscape and Planning Officer is strengthening links with planning teams to work with them to raise awareness of landscape issues.

Section 6 Align AONB policy across relevant authorities PB: it needs an identified person to take the lead.

Timelines and responsibilities need to be added to each goal in the plan and a review process added.

PM: note the distinction between management and delivery. E.g. the Landscape Colour Guide is the output, the dissemination is different.

CM suggested a pilot study of health prescribing which brought people in to the countryside to improve their mental health, using Council of Partners health and land management links . PM suggested that Whitchurch Walkers are Welcome might be a suitable group to be involved.

CW reported that an Aspire/Earth Trust pilot to self design "countryside activities" will report at the end of April.

HB: include commentary saying something about the outcomes of actions, e.g. issues encountered.

HO stated there is a need to populate the Business Plan with risks and monitoring review process before circulating. LT reiterated that setting the Business Plan objectives and reporting structure is an important task. It should include monitoring, review and reporting on the plan and should include outcomes of actions and insights acquired. The risks need to cover the opportunities as well as the risks.

Action: HO requested feedback from all on the Business Plan so far.

The meeting agreed to taking the Planning Update early.

12 Planning Update

The colour guide training event held on 13 March for local authority planners was well received. Most local authorities in the AONB were represented.

Planning Applications report highlights are:

- The Glamping site at West Hendred offers affordable camping to users of the AONB and Ridgeway.
- JH thanked RD for her support against the planning application for a warehouse within the setting of the AONB near Basingstoke.
- The Wash Water site near Newbury had received AONB input and had been felt to be generally an acceptable development close to the AONB.

10. Draft Budget

DEFRA announced that AONB budget will retain the 14% uplift that was introduced last year. The salary figures are not yet confirmed for the coming year and so the budget is still to be finalised. Table 2 shows the Local Authority contributions for the coming year.

Action: PCo to send LA contributions table to LA officers.

11. Budget Update

It was confirmed that DEFRA funds not spent in the current year cannot be carried forward to the following year.

13. Director's Report

The Access for All grant was received and spent within the deadline.

The Mend the Gap programme has a new manager Ruth Staples-Rolfe who will join the meeting for lunch.

The FIPL team have bid for additional funds for the FIPL grant for the coming year of £1.8 million. This is still subject to confirmation. The meeting thanked RW for his work on the FIPL grant and his contribution to Nature Recovery.

HO reported that changes are expected in the way fundings is being offered in the future and measurable outcomes will be set by DEFRA. Targets for individual landscapes are being discussed and may be sent out to AONBs in the near future.

The list of tasks for the coming year was presented. There was a discussion on the value of the Director's close involvement in the World Heritage Site (Avebury, Stonehenge and Associated Sites). This is an outstanding site within North Wessex Downs. HO explained

that he was seeking a deputy for his role as Chairman of the Avebury WHS Steering Committee to reduce the AONB time devoted to it.

To meet the Government's 30x30 target would require 240km² in the AONB to be seen as providing natural habitat within seven years. Members of the team are working with Local Authorities to deliver this target. The AONB's own Nature Recovery Plan is important to lead into work on Biodiversity Net Gain targets which highlight action on carbon and biodiversity. The Natural Solutions Delivery Partnership in West Berkshire is bringing together West Berkshire Biocap mapping with farmer and landowner engagement.

14 Annual Forum

The date is set for 11th October 2023. The theme will be Nature Recovery.

A Forum project team in the AONB are looking at speakers and venues, to include the work of the AONB. Topics that speakers may cover include nature recovery led by Community, Systems, Species Recovery and Farming.

There is a possibility that some film will be commissioned if time and budgets allow.

Ideas for inspirational speakers were requested.

15 AOB

Holding hybrid meetings of the Partnership was discussed as members' time commitments mean that attending meetings in person can be challenging.

SN emphasised that chairing 35 people in a hybrid meeting can be very challenging.

LT proposed that meetings could be divided between online, with a lighter agenda, and face-to-face meetings which are more focussed and allow more discussion.

RW FIPL end of year report not ready to present due to additional funding. There will be a review of the next 2 years at the next Local Assessment Panel meeting along with the end-of-year report.

The meeting welcomed Ruth Staples-Rolfe who explained that the area covered by the Mend the Gap funding is broadly Reading to Didcot.

Meeting closed 12.25 pm

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 4th July 2023. Venue to be confirmed
