



Dorset AONB Partnership
Hosted by Dorset County Council
County Hall, Dorchester DT1 1XJ

tel: 01305 228246
email: dorsetaonb@dorsetcc.gov.uk
web: www.dorsetaonb.org.uk
twitter: @DorsetAONB

Dorset AONB Partnership Board Meeting, 10.00am, Thurs 17th May 2018

Draft minutes

Present:

Chairman: Jim White (also Dorset Local Nature Partnership - LNP)

Local Authority Members:

Cllr Peter Webb (Purbeck District Council), Cllr Hilary Cox (Dorset County Council), Cllr Deidre Skipwith (North Dorset District Council)

Sector representatives:

Robert Lasseter (National Farmers' Union - NFU), Rupert Best (Country Land and Business Association - CLA), Hannah Jefferson (National Trust), Alison Moore (Local Enterprise Partnership - LEP)

Defra family officers:

Ian Alexander (Natural England)

Local Authority officers:

Alison Turnock (Purbeck District Council - PDC), Hilary Jordan (West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland and North Dorset District Council)

DAONB Team: Ian Rees (Countryside Officer), James Sharpe (South Dorset Ridgeway Project Manager), Julie Hammon (Stepping into Nature Project Officer), Steph Aburrow (Stepping into Nature), Katharine Wright (Dorset Food & Drink Coordinator), Marie McLeish (South Dorset Ridgeway Learning Projects Manager), Sally King (Visitor, Tourism & Access Manager), Sue Dampney (Communications Officer), Tom Munro (AONB Manager), Jill Hearing (South Dorset Ridgeway Project Officer),

Apologies:

Louise Stratton (National Farmers' Union - NFU), Brian Bleese (Purbeck Heritage Network), Cllr Audrey Burch (North Dorset District Council), Will Langer (CLA), Sam Rose (Jurassic Coast Trust), Mat Low (Natural England), Ken Buchan (Dorset County Council), Sally King (Visitor, Tourism & Access Manager), Kiera Diment (Dorset Food & Drink), Richard Brown (Landscape Planning Officer),

Welcome, introductions and apologies

Chairman welcomed all with particular welcome to new Board member Hannah Jefferson (National Trust).

1. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Subject to one correction (changing 'Economic' to 'Enterprise'), the minutes of the last meeting were agreed as correct

2. Delivering the AONB Management Plan

TM presented on AONB team delivery.

Discussion points:

- a. Dorset Fingerpost Project: RB asked who owns the asset: they currently remain property of Dorset County Council. However there is potential to develop a better-resourced project which could look at asset transfer to the community. RB raised the question of spelling mistakes on fingerposts: TM replied that some are preserved (in restorations) as a locally distinctive quirk; some are recent mistakes which may warrant rectifying. TM encouraged the board to alert the team to any spelling

inconsistencies. DS stated that the restoration projects were expensive, and community groups may be more willing to contribute to restoration if they were subsequently able to insure them.

- b. Low Carbon Dorset programme: RB asked if there was opportunity for hydro-power generation. IR explained that it's not got widespread potential in Dorset due to relatively low flows and shallow gradients. IA added that using existing structures (e.g. mills or weirs) also could conflict with conservation objectives for that watercourse. DS cited an Archimedes screw project which was now partially redundant because of reduced flows.

RESOLUTION: The Board approved and noted progress on Management Plan delivery

JW added his congratulations to the team; RL added that it was astonishing

3. 2017-2018 Finance report

TM presented the paper.

Discussion points:

- a. PW asked about valuation of volunteer time. TM replied that the team use widely-recognised standard figures of £50 per day unskilled, £150 per day skilled and £350 per day professional.
- b. DS sought clarification about the unpaid nature of volunteers: TM confirmed that they are not paid. Some may claim travel expenses if travelling is part of their volunteer task.
- c. RL asked if the AONB team quantify the benefits that volunteers receive (e.g. health and wellbeing; social). TM replied that this is an area of interest: we record some feedback but are not currently collecting health and wellbeing data. JW added a personal view point, that the benefits to wellbeing are significant. JHe: volunteer surveys by the National Trust give a sense of how important it is to people, but it is difficult to quantify.

RESOLUTION: The Board congratulated the team on the funding leverage demonstrated in the accounts

4. Management Plan Review

TM presented the paper.

Discussion points:

- a. Board involvement in pre-consultation draft: the team will ensure Board Members have a chance to comment on the pre-consultation draft.
- b. RB asked if the Review Group contained sufficient agricultural experience/knowledge. TM replied that it was at least partially covered by two representatives on that group and that agriculture specialists had fed into the 'expert review' stage. However, TM would be alert to this potential issue and could recruit another volunteer accordingly.

The board contributed to the process in a workshop session.

RESOLUTION: The Board delegates the preparation of a pre-consultation draft to the review overview group

5. South Dorset Ridgeway Partnership (presentation)

JS led the presentation with support from JHe and MMCL, and showed the short film published by the Arts Development Company which can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/TazhDziPrQ8>

Discussion points:

- a. Question from **RL**: have countryside stewardship schemes prepared as a result of the partnership been agreed by Natural England? Answer by **JS** and **JHe**: some applications have gone live, but others haven't due to RPA backlog. There was a discussion about the backlog and implications on the environment, mental health of Natural England staff, leading to high turnover and on the financial situation of local farmers. **RL** expressed sympathy for Natural England staff. **IA** responded: they are complicated schemes, but they are complicatedly administered. **JHe** added that funding

from the South Dorset Ridgeway LPS has allowed schemes to be submitted where they otherwise wouldn't have been.

- b. **RL** mentioned that the drystone wall at Gould's hill is fantastic, and we should go and see it.
- c. **HJ** highlighted the importance of continuity amongst partners. **JW** mentioned the benefits to the individuals themselves, but delivery only succeeds with a high-quality coordinator.
- d. Comment from **JW**: amazing amount achieved, with most targets exceeded. It was inspirational stuff and has laid foundations for the future. He was really encouraged by the numbers of young people engaged.
- e. Question from **RL**: It is part of national trail, but is it in the national trail booklet, published by Artem? If not: how do we get in? Now that project is coming to end, how do update the contents, to include links to the film?

Action: James Sharpe to look into updating national trail publication

6. National policy direction: 25 Year Environment Plan & Health & Harmony (Agriculture Command paper)

TM presented on the 25 Year Environment Plan, picking out key areas of currently delivery by the AONB team and areas of opportunity for future activity.

Discussion point:

- a. HJe asked if there was a risk that a top-down review of protected landscapes may not allow the current degree of local adaptation to delivery as seen among the various AONB partnerships. TM replied that – while we don't yet know the extent of this review – Defra officials appreciate this factor.

IA presented a personal perspective with reference to the policy direction outlined in the Agriculture Command paper. Key points:

- The Knepp Estate's rewilding project and how it exemplifies a land-based business 'getting off a treadmill' of high inputs, illustrating how to make an alternative living outside of the subsidy environment.
- The future of farming post-Brexit: the Basic Payment Scheme will be withdrawn. For small farmers, this is quite often the difference between profit and loss. Combined with increased age of farmers, and less interest from children to take on liability, change is on the horizon.
- 'Clean meat' and 'clean milk' are technological developments backed by some agriculture-based business (Cargills), happening in EU & US. Stem cells are used to grow the products in lab environments, eliminating big inefficiencies in energy conversion. If the price of these products come down and they become more mainstream, the niche for farmers to provide commodity meat and milk will reduce. As c40% arable crops are grown for feeding intensively-reared animals this could have big implications for the farmed environment. If farming, as we know it, is no longer required to provide bulk commodities there are opportunities for higher quality, more sustainable farming practices – in particular those which conserve high-quality habitats and landscapes.

Discussion points (largely on clean meat/milk):

- b. Feedstock for the lab processes would still be agriculturally-derived, but much less (in volume) required
- c. Consumer demand may not be sufficient for this technology to take off
- d. Risk of exporting environmental degradation in the same manner as that associated with many manufactured goods.
- e. Impact on land prices (devaluation likely): BPS has likely caused some inflation of land prices but this is probably a small portion of the value increases seen over the last two decades: land prices bear little relation to its annual productivity
- f. Government policy likely to continue to be a major driver in dictating agricultural practices, but the emphasis is broadly shifting from policy encouraging production to policies promoting conservation and resource protection. There was a consensus that this shift should be welcomed.

7. Local Government Review

Hilary Jordan gave a verbal update.

Secretary of State for Local Government has approved the merger of Dorset's local authorities into 2 Unitary Authorities. All of Dorset AONB's Dorset area will fall into the new Dorset Council area (the AONB includes very small areas of Devon & Somerset).

The Structural Change Order is being put before parliament, with a decision expected in June. Consequent orders will follow. A Joint Committee has been established for the Dorset Council area, which will become the Shadow Authority once the structural change order has been passed. This includes all elected members from the County, District and Borough Councils which will form the Unitary. As this is a very large body (c175 elected members), full Joint Council meetings will be rare and many decisions will be taken by a shadow executive made up of c20 elected members. This is likely to be formed in June.

Prior to 1st April 2019 (vesting date) some senior staff appointments will be made moving towards a Chief Executive in autumn. Depending on the start date of this appointment, they may be able to make Director-level appointments to start on vesting day. Key tasks will be to form a legal and balanced budget.

All other staff (including the AONB team) will be TUPE'd across to the new authority in April. Full service re-organisation will start when the Director-level appointments have been made.

8. Partners updates

Due to insufficient time, partners were asked to add only key items of importance and relevance:

Purbeck Local Plan: PW updated the Board. PDC are currently redrawing the plan, and will undertake a brief process consultation before submission to inspector in March next year. There was concern from the AONB over their small sites policy, but PW is hopeful that this has been addressed.

Consultation on **WDDC and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan** later this year

Consultation on the **North Dorset Local Plan** early next year.

LEP Growing Places Fund has been launched <http://dorsetlep.co.uk/funding/growing-places-fund/>

The fund is a repayable loan to support capital investment which creates housing and job opportunities in Dorset. The Fund may also be used where businesses are unable to access alternative funding mechanisms for viable schemes that will deliver economic growth and support Dorset LEP's strategic objectives. The application deadline is 22nd June for this round.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 15TH November 2018

If you wish to have items added to the agenda for that meeting, please ensure suggestions are sent to Tom Munro t.munro@dorsetcc.gov.uk by 5pm Monday 15th October so they may be considered by the AONB Steering Group.