

**Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee
23 April 2009, 2:00pm, Hornby Village Hall**

Minutes

Present

Lancashire County Council

County Councillor Jean Yates (Chair)
County Councillor Mary Wilson (Vice Chair)

Messrs: Hetty Byrne, Holly Gregson (Minutes), Cathy Hopley, Don Mckay, Mike Pugh, John Rhodes, Sandra Silk, Tarja Wilson

Pendle Borough Council

Councillor James Starkie

Wyre Borough Council

Councillor Roger Brooks
Alison Boden

Bowland Land Owners and Farmers Group

Henry Bainbridge

Lancashire Association of Local Councils

Michael Helm

Natural England

Stuart Padley

Ramblers Association

David Kelly

Yorkshire Local Council Association

Colin Price

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Andrew Gouldstone

Resident: Geoff Morries

County Councillor Mary Wilson

Prior to the meeting commencing, the Chair noted that County Councillor Mary Wilson would be retiring from political life at the June elections in June 2009. She thanked Cllr Wilson for her commitment to the committee and wished her well for the future.

Cllr Wilson thanked the committee for their kind words and noted she felt honoured to have worked with such pleasant, hard working, and enthusiastic team of people.

Apologies for Absence

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| Cllr Rosemary Elms | Ribble Valley Borough Council |
| Cllr Anthony Gornall | Preston City Council |
| Cllr Donny Whaites | Craven District Council |
| Chris Binney | Pendle Borough Council |
| Dan Bond | Environment Agency |
| Duncan Byrne | Wyre Borough Council |
| Andrew Dobson | Lancaster City Council |
| Ian Grindy | United Utilities |
| Colin Hirst | Ribble Valley Borough Council |
| Laura Kennedy | Craven District Council |
| Susan MacDonald | AONB Unit |

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes were agreed as a correct and accurate record.

Matters Arising

All matter arising are items on the agenda.

New AONB Management Plan

Don McKay noted that the final version of the Management Plan had been approved by Natural England and would now be sent to the Secretary of State. He added that a new and innovative approach would be taken with the plan which would be available on the Forest of Bowland website as an interactive PDF. Hetty Byrne went through how the plan would work highlighting that each objective and its related action would have its own webpage from which there would be an update section where partners would be able to record progress on line. It is hoped that this would make reporting easier, more efficient and transparent and, also, reduce the amount of paper that is used. Hetty added that the system would not be technical and training would be given to those who require it. Hetty added that the councils had approved the document and it would be available on line shortly.

Resolved

That:

- i. The report be noted; and
- ii. Partners be encouraged to make full use of the new web based reporting system once it is available on line.

Review of Governance

Don McKay noted that earlier in the year the AONB unit went through a review of governance to look at the internal staffing and structure of the partnership. He explained that the responsibilities in relation to the Management Plan have been distributed amongst the team leading to a number of changes in job titles and roles. He added that Sandra Silk had recently joined the team as the Landscapes Stories Project Officer.

Don added that whilst undertaking the review it became evident that there was a gap in the ability to delivery the core purpose 'to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural landscape'. Previously advice from other authorities have been sought however this is becoming more difficult as workloads increase, therefore it is proposed to appoint a full time post of 'Landscape and Biodiversity Officer' when funding becomes available. However, in the short term the budget only allows for the appointment of a part time officer.

Don went on to explain that the review also looked at the structure of the partnership and it was felt that it would be appropriate to disband the Officers Technical Group (OTG) and replace this with a number of themed, and task and finish group which better reflect the work that the unit undertakes. These would then update the Joint Advisory Committee on progress alongside information from the interactive Management Plan. It is hoped the proposed arrangements would allow for more focused and constructive meetings.

Resolved

That the report be noted and the recommended proposals are adopted for:

- i. new team roles and amended job titles;
- ii. securing funds to appoint a new Landscape and Biodiversity Officer;
- iii. the disbanding of the OTC and the setting up of new theme, and task and finish groups in its place;
- iv. quarterly e-bulletin to all partners; and
- v. revising the reporting mechanisms by replacing reporting of staff activities with feedback from partnership management group, themed groups, and task and finish groups.

New Draft Memorandum of Understanding

Don Mckay noted that the current 6 year Memorandum of Understanding signed by the local authority funding partners and Natural England in 2006 is due for review. Natural England have developed a new template which sets out how the partnership intends to work together, management arrangements and funding intensions of the partners.

Stuart Pasley noted that Natural England is still waiting for the national agreement to be signed and once this has been done they will work on local agreements.

Resolved

That:

- i. the committee support the proposal that the local authorities and Natural England, as principle funding agency, enter into a new memorandum of understanding to replace the existing memorandum;
- ii. officers prepare and circulate a draft text for consideration and agreement by funding partners; and
- iii. once agreement has been reached on the final text, by Natural England and the funding partners, then the funding partners and Natural England are requested to sign the Memorandum of Understanding.

Budget Update 2009/10

John Rhodes referred Members to the report and Appendix 'A' which reflects an up to date position in respect of the 2009/10 revenue budget taking into account changes which have occurred since the Committee approved the 2009/10 budget and requested that partner authorities make provision in their budgets. John highlighted the changes as follows:

- Natural England confirmed a higher level of grant offer totalling £282,600 (an additional £14,100).
- Progress has been made with the move to Dunsop Bridge which would now take place at the Start of October 2009, which has resulted in £6,800 of additional premise and travel costs requiring to be met from the 2009/10 budget.
- Lancaster City Council has only been able to offer a contribution for 2009/10 of £6,100 (£1,000 less than requested) but has agreed to make a contribution of £15,000 from its Local Strategic Partnership Second Homes Fund to the projects budget - sustainable development fund.
- £26,300 has been used from the projects budget to fund the continued part-time employment of Business Development and Community Engagement posts.
- The budget for the Landscape Stories project has been updated to reflect changes in the various contributions which have allowed increased expenditure.

John noted that the above changes have allowed a provision in the Committee's budget for projects in 2009/10 of £164,800, towards which officers would seek to draw in match funding.

The Chair praised Lancaster City Council for making £15,000 available out of their Second Homes Budget.

Responding to a query, from Councillor Brooks, it was explained that the second homes allocation offered by Lancaster City Council would be for 1 year only as they are allocated and considered yearly. It was also mentioned that Lancaster City Council also part fund other projects, e.g. cycle paths so do contribute a lot to the Forest of Bowland.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Draft Projects Programme 2009/10

Don McKay noted that officers have a good track record of attracting additional funds into the AONB budget from a range of other grant sources and partners as well as in kind help from landowners, farmers and local communities. Don referred Members to Appendix 'B' which set out a target programme for the officers in 2009/10. He highlighted some of the projects including habitat creation work, Gisburn Forest Mountain Bike Trails and the Sustainable Development Fund.

The Chair noted the great projects that have been undertaken and congratulated the officers on their ability to bring in additional funding.

Resolved

That the Committee approve the Target Projects Programme for 2009/10 as drafted at Appendix 'B' and to ask the officers to make necessary adjustments, including the virement of £26,300 from the projects budget to the non core employees (£25,500) and travel and subsistence (£800) budgets, in light of the funding offers received from Natural England and to continue to seek additional funding to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

Projects Programme 2008/09: Countryside Officers Reports

Tarja Wilson referred Members to the report and offered to take questions on the work that the County Council has undertaken.

The Chair noted that she was pleased to see that tramper trails are being developed as they are fantastic in helping low mobility people access the Countryside. Michael Helm agreed with this highlighting how it also benefits the family and friends of those with low mobility as days out can involve the whole family.

Alison Boden highlighted that Wyre Borough Council had been working on the Garstang Walking Festival which would run from 9 May to 17 May 2009, and where possible tramper scooters would be made available. Alison added that a number of brochures would also be available soon including a historical pub trail and Active Wyre (a brochure which aims to bring together different sporting activities).

The Chair thanked the Countryside Officers for all the excellent work they had achieved during 2008/09.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Proposal for Claughton Moor Windfarm

The Chair explained that it was hoped that Andrew Dobson would be available to discuss the proposed windfarm, however due to personal circumstances he was not able to attend. She therefore suggested deferring the item until he next meeting.

Don McKay noted that a formal planning application has not yet been submitted for the proposed windfarm; however planning has been sought for an access road to the site. He added that the proposal is for 20 126m high turbines and that the AONB unit

is concerned that the turbines would have a negative impact on the landscape and views throughout Bowland. He felt that it would be appropriate to take this forward once the results of planning for the access road are known.

Don added that the AONB support renewable energy and windfarms in appropriate areas and that his concerns stem from their location on a designated landscape and that the developers don't appear to have fully investigated other more appropriate sites.

The Chair noted that she is also concerned about the proposed site and felt that windfarms should be located in appropriate places; not designated landscapes or residential areas. She added that if planning consent was granted a special meeting could be held to discuss how to take this forward.

Michael Helm added that he was very disappointed that such a proposal was even being considered and felt that the negative views be passed on to Lancaster City Council.

Resolved

That, should planning consent be granted for the access road that a special meeting of the Committee be held to discuss the windfarm proposals further.

Green Tourism, BTEF and Bowland Experience

Cathy Hopley referred Members to the report which contained information on the Bowland Experience and Green Tourism.

Resolved

That the Committee ratify the Chairman and Vic Chairman's action in agreeing to support the setting up of a Bowland Tourism and Environmental Fund (BTEF) as a Registered Charity and Bowland Experience Limited as a subsidiary company and to the appoint County Councillor Jean Yates as Chair of the Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee as a Director in both bodies.

Sustainable Development Fund Report

Cathy Hopley explained that a grant of £61,666 was allocated to the Sustainable Development Fund by Natural England in 2008/09, however in January 2009 Natural England offered a further £10,000 if it could be allocated and spent, which was done. Therefore, a total of £71,617 was allocated to 17 projects in the Forest of Bowland area.

Cathy added that County Councillor Wilson is currently the chair of the decision panel and following her retirement as a county councillor a replacement would be sought. The Chair highlighted that it was not necessary to have a politician as the chair so it was agreed, with County Councillor Wilson's consent, that she would continue to chair the panel.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Festival, Communications and Publicity

Members were referred to the report and comments and questions were taken.

The Chair noted that she was pleased with the improvements that have been made to the Forest of Bowland branding and that it was getting to the stage where it was becoming instantly recognisable amongst other publications.

Andrew Gouldstone from RSPB highlighted that using funding from Ribble Valley Borough Council and the AONB unit, 3 educational sessions have been run in 8 primary schools. The children have been learning about the Forest of Bowland AONB, its key species and habitats, land use and birds in the area as well as taking part in the RSPB's Great Garden Birdwatch. He added that the scheme had been very well received and it is hoped that it can be rolled out during 2009/10 to include more schools. He thanked the funding partners for their help.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Environmental Policy

Cathy Hopley noted that the move to the new offices combined with the current climate, and our efforts to support local tourism businesses to become more sustainable, have prompted the ANOB unit to develop an Environmental Policy. She added that proposed policy is shown at Appendix 'C' and sets out the aims to meet the following objectives:

- Save energy,
- Travel wisely,
- Save resources,
- Purchase fairly and locally, and
- Conserve and enhance the AONB.

The Chair confirmed that she is happy to endorse the plan.

County Councillor Mary Wilson noted that the Dales Rail service currently runs from Easter to October each year, she suggested that this service could be extended to run longer as it stops at various places in the AONB. She added that the line is also under used and thought it could be promoted more.

Michael Helm highlighted that at the Lancashire Local Access Forum a discussion has taken place regarding taking bikes and wheelchairs on trains. He noted that only 2 in 7 carriages need space to accommodate a wheelchair and there is not legislation governing train operations to carry bikes. He felt that in encouraging people to use sustainable transport it was necessary to lobby for amendments to be made to legislation regarding taking bikes and wheelchairs on trains and requested that it be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

The Chair agreed with this and suggested that Oliver Starkey, the County Council's Environment Directorate Accessibility Planning and Social Inclusion Officer be invited to attend the meeting to discuss this further. It was also suggested that Peter Moore, Chairman of Ribble Valley Rail, also be invited to attend.

Resolved

That:

- i. the committee support the adoption of the AONB Environmental Policy and to recommend it to partners; and
- ii. Wheelchairs and Bikes on Trains be added to the next agenda for further discussion, and that Oliver Starkey and Peter Moore be invited to attend the meeting to contribute to these discussions.

Any Other Business

Publicity within the Forest of Bowland Boundaries

Geoff Morries, a resident of Newton and retired County Ecologist highlighted that he is very impressed with the level of work that is undertaken in the Forest of Bowland. However, he added that there appeared to be a general lack of awareness about the core purpose and values of the AONB by residents of the area (he acknowledged that this was not exclusive). He added that residents don't even know about big events, such as the Bowland Festival. He felt that more should be done to raise awareness in the local area including highlighting contact details for the AONB unit.

The Chair agreed this was a problem and noted that the new Management Plan and website might assist. Don McKay added that it is intended that a signage strategy would be put into place that would raise awareness amongst local communities and Parish Councils that they were part of the AONB.

Councillor Roger Brooks noted he also felt that the residents of Bowland could be unaware of what is happening in the local area but felt that there was a lot of information available but whether people take this in was another matter. He added that gradually awareness would increase but this could take a few years to achieve.

Henry Bainbridge also noted that Farmers are very aware of the AONB landscape and some have adapted to use the special characteristics to generate income.

Alison Boden suggested that an easy way of branding the AONB would be to allow partner organisations, such as Parish Councils, to use the Forest of Bowland Logo. Don agreed that the logo could be used to raise awareness for example on Parish Council and village notice boards but felt that its use needs to be closely monitored as there have been instances when the former logo had been misused. He added that use of the logo needs strictly 'policing' to avoid this which was a task undertaken by the Communications & Publicity Officer, Susan MacDonald.

Forest of Bowland Signs

Councillor James Starkie noted the signs which mark entry to the Forest of Bowland were becoming faded and shabby looking so felt that they needed refreshing. Don noted he was aware of this and designs for new signs have been looked at but due to

budgetary constraints it has not been possible to take this forward, however he noted that if members felt strongly this issue could be reprioritised higher.

The Chair noted that bad signs often reflect badly on an area so agreed that this should be explored. She suggested that an Arts Council Grant might be available to assist with renewing the signs.

Date of Next Meeting

3 November 2009 (postponed from 9 October) to be hosted by Wyre Borough