

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
SOUTH DEVON AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY  
PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE**

**HELD VIA REMOTE VIDEO MEETING  
ON FRIDAY 18<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2020**

**1. INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**Those present were:**

Cllr Roger Croad	RC	Devon County Council
Peter Chamberlain	PC	Devon County Council
Cllr Bernard Taylor	BT	South Hams District Council
Graham Swiss	GS	South Hams District Council
Cllr Anne Brooks	AB	Torbay Council
Tracy Brooks	TB	Torbay Council
John Green	Chair	Independent
John Martin	Vice-chair	Plymouth University
Peter Sandover	PS	Representative: community/voluntary groups
Lynne Maurer	LM	Representative: parishes
Samantha Dennis	SD	Representative: tourism community
Roger English	RE	AONB Manager
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager – minute taker

**Also attending:**

Doug Eltham	DE	Devon County Council
John Graham	JGm	Deputising for Geoffrey Osborn
Adam Davison	AD	AONB Project Officer

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Cllr Rosemary Rowe	South Hams District Council
Cllr Jonathan Hawkins	Devon County Council
Rob Price	Environment Agency
Eamon Crowe	Natural England
Geoffrey Osborn	Representative: amenity groups
Kate Ryder	Representative: business community
Ed Parr Ferris	Representative: environmental organisations (NGOs)

Note – Richard Snow of the National Trust was on furlough leave

**Observers**

Two observers attended the online meeting. Unfortunately, a third observer was unable to connect.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

2.1 No interests were declared

### **3. MINUTES OF THE 13<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2020 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING FOR APPROVAL & ANY MATTERS ARISING**

- 3.1 A correction to the notes of the last meeting is required to show John Martin attended.
- 3.2 It was noted that most actions had been completed or are progressing.
- 3.2.1 The AONB Manager confirmed Geoffrey Osborn's comments have been relayed to Pat Whymer, head of Development Management at SHDC.
  - 3.2.2 Following the March 2020 Partnership Committee meeting, Ed Parr Ferris expressed interest in joining Richard Snow, Samantha Dennis and Lynne Maurer on the small working group for Colchester Declaration activity. The initial meeting of the topic working group is anticipated to take place in October, having been deferred due to Covid-19 restrictions.
  - 3.2.3 A number of partners have been in contact to add further information to the updated Delivery Plan. It has been a challenging period with Covid-19 (Coronavirus). The AONB Manager invited partners to continue to inform the AONB project Officer of any activities pertinent to the Delivery Plan.
  - 3.2.4 An early decision was taken by the National Association for AONBs' to postpone this year's conference. The Exeter University booking has been moved to similar dates next year. The conference is likely to still be Devon focussed and current plans include using University facilities to run an online conference whilst maintaining the potential for site visits.

### **4A COVID-19 RELATED IMPACTS ON AONB MANAGEMENT AND ROUND TABLE PARTNER UPDATES**

Covid-19 continues to have wide reaching impacts on AONB communities, businesses and partner organisations. The AONB Manager reported that the staff unit continue to progress a healthy project programme however due to Covid-19 it has been a particularly challenging period affecting the AONB landscape, its natural beauty, staff time, projects and programmes. A revised Delivery Plan was included as an addendum to the papers. In discussion:

- i. The AONB staff unit moved to working from home and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.
- ii. Funding programmes have been affected, notably National Lottery Heritage Fund. There has been a reprofiling of activities and priorities, in particular projects with a large community engagement component. Negotiations took place with funding bodies to amend schemes activities/timescales to ensure these could be delivered and ensure funding is secured.
- iii. 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary programme was significantly affected. A scaled back, socially distanced, 60@60 launch still managed to take place at Berry Head. The project is in support of Devon Young Carers with activities and challenges taking place into 2021.
- iv. A number of partners have been on furlough leave including a number of key staff at The National Trust. Many programmes of activity such as the Monument Management Scheme, elements of Life on the Edge, Wild Wembury project work, Farm facilitation programme as well as coastal change activities are being reprofiled, with some on pause, until staff have returned or funding is formally confirmed.

In the last month, the AONB staff unit have worked with partners on a range of Green Recovery Challenge Fund bids to National Lottery. Some work taking place at a national level. The papers included a restricted copy of the National Association for AONBs' offer to the nation. Local activity includes working with Buglife on the urgent work required at Prawle Point for the six banded nomad bee and long horned mining bee.

The AONB Partnership Chair asked Committee members to highlight Covid-19 related impacts.

4a.1 Samantha Dennis, representative for tourism

- i. Furloughed in March, Kingsbridge Information Centre was closed at that time; planning to reopen in October.
- ii. Spent some time at the beginning of lockdown liaising with businesses and signposting to relevant Government schemes.
- iii. There has been a very large influx of visitors to the area with businesses that reopened fully booked. There have been some pop-up offerings to fill gaps in the market however these pop-ups may not be as informed about the AONB and sustainability.

4a.2 Lynne Maurer, representative for Parish Councils

- i. Parish Councils have had an influx of information from Government and DCC.
- ii. Lockdown easing increased pressure on the AONB and did result in damage at some key sites. One example was a large fire in the Kingswear area caused by an out of control beach barbeque resulting in substantial loss of coastal woodland.
- iii. Looking to approach parish councils to donate to the Devon Young Carers project that will provide days out in the AONB with activities organised with partners exploring the AONB special qualities through activities such as stand-up paddle boarding, canoeing, surfing and snorkelling.

4a.3 Peter Sandover, representative for community/voluntary groups

- i. Involved in Neighbourhood Planning for the area. Involved in a number of groups and can see that activity has stepped up. Referendums will not take place on plans put forward until next year however plans that complete examination can still be given significant weight in the planning process.

4a.4 John Graham, deputising for the representative for amenity groups

- i. Groups have continued to function although not able to meet in person.
- ii. There was adverse publicity surrounding the initial closure of certain Dartmoor National Park car parks. Although this does not seem to have happened within the AONB, note that there is need to ensure parking remains open to visitors from outside the area, so they can explore the AONB to benefit mental health and wellbeing.

4a.5 John Martin, Vice Chair

- i. Recently put in for a BBSRC grant in support of coastal communities; the AONB Manager provided a letter of support. If successful, would enable activities in South Devon, funding staff to run citizen science activities connecting people to the coast.

4a.6 Peter Chamberlain, Devon County Council

- i. DCC refocussed activity to Covid-19 response.
- ii. Most activities continued through remote working however physical meetings and active events discontinued.
- iii. Focus is now on recovery activities through Devon Local Nature partnership

4a.7 Graham Swiss, South Hams District Council

- i. Move to agile working around four years ago has meant seamless transition to home working.
- ii. Challenging time for SHDC, with focussed activity to the Covid-19 response. This included a community response team set up to help support Members and to help support and co-ordinate efforts of local groups.
- iii. As with other local authorities, revenue streams have been impacted in particular during the initial months of lockdown.

## 4a.8 Cllr. Bernard Taylor, South Hams District Council

- i. Local Authorities have experienced additional financial pressures due to Covid-19, in addition to coping with high visitor numbers over the summer. Concern was expressed over possible impacts upon future budgets.

## 4a.9 Cllr. Anne Brooks, Torbay Council

Feedback was provided via the Chat function as a technical issue prevented Cllr. Brooks from unmuting.

- i. Well done to the AONB staff unit for a wonderful 60<sup>th</sup> launch at Berry Head. A busy day with a good piece in the Herald Express about the launch celebrations.

## 4a.10 The AONB Partnership Chair requested Partnership members consider the recommendations on item 4a contained in the papers, in particular the AONB Managers request for any further information on Covid-19 related impacts upon the management of South Devon AONB for use as evidence to support future green recovery work.

**ACTION 1 (all)**: Provide any further supporting detail on Covid-19 related impacts by 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020 in order that a summary report may be used as evidence to support future green recovery work.

**4B GOVERNMENT REFORMS OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM IN ENGLAND**

Graham Swiss, South Hams District Council, introduced the scheduled and proposed wide-ranging reforms to the planning system in England. The main changes were highlighted in the papers.

## 4b.1 Of particular note

- i. Potentially the most fundamental change since the current planning system was introduced by the 1947 act.

ii. Planning White Paper

- Currently in the consultation period, ending on 29 October 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

iii. Changes to the current planning system

- The consultation period closes on 1 October 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>

## 4b.2 Observations and in discussion

- i. In practise, what is proposed in the planning white paper is a radical change to the planning system and intended to come in relatively quickly. In particular the proposed change to a zonal approach – allocation of areas for growth, renewal and protection.
  - a. Time and resources will be required to transition from the current system to the new one.
  - b. Zoned areas for Growth will have outline planning consent
    - Currently, under the allocation system, local authorities do some work up front to check allocated sites are broadly suitable for development with the detail taking place during the planning process.
    - Zoned areas for growth come with outline planning consent, requiring much more local authority effort up front.
  - c. As the Zoning process is front-loaded, it is unclear at this time to see how developers would fund the resources LAs' will require.
  - d. Environmental constraints also need to be considered. Currently detailed investigations take place at a later stage. For example in the case of archaeology the geophysics or digs only take place in the area the harmful impact will occur. In the new system, this would need to take place over the extent of the area zoned for growth.

- ii. Opportunities to improve the current planning system with many positives. However, the following was noted
  - a. The White Paper does not contain detailed information on the proposals. For example, Zones for protection may include AONBs however sufficient account would also need to be given to the effect on AONBs, as developments outside the AONB can result in harm to it.
  - b. Professional bodies have shared concerns.
  - c. 'Locality', the agency supporting Neighbourhood Planning, has expressed concerns that although supported, Neighbourhood Plans will reduce in scope.
  - d. Development Management policies being removed from Local Plans could also impact what Neighbourhood Plans can say.
  - e. The removal of consultation at planning application stage is of concern.
- iii. Consultation period closes on 29 October 2020. Everyone is encouraged to make submissions themselves in addition to the AONB response.
- iv. It was reported that the Planning White Paper is currently subject to a legal challenge.
- v. The first five-year Torbay Local Plan Review is required by mid December 2020. A Local Plan Project Working Group/Board to include Members, Neighbourhood Forums and other representatives has been instigated. The first meeting has been scheduled for the first week of October and will help to steer the need and extent of the Review process under a very tight timescale.

4b.3 The AONB Partnership Chair requested Partnership members consider the recommendations on item 4b contained in the papers.

**ACTION 2 (all):** Highlight any specific areas of the consultations for which development of a South Devon AONB response is considered particularly important.

**ACTION 3 (all):** Indicate your interest in working with the AONB Manager to inform responses from the South Devon AONB unit on behalf of the Partnership to the two consultations.

#### **4C CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY CRISIS – EMERGING INTERIM DEVON CARBON PLAN**

Doug Eltham, Environment and Sustainability Policy Officer at Devon County Council, provided an update on this agenda item to Partnership members. This was followed by a short presentation from the AONB Manager.

**ACTION 4 (all):**

- Highlight to the AONB Manager where difficult decisions may be required together with suggestions for constructive solutions.
- Indicate your interest in working with the AONB Manager as part of a small Task and Finish group to inform a constructive response by the South Devon AONB unit on behalf of the Partnership to the Interim Carbon Plan when launched.

#### **5A AONB PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING STRUCTURE**

The AONB Chair introduced this item that reviews the Structure of the South Devon AONB Partnership Committee meetings and went through the options provided in the papers.

5a.1 Partnership members discussed the recent trial of the public presentations and statements as well as the format of meetings generally. The trial sessions took place immediately before the main Committee meeting, with attendees' welcome to stay as observers.

5a.2 In discussion

i. To bring public statements into the main meeting.

Note, although there is an existing facility for members of the public to send in questions three weeks prior to each meeting, a minor change would be required to the constitution terms of reference for Partnership operation in order to incorporate public statements into the main meeting.

ii. Whether to keep the public presentation element.

- The AONB Manager mentioned the presentation could be focussed on the parish in which the meeting is being held. In 2017 at a Partnership meeting held in St Anne's Chapel, a presentation was provided that gave information on the parish of Bigbury, the importance of the AONB on the parish and the challenges being faced in the parish.

iii. When physical meetings resume

- Ensure observers are placed where they can hear and see presentations.
- In addition to invitations already sent to all AONB parish councils, specifically invite the local parish Chair to the meeting.

iv. The AONB Partnership Chair proposed to

- a. Reformat the presentation to focus on a specific Parish, scheduled to take place prior to the start of the main meeting.
- b. Provide an opportunity for public statements within the main meeting agenda, to take place immediately following introductions and apologies. Session to be limited to fifteen minutes duration with each statement taking up to three minutes.

**RESOLVED:** Partnership Committee members agreed to the Chair's proposals.

**ACTION 5 (RE):** Circulate proposed amendments to the constitution terms of reference prior to the next Partnership Committee meeting.

## **5B. GLOVER REVIEW – DIVERSITY AND AONB GOVERNANCE**

The AONB Manager went through the update provided in the papers.

5b.1 Two documents pertinent to this agenda item became available immediately prior to distribution of papers for the meeting. These documents came with a clear instruction that although they may be circulated to AONB Partnerships, they were not to be published. In this respect, the documents could not be included in the main papers but were distributed with them as separate addendums - 1 & 2.

5b.2 The AONB Manager asked Partnership members to provide feedback, in particular about how to increase diversity and broaden representation including ideas to engage younger people.

In discussion:

- An advantage of meeting remotely is the ability to involve people that would not ordinarily be able to attend physical meetings. For example, representatives from outside the AONB who visit as tourists, perhaps from Plymouth or Exeter, could attend online.
- To attract other age groups
  - Increase use of social media messaging to promote the AONB.
  - Invite a rolling representative from the colleges or schools.

- Perhaps work in partnership with the National Trust who are also seeking to engage with a more diverse audience.
- Compile a single page summary of what South Devon AONB Partnership seeks to achieve by increasing engagement and diversity. This would then be used to help people understand and feel motivated to participate.

**ACTION 6 (all)**: Send thoughts on this to the AONB Manager. A single page summary will be prepared by the AONB Manager and the AONB Chair prior to the next meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to carry forward this topic onto next meeting agenda for further discussion.

- Annual Forum was discussed
  - An opportunity to increase public engagement. Could be a public event, for example hold in a public place. Amenity groups could put people forward to speak about the AONB at the event.
  - Look at timing and format

**ACTION 7 (all)**: Share views on format and timing of next year's Annual Forum to the AONB Manager, to be incorporated into a white paper for the next meeting.

## **6A. CURRENT AND RECENT KEY PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

An update on development management matters of note was circulated in the papers.

- 6a.1 The AONB Manager informed Partnership members that the last Core Funding Group meeting approved an option to bring in planning office support to year end. A number of opportunities are being explored to deliver this.
- 6a.2 The Inglewood application in Torbay has an appeal date set for January 2022.

## **6B. PLANNING UPDATE COVERING THE LAST SIX MONTHS**

Provided as a separate report.

### **6b.1 In discussion**

- Amenity Groups would like to see the AONB consultation response come through more quickly to help and encourage others to send in a response.
  - When asked if the additional planning resource would allow for an early indication of an AONB holding objection the AONB Manager confirmed that having additional resources allows for opportunities to do more. In straight forward scenarios the AONB response has gone in quickly however this is not always possible for example where key aspects of documentation are missing.
  - The AONB Manager reminded Partnership that he is happy to have conversations or email correspondence on planning applications.
- It was suggested that AONB Standing Advice could be helpful in the first instance with reference to AONB Planning Guidance, to include NPPF assessment of whether the application is 'major/minor' and alternative sites etc. The AONB Manager reminded Partnership members of the trial of standard responses that took place previously. There were elements that worked well but also some that did not, so this approach was withdrawn. This will be revisited in the light of the updated AONB Planning Protocol and current caseload.

- It was mentioned that at a recent Development Management Committee Meeting, the lack of an AONB response was taken as no objection. A critical point of principal as clearly set out in the AONB Planning Protocol, developed with South Hams District Council and adopted at our March 2020 Partnership meeting, is that

*“the absence of a consultation response [from the AONB Unit] must not be taken to mean no objection”.*

See clause e) to the section entitled Development Management Process in the March agenda papers attached and repeated below for convenience.

*“The local planning authorities will:*

*e) In cases where the AONB Unit is unable to respond to a consultation this should not be taken to mean that the Partnership does not consider there to be any (significant) adverse impacts on the purpose of AONB designation. For the avoidance of doubt, the absence of a consultation response must not be taken to mean no objection;”*

- AONB representation on Design Review Panels, where these are formed, was suggested.  
**ACTION 8 (PS):** Create a paper for presentation at the next meeting of the AONB Partnership Committee.

#### **6C. AONB STAFF ACTIVITY REPORT**

An update on AONB staff activity will be circulated post meeting.

#### **NEXT MEETING AND 2021 PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING DATES**

Locations and themes for meetings will be announced nearer the time.

- **NEXT MEETING**

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020, via remote video meeting

- **PROPOSED MEETING DATES 2021**

12<sup>th</sup> March 2021, via remote video meeting

25<sup>th</sup> June 2021, venue TBC

26<sup>th</sup> November 2021, venue TBC

**These minutes remain as draft until approved at the next meeting of the South Devon AONB Partnership Committee.**