

**Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee
25 April 2008, 2pm, Eldroth Village Hall**

Minutes

Present

Lancashire County Council

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

Messrs: Lucy Barron, Holly Gregson (Minutes), Cathy Hopley, Don McKay,
Dave Oyston, Dave Padley, Mike Pugh, John Rhodes

Craven District Council

Hazel Smith

English Heritage

Jennie Stopford

Environment Agency

Dan Bond

Lancashire Association of Parish and Town Councils

Michael Helm

Natural England

Paul Green
Stuart Pasley

North Yorkshire County Council

Graham Megson

Preston City Council

Martin Putsey

Ramblers Association

David Kelly

Ribble Valley Borough Council

Colin Hirst

RSPB

Andrew Gouldstone

Wyre Borough Council

Councillor Roger Brooks

Alison Boden

Duncan Byrne

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Lin Barrington

Councillor Philip Boyle

County Councillor Peter Elliott

Councillor Rosemary Elms

Councillor Anthony Gornall

Ian Grindy

Susan McDonald

Councillor Colin Price

Tarja Wilson

Craven District Council

Pendle Borough Council

Lancashire County Council

Ribble Valley Borough Council

Preston City Council

United Utilities

Lancashire County Council

Lancaster City Council

Lancashire County Council

Natural England Presentation

Before the committee meeting commenced it was agreed that Paul Smith, Lancashire and Cheshire Area Manager, Natural England would give a brief and informal presentation to the committee.

Paul noted that on the 21st May 2008 Natural England would be releasing 5 documents:

- **Manifesto:** This details how Natural England would spread their messages and engage with the wider community.
- **Corporate Plan**
- **Annual Plan**
- **State of the Natural Environment Report:** This report brings together information on the state of the natural environment and details how this information would be acted upon. Paul noted that there would be targeted intervention, e.g. AONBs, that there is a growing interest in the countryside however this tends to be passive, interactions with communities is poor and that many areas have a rich variety of species and habitats. He added that the policy would be underpinned.
- **Strategic Direction Document:** Paul explained that this document was first published 18 months ago and is being reviewed as many of the original pressures have been completed and new things need to be added

to the document. Paul highlighted that the major challenges that Natural England face are climate change and how we can adapt, improving the relevance of the countryside in peoples everyday life, and the growing popularity of the countryside and demands on resources.

Paul added that Natural England would be changing direction to look at landscapes on a wider scale and how changes to one area can contribute to:

- Ecosystems
- The engagement and understanding of people and their perception of the natural environment
- Building a economic case for a Natural Environment
- Stronger special environment
- Integrated solutions.

Michael Helm noted that there was little use of the words 'access' and 'recreation' in Natural England's documentation and enquired to the priority of this. Paul explained that Natural England refers to 'the enjoyment of the countryside' which encompasses access in a broader sense and so the access is not used as often as it perhaps would be. Michael felt that Natural England has a negative attitude towards access and asked if he could have confirmation of the access priorities. This information would be provided outside of the meeting.

Graham Megson expressed concerns over funding for wildlife sites and nature reserves; he felt that if they fell outside of Higher Level Stewardships then securing funding would become even more difficult. Paul noted that individual sites would not be funded but funding would be distributed to areas that would enjoy a wider benefit.

Lucy Barron asked that Natural England consider a 3 year funding profile as it would be beneficial to be able to make long term funding commitments. Paul confirmed that it was Natural England's aspiration to move towards 3 year funding but this would take some time.

The Chair noted that she also sits on the Arnsdale and Silverdale AONB Committee and they were in the same situation regarding funding. She added that a letter had been written to Natural England, and copied to Ministers and other interested parties, to lobby for 3 year funding.

Resolved

That a letter be wrote to Natural England, coping in interested parties, to request that a 3 year funding profile be considered.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes were agreed as a correct and accurate record.

Matters Arising

Reviewing the Management Plan

Don McKay noted that since the last meeting of the Committee it had been decided that due to time constraints it would be more appropriate to bring in consultants to review the management plan. He added that they priced well and already had knowledge of the Forest of Bowland area.

Sustainable Development Fund

Don explained that there had been assurances from Natural England that there would be funding however as of yet it is not clear how much money is available. He added that the National Association of AONBs has met with Ministers to lobby for the continuity of this funding.

2008/09 Revenue Budget and Staffing Update

John Rhodes took members through the report and apologised for referring to Natural England as the Countryside Agency in the budgetary table. He highlighted that at the last meeting it was agreed that project money could be used to fund staff to deliver community engagement and business development work. He noted the following changes have been made regarding AONB Unit Staffing:

- The temporary post of Community Projects Officer has been extended until 31 March 2009 on a part time basis of 3 days per week.
- The temporary post of Business Development Officer (part time) has been extended until 31 March 2009. This post is funded by the revenue budget and additional contributions from Ribble Valley Borough Council.
- The temporary post of Information Officer (part time) has been extended to work on a part time basis of two days a week for 6 months from 1 April 2008 until 30 September 2008 and from 1 October 2008 to 31 March 2009 for one day a week to cover for the reduced hours being worked by the Publicity and Information Officer. This post is being funded by the pay savings being made from the v-time arrangements.

John explained that Appendix 'A' showed the previously agreed revenue budget for 2008/09 in column 2 and the effects on the budget of the staff proposals in column 3.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Relocation of the AONB Office

Don updated the group on the progress that has been made to finding a solution for relocation of the AONB office to a more central location; preferably Dunsop Bridge. He drew Members attentions to a number of maps which

showed the location of Dunsop Bridge within the AONB and the public transport routes to and from the area. He noted that he is working closely with Lancashire County Council's (LCCs) Property Group to negotiate a package with the Duchy of Lancaster. He added that cost savings are being made by reducing the amount of floor space and by introducing a degree of home working. It is estimated that yearly cost of the relocation would be about £16,000 plus an estimated £6,000 for staffs excess travel cost, which LCC are obliged to meet for 3 years. He added that the relocation would be funded from the projects budget reducing it to approximately £40,000. Don requested that the funding bodies consider making an additional contribution to the JAC in order to avoid the reduction to the Projects provision.

Responding to a query, from Councillor Roger Brooks, Don confirmed that a SWOT analysis had been carried out and had been distributed with the meeting papers from the 12 October 2007 meeting. He highlighted that the strengths include the location, accessibility for funding partners and increased community involvement. Whereas, the disadvantages include the poor public transport links. David Kelly enquired to the frequency of buses to Dunsop Bridge. Don explained that the B10 / B11, which are an important community resource, run hourly through the village.

The Chair noted that she has approached Chris Trinnick, LCCs Chief Executive, regarding relocating the AONB Office and he has agreed to write to the Duchy to request that lower rents be made available.

Graham Megson noted that his experience of moving an AONB office to a central location has been very positive and well received.

Colin Hirst expressed his support in moving the office as he felt the economic and rural benefits would be excellent but showed concerns over reducing the project budget. He added that he felt that Ribble Valley Borough Council, along with other councils, already have tight budgets and felt it would be difficult to obtain further funding. John Rhodes noted that the figures illustrated in Appendix 'B' column 4 showed the indicative estimations at 2008/09 prices of what the first full year effect would be, possibly 2009/10, assuming a continuation of the temporary posts. Don added that it was hoped that costs could be reduced further by using renewable energy sources and obtaining grants.

Resolved

That:

- i. In principle it be agreed to relocate the AONB offices to the former estate workshops, Dunsop Bridge subject to a satisfactory predevelopment and leasing arrangement being reached between LCC and the Duchy and to request that LCC enter into such an agreement.
- ii. Funding partners be requested to consider whether they could offer to increase their contribution to the JAC budget in 2009/10 above the

level of inflation in order to seek to offset the reduction to the project budget to meet new premises costs.

2008/09 Draft Programme of Projects

Don asked Members to refer to the report which outlined the target programme of project work. He noted that there was still some uncertainty regarding the level of funding that Natural England would make available and therefore the table has been prepared with the target budget and may need to be adjusted in light of the funding received. Don added that he felt the budget was well balanced but could be revised if a certain area needed more monies.

Resolved

That

- i. the target programme for 2008/09 as set out in the report and accompanying table be approved;
- ii. officers be requested to make necessary adjustments in light of the funding offers received from Natural England; and
- iii. officers continue to seek additional funding to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

Review of the Management Plan

Lucy Barron updated the committee on the progress that has been made with the Management Plan review. She noted that consultants had been brought in to assist with the review at a reasonable cost and that 12 workshops had been held to look at the Management Plan themes. Lucy thanked all those that had attended the workshops for their hard work and valuable views.

Lucy explained that the Plan is currently going through a policy review whereby the management plan objectives and actions are being checked against relevant regional and national strategies and policies to ensure they match. She added the plan will then be restructured and the actions and objectives would be made SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Time bound).

Lucy asked then when reviewing the Draft Management Plan Members consider if there are any gaps, their opinion of the structure, are the objects clear and encompassing, does it work for your organisation and are your aspirations included. She added that the Plan should be for the partnership not just the AONB unit.

Lucy felt that it was reassuring that a lot of the information in the previous plan was still valid and took Members through the main changes to the revised plan:

- European Landscape Convention would be incorporated;
- Monitoring and evaluation section would be more robust;

- A range of new strategies and groups have been included;
- Branding and communication work would be more focused on technology, especially the website;
- New objectives relating to Climate Change would be included and would be integrated into the plan as a whole as it is a key issue for future protection.

The committee were asked to give approval for the Chair and Vice Chair to be delegated the power to release the draft Management Plan for statutory consultation. Lucy reminded the committee this is a draft version and the final draft would be brought to the next committee meeting for final approval.

Don confirmed that the document was available electronically and hard copies for those who do not have computer access are available from either Lucy or Don.

Resolved

That the Chair and Vice Chair be given approval to release the draft Management Plan for statutory consultation.

AONB Officer Report

Don referred Members to the report which updates the committee on the work that he has undertaken.

Don noted that in 1999 the Forest of Bowland AONB were integral in the formation of a National Association of AONBs (NAAONB). He added that the NAAONB undertake a lot of excellent work on behalf of AONBs, including responding to government consultations and lobbying for continued funding, and is, therefore, a very valuable resource. Staff of the NAAONB have been putting in large amount of voluntary hours to deliver the required services. Don explained that the Association would be asking for an increase in subscription, possibly up to as much as £2,000, to fund staff time properly. He requested that Members support this proposal.

The Chair highlighted the success of a visit by Norwegian councillors, locals, professionals and academics who expressed an interest in sustainable tourism. He congratulated the team on making the visit a success.

Resolved

That

- I. the report be noted; and
- II. that Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee support the proposal to increase subscription to the NAAONB to properly fund staff time.

Assistant AONB Officer Report

Lucy referred Members to the report which updates the committee on the work that she has undertaken. She highlighted the traditional boundaries banners that have been produced and the Bowland Festival Arts development. She noted that since writing the report the Arts Council had approved the funding bid and that Green Close Studios would be working closely with the partnership to manage the project.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Publicity and Information Officer

It was highlighted that the Bowland Festival would take from 1st to the 8th June 2008, 76 events would be running and there have been nearly 500 expressions of interest. It was added that individuals are showing high interest and although most are from the local area some enquiries are from the further away. It was noted that Susan has also attended a Europarc Junior Ranger training course in Laufen, Germany and she is highly enthusiastic about the training. Susan hopes to run a similar scheme in Bowland with the view to running a camp in June 2009.

It was also noted that Susan and Hetty have undertaken a lot of work on the website (www.forestofbowland.com) and suggested that Members familiarise themselves with the information it contains. It was added that the annual report will be made available on line and asked for committee approval to distribute the report electronically this year. Hard copies could be printed on request.

Resolved

That

- i. progress be noted; and
- ii. agreement be given for the production of the annual report in electronic format only.

Communities and Funding Officer Report

a. Sustainable Bowland

Members were updated on the Sustainable Bowland Programme, with attention being drawn to the following:

- In two years there has been £400,000 grant aid which has been matched by nearly £400,000 private and community investment over the last 2 years.

- 17 tourism businesses have been accredited by the Green Tourism Business Scheme
- A number of new leaflets and other publications have been produced.
- 28 Local distinctiveness projects have been supported by the local community.
- Work has been undertaken regarding securing additional funding for the posts of Community Projects Officer, Business Development Officer and Information Officer.

Resolved

That:

- i. The success of the Sustainable Bowland Project be noted; and
- ii. Agreement be given to support further funding application to respond to the needs and opportunities identified.

b. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

The Committee was informed that 12 projects have been funded through the Sustainable Development Fund using the entire yearly budget. It was noted that alternative funding sources, such as the Lancashire County Council Climate Change Grant, are becoming available and so it is anticipated that the SDF could be reduced to this type of project in 2008/09. If this was the case then SDF project funding would need to become more targeted to areas of need.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

Lancashire Countryside Service Reports

a. North and West Bowland

Lucy Barron updated the group on the work that has been undertaken in North and West Bowland:

- There has been a BTCV hedging week which proved to be very popular. Alongside this other work on traditional boundaries has been undertaken including further hedge planting and dry stone walls.
- Work on low mobility access has been carried out, including a new tramper network at Cobble Hey and gate installation.

Lucy asked that Members refer to the report for a full list of the diverse activities that have been undertaken and the funding that has been secured.

The Chair congratulated officers on the funding that had been secured and awards that have been won.

b. Pendle and East Lancashire

Dave Oyston updated the group on the work that has been carried out in Pendle and East Lancashire:

- 3 Parish Lengthsmen undertake a lot of work in the area, such as road side clearing and traditional boundaries, and although some of the projects are small when you look at them as a whole a significant difference is achieved.
- Higham to Pendle Hall Bridleway has been improved and although this is not entirely within the AONB area Dave felt that it was important to ensure there is good access to Bowland. He added that 700m of hedge has been planted and that the route was suitable for all users.
- Low mobility access has been improved by replacing stiles with kissing gates and a riverside path at Sabden.
- Drainage has been improved on Lowehouses Bridleway which has increases the usability.

Michael Helm congratulated Dave on the access to Bowland route that he has worked on. He felt that it was important to have good access to the area and that this would dissuade some people to take horse boxes into Bowland.

c. East Bowland

Dave Padley took Members through the work that has been carried out in East Bowland.

- Work has been undertaken to provide a mill flag footpath at Stocks Reservoir which directs people from boggy areas and protects habitats and local wild flowers.
- Work on traditional boundaries has been undertaken including hedge laid by BTCV volunteers and a hedge laying competition at the Downham Estate. In addition to this, a contractor has been working with a local landowner on a one-to-one basis to teach him the skills that are required in traditional boundaries work.
- Stone carving workshops have been held in Bolton-by-Bowland at which waymarkers for use in the AONB were produced. Dave noted the excellent atmosphere and enthusiasm at the workshop.

d. Wyre

Duncan Byrne took members through the work that has been undertaken in Wyre:

- Hosted Conference of Association of Voluntary Countryside Wardens at Bleasdale. Many of the people which attended the conference did not know the Bowland area prior to the conference but have returned to the area and would be attending the Garstang Walking Festival in May.
- The Garstang Walking Festival would take place from the 3rd to 11th May 2008 with half of the activities taking place with the AONB boundaries.

- Practical work such as traditional boundaries and footpath improvements were also undertaken.

The Chair congratulated the officers on all the fantastic work they carry out and the Vice Chair noted that staff enthusiasm was excellent.

Any Other Business

Lancashire Rural Futures

Don informed that group that Lancashire Rural Futures was closed in March 2008 due to the Regional Development Agency deciding not to continue funding. However a small team of staff have been retained on a temporary basis. Don asked that approval be given to try and influence the continuity of this project.

Resolved

That approval be given to try and influence the retention of Lancashire Rural Futures.

Carbon Compensation Scheme

The Chair explained that Lancashire County Council is undertaking a Carbon Compensation Scheme from which all the money raised would be donated to Uganda. She noted that many people would be returning to villages from refuge camps but many have been outcast by their families and lack basic knowledge and skills, such as farming. The monies raised would go towards eco housing and helping provide some basic skills. The Chair added that visits would be made to the Forest of Bowland and asked that if approached for information to co-operate and offer advice and help as necessary.

Date and time of Next Meeting

Friday 3 October 2008, 2:00pm to be hosted by Ribble Valley Borough Council.