

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP

**Minutes of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership Management Group held on
Thursday, 6th July 2017 at Forbes Lounge, Hemyock Village Hall**

Present:

Bruce Payne (vice-chairman)	Special Appointee
Cllr Dave Durdan	Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cllr Martin Wale	South Somerset District Council
Gordon Field	Blackdown Hills Artist & Makers
Heather Stallard	Blackdown Hills Business Association
Graham Long	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Dr Margaret Hall	CPRE, East Devon & Exeter
David Northcote-Wright	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Elaine Hayes	Special Appointee
Bob Nelson	Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Also present:

Blackdown Hills AONB staff team: Linda Bennett (**LB**), Jackie Vaughan (**JV**), Lisa Turner (**LT**),
Blackdown Hills Natural Futures Manager: James Maben (**JM**)
Nature & Wellbeing Project Officer: Kristen Lambert (**KL**)

Members of the public: One member of the public was present

Apologies: Cllr Paul Diviani (chairman) (East Devon District Council); Cllr John Berry (Devon County Council); Cllr John Thorne (Somerset County Council); Cllr Frank Rosamond (Mid Devon District Council); David Westbrook (Natural England); Mark Pope (National Farmers Union); Clare Groom (AONB staff team); John Greenshields (Blackdown & East Devon Woodland Association); Martin Turner (Blackdown Hills Hedge Association); Jocelyn Pritchard (Blackdown Hills Parish Network); Simon Larkins (National Trust); Peter Chamberlain (Devon County Council)

ITEM 1 Welcome, introductions and apologies	
The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were carried out.	
ITEM 2 Questions from the public	
No questions were raised.	
ITEM 3 Minutes and matters arising from 2nd March 2017	
Amendments 6.3 EH: Replace 'tourism marketing agency' with 'Wild Somerset project' DNW: Amend to read: Somerset Wildlife Trust is increasingly concerned about fly-tipping in the area, especially Dommatt Wood and Quants, which has increased since the introduction of restrictions on items that can be taken free to local waste recycling centres in Somerset. It is feared that the situation will worsen with the proposed introduction of three weekly rather than fortnightly waste collections later this year. When waste is dumped on private land it becomes the responsibility of the landowner.	

<p>Matters arising Bob Nelson (BN) requested an update on the formation of the Blackdown Hills AONB Countryside Fund Panel; LB explained that four local people have now volunteered to join the panel and the paperwork is in the process of being completed.</p> <p>ACTION: The Blackdown Hills Countryside Fund website should be updated to read that the £25,000 originally required to set up the fund has now been raised and that community grants will soon be available.</p> <p>The minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting.</p>	<p>CG</p>
<p>ITEM 4 AONB Team Report circulated prior to the meeting</p>	
<p>4.1 AONB team report, SDF and finances</p>	
<p>4.1.1 Crayfish Project The AONB’s application to the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Your Heritage programme has been successful and the project will run for 14 months from October 2017. A project officer will be appointed and be in place by October.</p> <p>4.1.2 Wellington Monument The National Trust’s application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of the monument was unsuccessful, however a revised bid has now been submitted and the outcome will be known at the end of September. The AONB will try to encourage the National Trust to get more involved with community engagement and events as this will support future bids.</p> <p>ACTION: LB& DNW to contact NT about closer working/community engagement</p> <p>4.1.3 Dunkeswell Abbey The local community is keen to investigate further the features of interest that were identified recently from a Lidar survey over the area and would support an application to HLF for a small ‘Sharing Heritage’ grant of between £3k-£10k. LB will continue to develop this project over the coming months.</p> <p>4.1.4 Restoration of traditional fingerposts Somerset parishes that wish to help with the restoration and maintenance of these heritage features will be guided by a handbook that is due to be published very soon. Signposts surveyed as part of the initiative will be plotted on an online map.</p> <p>A link to the handbook and map is available below: www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/schemes-and-initiatives/somerset-fingerpost-restoration-project/</p> <p>4.1.5 Apple Trail LB and LT convened a meeting between Cllr Jenny Brown (EDDC) and Duncan Gray (BHBA) and DCC/SCC Rights of Way officers to discuss the Apple Trail project which will be a promoted route of 55-60 miles between Sidmouth and Taunton, and link with the orchard heritage of the area. The Trail project team were advised that road safety audits for the trail</p>	<p>LB/ DNW</p>

<p>would need to be carried out as it was to be a promoted route. EH suggested that LT should contact Dave Edgcombe from North Devon AONB as he has experience in setting up a community orchard project. It was also suggested that they should also be encouraged to apply for a SDF grant for a feasibility study.</p> <p>4.1.6 Finances: End of year accounts for 2016-17 for the AONB Partnership and Sustainable Development Fund presented to the Management Group for approval.</p> <p>APPROVED: Members approved the financial figures that will be published in the Annual Review 2016-17.</p> <p>Financial information to the end of May 2017 Bob Nelson questioned the large overspend in NBK10 (Information and publicity budget); LB explained that this was due to work on a new website being carried forward from 2016-17.</p> <p>ACTION: A list of proposed project expenditure for 2017-18 to be sent to members with the minutes.</p>	<p>JV</p>
<p>4.2 Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project (BHNF)</p>	
<p>The BHNF team has engaged Daisi to create an opportunity for local primary schools to produce art work that reflects the Natural Futures project learning around this unique landscape.</p> <p>The art work from this project will be on display between 15th September and the end of November 2017 and invitations to the exhibition will be sent to members.</p> <p>Bruce Payne commented on how inspiring the Community Nature project networking meeting had been and a way forward to sustain this enthusiasm needs to be put in place. JM informed the group that legacy plans are in place and that Sammy Fraser the volunteer co-ordinator will be supporting the groups in the future.</p> <p>EH offered, for free, the new conference room at Ferne Animal Sanctuary for community group meetings; this could then be used as match funding when applying for grants.</p>	
<p>4.3 Recruitment of new AONB manager</p>	
<p>LB thanked management group members for attending the lunchtime interview sessions for the new AONB manager. A new manager has been appointed and will start on the 23rd August 2017.</p>	
<p>ITEM 5 AONB Partnership</p>	
<p>5.1 AONB Management Plan review Report circulated prior to the meeting</p>	
<p>The current management plan runs from 2014 -19 and the review process will need to start shortly to meet the timetable for adoption of the 2019 – 2024 version. The management plan is the responsibility of the local authorities however in practice the AONB Partnership produces it on their behalf.</p>	

<p>Information gathered from the business plan workshop at the November 2016 management group meeting will feed into the new management plan.</p> <p>BN requested that ultrafast broadband is included in the next management plan.</p> <p>EH suggested that it would be beneficial to work jointly on aspects that need to be carried out by all AONBs, e.g. Habitat Regulations Assessment could be procured as one contract, along with the printing of the final document.</p> <p>LT advised that, as with previous versions, this will be a key consideration.</p>	
<p>5.2 Making it Local (MiL) programme update Report circulated prior to the meeting</p>	
<p>MiL has been confirmed by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) as the best performing Local Action Group (LAG) in the country with the highest proportion of its budget committed and the largest number of projects supported. Due to this success and the fact there are sufficient applications in the pipeline to fully spend, the executive committee has advised that a request is made to the RPA requesting that if there is any underspend elsewhere in the country it be transferred to MiL in view of its proven track record delivery and list of awaiting applications.</p> <p>Two major MiL projects in the Blackdown Hills AONB have received funding; Ferne Animal Sanctuary and Otter Dairy ice creams.</p>	
<p>5.3 Briefings from partners</p>	
<p>David Northcote-Wright: The footpath from Wellington to the Monument has had long running problems due to its usage and being near a springline. Somerset Wildlife Trust, in discussion with SCC rights of way, is looking at improving the surface of the footpath at a cost of £8000 and could apply to the Sustainable Development Fund to support this work. A Wildlife Watch programme for children has taken place at the Jan Hobbs meadow in Bishopswood.</p> <p>Ash Dieback is widespread in the north of the Blackdown Hills mainly in saplings and as far south as Yarcombe; this will have a massive impact on the Northern Scarp. The Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum wants to understand how the loss of Ash trees is likely to affect the character and scenic qualities of the Devon countryside and is asking for photos showing views of landscapes in which Ash trees play an important part.</p> <p>It is important not to fell diseased trees as research needs to be carried out to see if they recover. A map on the Forestry Commission website shows the current situation in the UK http://tinyurl.com/yc8uvkn3</p> <p>ACTION: DNW to advise the AONB of where the affected Ash trees are situated.</p> <p>Heather Stallard: Blackdown Hills Business Association (BHBA) will have a marquee at the Honiton Show on Thursday 3rd August.</p> <p>Monthly business meetings continue at the Sidmouth Arms in Upottery.</p> <p>BHBA social evening was held at the Landrover experience in Awliscombe.</p> <p>In 2019 it will be the 100th anniversary of the start of the Young Farmers Club in Hemyock and it is hoped that a commemorative statue of a calf will be commissioned to mark this event.</p>	<p>DNW</p>

<p>Graham Long: Parish Network has produced a leaflet on planning for Parish Councillors and is now putting together a leaflet on broadband that will be sent out soon. Gigaclear will soon connect the first properties in the Blackdown Hills to ultrafast broadband. Gigaclear has raised £100m from city investors to fund local projects. Government has now confirmed that companies providing fibre to properties pay zero business rates, and through a new Digital Infrastructure Investment fund has made £400m available to deliver fibre to the premises.</p> <p>Elaine Hayes: Ferne Animal Sanctuary is attending the Honiton show in the BHBA marquee. Over the summer, a Sense-ational campaign will encourage children and adults to experience the natural world using all their senses, and will be involved with the 'Big butterfly count'</p> <p>EH is working with Clare Groom on a media opportunity with a TV programme called 'walks with my dog'.</p> <p>EH is attending the NAAONB conference in Winchester.</p> <p>Asian hornets are now in the area and with Himalayan balsam, American signal crayfish, and Ash Dieback the AONB could look at a bigger project on invasives.</p> <p>Cllr Dave Durdan: West Somerset & Taunton Deane Borough Council have launched a weekly online lottery to support local good causes with a top prize of £25,000. More details can be found at somersetwestlottery.co.uk</p> <p>Gordon Field: Met Rob Greenhalgh, new Ranger from Forestry Commission for a walk around Otterhead looking at footpaths, coppicing and for general advice. Sun 27th August Churchinford food and craft fayre Somerset Art Weeks are 23rd September – 8th October. Further details: http://somersetartworks.org.uk/artweeks17/ Local BHAAM artists will be at Cotley Farm Estate, Wambrook over the final weekend with interpretation around the buildings.</p> <p>Margaret Hall: Examination of Mid Devon local plan review takes place in September and CPRE will be involved the hearing about Junction 27 developments. Crispin Truman is the new Chief Executive for CPRE, starting later this year, and comes from the Church Conservation Trust.</p> <p>Cllr Martin Wale: Congratulated the AONB team for its great work in the Chard area.</p>	
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<p>ITEM 6 The AONB family and beyond Report circulated prior to the meeting</p>	
<p>Elaine Hayes, Clare Groom, Kristen Lambert and the new AONB Manager will be attending the NAAONB conference in Winchester.</p>	
<p>ITEM 7 Any Other Business</p>	
<p>Linda Bennett was thanked for all her hard work and passion over the last nine years whilst working as the AONB Manager. She was wished well in her retirement.</p>	

Date of the next meeting	
Next meeting will be held on Thursday, 2nd November 2017 from 9.30am – 1.30pm at the Ferne Animal Sanctuary near Chard.	

Signed as a true record:

Chairman.....

Date.....