DORSET AONB PARTNERSHIP BOARD

DRAFT Minutes of meeting held on 17th July 2007

The Dorset AONB Partnership Board met at Burraton House, Poundbury, on the 17th July 2007

Present

Tim Frost - Chairman

John Mortimer (Country Land & Business Association), Cathy Fitzroy (Natural England), Helen Mann (National Trust), Steve Andrews (National Trust), John Stobart (Natural England) Cllr Paul Johns (Purbeck District Council), Cllr Marjorie Snowden (West Dorset District Council), Cllr Margaret Leicester (Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, Cllr Hilary Cox (Dorset County Council).

Officers

Tim Badman (Dorset County Council), Andrew Price (Dorset County Council), Jo Witherden (West Dorset District Council), Margaret Cheetham (Purbeck District Council), Kevin Morris (North Dorset District Council), Kate Evans (Weymouth & Portland Borough Council) Sam Rose (World Heritage Team), Sarah Bentley (Dorset AONB), Doug Harman (Dorset AONB), Katharine Wright (Dorset AONB).

1. Apologies

Vincent May (Purbeck Heritage Committee), Cllr John Hyde (Purbeck District Council), Mark Sturgess (Purbeck District Council), Sarah Diacono (Somerset County Council), Heather Ray & Richard Belding (Natural England), Heather McBeth (Government Office South West), Richard Preston (Forestry Commission).

Firstly Tim Frost welcomed the new members Cllr Paul Johns (Purbeck District Council) and Cllr Marjorie Snowden (West Dorset District Council) to the Dorset AONB Partnership Board, and thanked members, Cllr Roake (North Dorset District Council), Cllr N Cake (Purbeck District Council) and Cllr S East (West Dorset District Council) who had supported and given valuable input over the past few years.

2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on the 31st October 2006 were confirmed and signed. There were no matters arising.

3. Review of achievements in 2006/7 and update on current work programme

3.1 A presentation was given by the AONB Team Manager on the significant progress that the team had made towards delivery of the AONB Management Plan. Overall, the Team had delivered a programme worth nearly £1.2 million when match funding for AONB and Sustainable Development Funded projects were taken into account. A financial summary was tabled at the meeting (attached).

Cllr Hilary Cox thanked the team for their hard work, especially the 'Pastures New' Project which had been particularly affected by DEFRA budget cuts for Higher Level Stewardship.

Cathy Fitzroy also mentioned that Natural England's Chief Executive had been impressed by 'Pastures New', which had been mentioned at national conferences as an example of best practice.

Cllr Johns asked how the AONB Partnership was tackling the big issue of climate change and global warming. The Team Manager reported that climate change adaptation and mitigation were being considered and built in to each project as far as possible, and that climate change would be a key issue within the Management Plan review.

Tim Frost thanked the team and expressed his hope for the continued support of the partners, particularly given the large amounts of funding the programme was levering in for Dorset.

The Team Manager reported that this year not all project bids to Natural England were successful, due to central funding cuts. One of the affected initiatives was the Winterbournes

Project, which had also been hit by Environment Agency cuts. However, it was hoped that this would be a temporary loss of funding and the team was working with partners to undertake low budget work to maintain momentum. The South Dorset Ridgeway project was also unsuccessful, but there was a natural hiatus while a large HLF bid was submitted, the results of which would not be known until December. Again, work was continuing with the volunteers to ensure no loss of momentum in the interim period.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) budget was cut to £70,000 and all money had been allocated in April under a single application window to ensure that the best projects could be selected. Meanwhile the National Association for AONBs are lobbying for this fund to continue. Resolved: Text for the annual review 2006/2007 was agreed.

- 3a. Tabled item for information Note of Funding Authorities Discussions, prepared by Andrew Price Head of Planning, Dorset County Council (paper attached)
- 3a.1 Andrew Price presented a paper summarising discussions that had been taking place among the core funding partners regarding future funding and arrangements for the AONB beyond the current Memorandum of Agreement which ends in 2009. There was currently a shortfall in funding from West Dorset District Council from March 2008 but the Council were addressing this through their internal budgeting process, the outcome of which would not be known until early 2008 and could not be guaranteed at this stage.

Natural England was committed to continuing funding at 75% on a 3-year rolling programme. Heather Ray (Dorset & Somerset Area Manager, Natural England) had reported that Natural England was very impressed with the Dorset AONB team and regarded their work as a national exemplar. Senior Officers felt the priorities should be development and implementation of land management projects and assisting local planning authorities with forward planning policy work

Steve Andrews asked why West Dorset District Council funding could not be agreed sooner, given the uncertainty this presented for the partnership and team. Cllr Snowden noted that she had not been involved in previous decisions but would take the issue as a priority to the committee meeting in September. Jo Witherden explained that a bid would have to be made through the gateway funding process in September and would be marked as a high priority.

Board members noted that local authorities have a statutory duty to act jointly to produce an AONB Management Plan and that it would be extremely disappointing if any Dorset authority were to fail in this duty. Natural England's clear commitment to continued funding should be taken into account. Cllr Johns reported that though he could not confirm funding at that stage he did not perceive any problem with continued support from Purbeck.

Cathy Fitzroy noted, further to comments from Heather Ray given in the report, that AONBs remained high on Natural England's agenda and had taken priority over a number of other areas of work in the current year's funding arrangements. She also suggested that the local authorities individually consider joining the National Association for AONBs to gain a national perspective on the work.

The AONB Team Manager welcomed the positive tone of the report and noted that it would provide some relief for the team in what had been an uncertain time. She also asked Mr Price to elaborate on the fifth paragraph of the report concerning management arrangements and whether he could outline the process by which the discussions would be taken forward, given that the Team, Chairman and other partners had not had an opportunity to comment. Mr Price confirmed that further meetings would be needed and that a draft MOA would be brought before the Board in due course. Cathy Fitzroy asked to be included in discussions.

In conclusion, Board members noted their hope that discussions concerning funding could be successfully concluded. The team were considered a high performing unit and members noted the importance of being honest and clear in respect of decisions affecting them.

4. Planning Protocol:

4.1 The Team Manager presented the draft AONB planning protocol, which had been subject to considerable discussion. Emphasis was placed on contributing to forward planning policy to ensure that the AONB was adequately considered at this stage, hopefully reducing the need for

detailed involvement in development control issues. The focus was on where the team could add value to the work of the planning authorities. The planning authorities had developed some further proposed amendments which were tabled at the meeting (attached). All authorities confirmed that they were happy with the protocol. Following Board approval, each authority would have to adopt the protocol.

Resolved: The Board agreed the AONB planning protocol with amendments as tabled.

5. Arrangements for the Dorset AONB Management Plan Review

- 5.1 The Team Manager presented the paper, outlining the process required for the statutory review of the AONB Management Plan. There were a number of aspects of the process that the board were requested to consider and agree at this stage, to enable the team to commence work. The Plan was to be completed by March 2009 and would require a Strategic Environmental Assessment, sustainability appraisal and appropriate assessment of impacts on Natura 2000 sites. The team had identified a number of areas where the existing plan could be improved, including rationalisation of the policy framework to develop a smaller and more focused core set of AONB policies; a more spatial framework, which had not been possible with the last plan; greater focus on coastal and marine issues and food and farming. The team manager noted that the current uncertainty over membership and funding from all local authorities was a key concern in relation to the Plan review.
- 5.2 The first action to be taken forward was that each local planning authority was required to formally authorise the team to commence the review. The team would then formally notify Natural England of the intention to review the plan. All authorities agreed to send an authorisation letter to the team manager.
- 5.3 The guidance on AONB Management Plan reviews issued by the Countryside Agency noted that there was a difference in terminology in the first round of management plans that caused confusion. A recommended terminology had been developed to achieve a consistent approach nationally and the board was requested to consider adopting it. Cllr Snowden noted a strong dislike for use of the word *vision*, and after some discussion it was agreed that the term aspiration would be used instead. Members noted that the new plan should be aspirational but also realistic and achievable, should make links with the vision in the Dorset Sustainable Community Strategy and reflect the living and working environment of the AONB.
- The Team Manager proposed that a steering group be established to support the team in undertaking the review and ensure links with local development frameworks and other strategies. It was proposed that this should include Natural England as statutory body for AONBs plus all the local planning authorities whose duty it is to produce the plan, plus other officers as required for specific elements. As such, the existing Technical Advisory Group, with additional officers as required, was proposed as steering group. This was endorsed by the Board.
- 5.5 The Team Manager presented a revised time table for the review, noting key milestones and consultation phases. This was agreed by the Board.
- The AONB Landscape Planning Officer presented a draft Statement of Stakeholder Involvement, which was a working draft aiming to set out how key stakeholders would be involved in the review process. Members noted that every opportunity should be taken to link consultation processes with those for other plans and strategies wherever possible to reduce 'consultation fatigue'. A specific event targeted at landowners and farmers was proposed and agreed. Jo Witherden and Margaret Cheetham agreed to send detailed comments and suggestions directly to the team.
 - Resolved Board members noted the issues concerning the Management Plan review.

 Local planning authorities agreed to send an authorisation letter to the team.

 Members agreed the terminology with aspiration to replace the term vision.

Members agreed that the existing technical advisory group would form the basis of a review steering group, with additional officers attending as required.

Members agreed the revised time table for the review and the outline Statement of Stakeholder Involvement, with amendments to be sent to the team.

6. DEFRA Rural Pathfinder conclusions

- 6.1 The AONB Team Manager presented the paper on the Rural Pathfinder process, which had emerged from DEFRA's Rural Strategy in 2004. The element relevant to the AONB had involved focusing on the environmental partnerships in the county, and whether the AONB Partnership Board could take on a co-ordinating role for strategic countryside issues both in and outside of the AONB boundary. It was noted that this would not affect the work of most of the team, who are resourced to focus on the AONB. This had been the subject of considerable discussion at a time of considerable change, with Natural England being formed and a new pathfinder being developed in relation to local government reform. Given the funding issues that had since emerged for the AONB and the current need to focus on the management plan review, the technical advisory group had recommended that the proposals be 'parked' for the present while the Partnership focuses on these more immediate concerns. The proposals remain a working draft of ideas that could be returned to in future. The Coastal Corridor Plan, which had emerged from the Pathfinder as a specific area of partnership working, was going ahead led by the AONB Team.
- 6.2 Cllr Cox noted that, though disappointing, some good work had emerged from the Pathfinder, including the heathland work in South East Dorset and that the AONB's input to the DSP Environment Theme Group would help ensure co-ordination. Tim Badman agreed that the timing was not right to pursue the proposals but felt that they could bring future benefits to the AONB. Members highlighted the need to ensure better co-ordination, but were also conscious of the danger of losing the focus on the AONB.

Resolved - Pathfinder proposals should not be taken forward at this stage but may be considered as a potential option in future.

7. National Trust Proposals for Hardy's Cottage

- 7.1 Helen Mann gave a presentation on the National Trust's proposals for Hardy's Cottage and the links with the Dorset AONB. The Trust aims to upgrade the visitor experience at Hardy's Cottage, make links between that site and Max Gate plus out into Hardy's Wessex. Helen emphasised the importance to the Trust of working closely with the AONB Team, and that she sought the Board's formal endorsement for the team to be represented on the steering group for the project and become actively involved in developing the links to the wider Hardy landscapes.
- 7.2 Members endorsed proposals to improve Hardy's Cottage and made a number of suggestions, including linking the project to the Destination Management Organisation, local tourism officers and the Blue Badge Guides. A 'Friends of Hardy's Cottage' group could be established as a focus for volunteer activity and the significant opportunities of the international tourism market were noted, given Hardy's widespread popularity. It was noted that the AONB is very rich in literary and other cultural connections and that links with this element could be explored in the management plan review. The Board fully endorsed and supported the involvement of the AONB Team in the project.

Resolved: - the Board approved the involvement of the AONB Team in the Hardy's Cottage project.

8. AONB response to DEFRA Coastal Access consultation

- 8.1 The AONB Team Manager gave a brief summary of DEFRA's proposals to create a new 'access corridor' to the English coast. DEFRA's vision was for 'a coastal environment where rights to walk along the length of the English Coast lie within a wildlife and landscape corridor that offers enjoyment, understanding of the natural environment and a high quality experience; and is managed sustainably in the context of a changing coastline. Four options were presented to achieve this vision:
 - Option 1 Use of the Highways Act 1980
 - Option 2 Section 3 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000
 - Option 3 Voluntary measures to create permissive access
 - Option 4 Proposal for new primary legislation
- 8.2 The Team Manager noted the strong links between with the emerging Coastal Corridor Plan being developed for Dorset and East Devon and the synergy of this plan with the vision and outcomes proposed by DEFRA. The Team felt that the corridor approach should be welcomed but that it should include heritage as well as wildlife and landscape. The Team also noted that Dorset already benefits from good access through the South West Coast Path National Trail and positive approach from coastal landowners. However, there were problems with managing the coast path on an eroding coast that were difficult to address through current legislation. The Team felt that Option 4 could offer benefits for access management in Dorset.
- 8.3 Members raised considerable concerns over option 4, notably on the impact on coastal businesses. It was noted that we already have good coastal access in Dorset through rights of way and voluntary agreement. John Mortimer felt that there was a lack of clarity in the proposals with no clear information on how wide the corridor would be. He also felt that the issue of compensation would be key to coastal businesses, which would lose their exclusive access rights. Mr Mortimer suggested that an enhanced Highways Act a 'hybrid' option could be a useful alternative. Helen Mann noted that, while coastal access in Dorset is good, there are some pinch points where erosion will result in a loss of the coast path. These currently proved difficult and time consuming to address and option 4 could provide a tool to help.
- 8.4 Members felt that it would be difficult to achieve a consensus on the proposals. It was agreed that the Team should draft a response in the form of a commentary on the pros and cons of each option but without stating a preference and that the draft response should be circulated to key partners for further comment prior to submission.

Resolved: AONB Team to draft a commentary on coastal access options (with no stated preference) for circulation to members prior to submission.

9. Updates from the Heritage Committees

- 9.1 West Dorset Heritage Committee update from Cllr Margaret Leicester
 The Heritage committee last met on the 25th June, Cllr Marjorie Snowden was elected as
 Chairman and Cllr Margaret Leicester as Vice Chairman. The Committee discussed the Coastal
 Corridor Plan and it's implications for the heritage Committee area, following a presentation
 on the findings of the Halcrow access study by the AONB Team manager. There was also a
 discussion on the Woodlink project and other AONB updates. The Fleet Catchment project has
 not gained SDF funding and will now be reappraised before moving forward. At the previous
 meeting in February, the proposed action concerning advice for farmers and landowners was
 explored but it was agreed that this should not be taken forward at present.
- 9.2 The AONB Team Manager clarified the position regarding funding for the Fleet project, for which no application to the Sustainable Development Fund had been received.
- 9.3 Purbeck Heritage Committee update from Sarah Bentley

In the absence of the Committee Chairman Vincent May, the AONB Team Manager gave a short update. The committee met on 21st June with main agenda items including the findings of the coastal corridor access study, the visitor capacity work being trialled in Purbeck and to receive an update on progress with the Purbeck Keystone HLF project.

9.4 North Dorset Countryside & Heritage Panel update from Kevin Morris
The North Dorset Panel had not met recently but will in the near future, and the focus will be mainly on the AONB Management Plan review.

10. Any other business

The Chairman reported that this was the last Board meeting for Tim Badman, Environment Group Manager at Dorset County Council, who was leaving Dorset to take up a post with the World Conservation Union in Geneva. The Chairman thanked Tim for his contribution to the AONB which would be greatly missed, all members wished him well in his new job.

Date of next meeting Tuesday 30th October @10am (venue TBC) Katharine Wright to circulate a set of yearly dates.

Report tabled under item 3.

Dorset AONB Financial summary 2006/7

This year, the AONB programme as a whole totalled £1,193,518.30 of activity to conserve and enhance the AONB for present and future generations.

How AONB funding works...

The AONB budget has three different strands:

- 1. The CORE budget covers the costs of running the AONB staff unit and operational costs of the Partnership. Local authorities contribute 25% of this budget, the amount varying according to the amount of their administrative area in the AONB. Their funds are then matched at a rate of 75% by Natural England's central funds in recognition of the national significance of AONBs. In 2006/7 the Partnership operated in budget, with total core expenditure of £266,243.22.
- 2. Project funding for AONBs is also available from Natural England, covering up to 50% of project costs. This national funding stream is limited and the team works hard to secure funding from other sources to support on the ground delivery of work to enhance the AONB. In 2006/7 the team secured £33,000 from Natural England and multiplied this by over seven to deliver projects with a total value of nearly £246,000.
- 3. The Sustainable Development Fund is provided by Natural England to support projects delivering benefits to the AONB and its communities. The team secured £80,000 which was allocated as grants to 15 projects. Although up to 10% of the grant can be used for administration, the Partnership took a decision to minimise administrative costs and absorb these into the core budget as much as possible to maximise the amount available for projects. The Sustainable Development Fund grant of £80,000 levered in over £600,000 of match funding, and involved nearly 100 local businesses and 29 community and voluntary groups.

CORE BUDGET

Core Budget Income

Source	Amount
Natural England	£199,667.53
Dorset County Council	£33,287.84
West Dorset District Council	£21,890.09
Purbeck District Council	£7,749.41
North Dorset District Council	£2,449.99
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council	£1,198.36
TOTAL	266,243.22

Core Budget Expenditure

Item	Amount
Staffing costs including training	£212,214.28
Communication and promotion	£23,169.01
Partnership running costs (meetings, events, conferences)	£5,609.54
Office accommodation and equipment	£11,264.60
Operational costs (research and development - landscape	£13,965.95
character, monitoring, etc)	
TOTAL	£266,223.38

PROJECT BUDGET

The project budget is provided by Natural England and supports up to 50% of project costs.

Project	Total value of project Grant claimed from		Source of match	
		NE	funding	
Dorset Woodlink	£50,994.73	£9,000	Forestry Commission.	
			Chalk & Cheese	
			LEADER +, Cranborne	
			Chase AONB	
South Dorset Ridgeway	£7,600	£3,800	Dorset County Council	
Winterbournes &	£51,875.62	£12,200	Environment Agency,	
Wetlands			Dorset Wildlife Trust	
			and Wessex Water	
Purbeck Keystone	£135,401.71	£8,000	Heritage Lottery Fund,	
Project			Purbeck District	
			Council.	
TOTAL	£245,872.06	£33,000		

AONB Sustainable Development Fund Budget

Project	Applicant	Total value of project	Grant provided
Woodland Management &	Eight Acre Coppice LNR	£5,226	£1,595
Woodland Secrets	Group		
Greywater reedbed	The Magdalen Project	£16,140	£6,240
Farm plastic recycling	Farming & Wildlife Advisory	£19,150	£13,450
	Group		
Dorset Farm Radio &	Trilith	£66,578	£8,000
Community Film & Audio			
Archive			
Rushworks	Rushworks (Anna Lewington)	£33,037	£12,140
Crossings	The Architectural Association	£24,556	£5,000
SEA - Science,	Dorset County Council	£6,731	£3,500
Environment and Art	(Durlston Country Park)		
Playing field	Long Bredy Parish Council	£447	£337
enhancement			
Brownsea Outdoor	The National Trust	£461,923	£12,995
Activity Centre			
Dry Stone Walling Centre	Purbeck District Council	£11,452	£2,500
	(Keystone Project)		
Upwey Mill small scale	Mr R Willet	£4,283.90	£1,500
hydro-electric			
From Sea to Vale	Bridport Local Food Group	£17,145	£6,000
(Celebration of food and			
landscape)			
Our butterflies and moths	Butterfly Conservation	£6,552	£3,497
	(Dorset Branch)		
Shillingstone round	Shillingstone Parish Council	£3,650	£350
village trail			
Upsydling Orchard	Green & Pleasant	£4,552	£2,000
Creation			
SUB TOTALS		£681,422.90	£79,104
Administration costs (news	letter)	-	£1,063
TOTALS		£681,422.90	£80,167

Report tabled under Item 3a.

DORSET AONB PARTNERSHIP BOARD

NOTE OF FUNDING AUTHORITY DISCUSSIONS

Item for Information

Prepared by Head of Planning, Dorset County Council

Discussions have been underway for some time now in anticipation of the need to prepare a new Memorandum of Agreement and funding arrangements from January 2009. The six funding partners, Natural England and the five local authorities, have discussed the principles of the way forward and will now be able to move towards agreeing a secure future for the team and the continued work of the Partnership beyond 2009.

Chief Officers met with Heather Ray last week and it was confirmed that Natural England is committed to continuing priority funding to AONB and will look to secure a 3 year rolling programme from January 2009, based on 75% core funding and continued project support. There is a shortfall in funding on the local authority side beyond March 2008 but West Dorset District Council intend to address this issue through their budget process. The outcome will not be known until early next year and cannot be guaranteed at this stage.

Heather reported that Natural England was very impressed with the Dorset AONB team and regarded their work as a national exemplar. She has agreed to act as Natural England's representative on the Board and looks forward to agreeing with Board members, on an equal partner basis, the future direction and delivery programmes. Natural England shared some of their thoughts for the future of AONBs at the recent natural AONB Conference, which we will no doubt be exploring at Board level in the near future.

Dorset authorities are keen to support the good work in identifying and delivering programmes of land management projects, and to ensure that this remains the key focus of team activity. Alongside this it is planned to ensure that greater support is provided to local authorities in pursuit of their duties and responsibilities towards the AONB, by increasing team involvement in the development of planning policy. Planners will also lend support to the team's role in co-ordinating review of the AONB Management Plan, to ensure a broader view is taken of social and economic needs alongside the landscape and other environmental priorities, and to help develop the spatial aspects of the Plan. The planning protocol now needs to be agreed and for development control this will focus on ensuring team advice is provided where invited on proposals likely to have significant effects on the AONB; it will be for individual organisations to represent their own views on major developments through normal consultation.

Management arrangements of the team will be reassessed and it is anticipated that line management will be exercised by the Group Manager, Environment Policy of Dorset County Council. The Team Manager and this postholder will be accountable to the funding partners who will meet regularly at senior management level to monitor direction and progress on behalf of the Board.

Heather Ray is not able to attend today's meeting of the Board, but looks forward to joining us on future occasions. Board members may also be pleased to learn that Tim Badman is taking up a post in August with the IUCN, based in Geneva. Tim has made an outstanding contribution to Dorset over the last 10 years, and will be sorely missed; his post is currently out to advertisement and we hope to achieve a similarly outstanding replacement.

Amendments tabled under item 4. AONB Planning Protocol

AONB Board meeting, 17 July 2007 Proposed Amendment to Para. 4.4 of the draft planning protocol

Existing:

"Consult the AONB Team / Partnership on any major or significant applications that, in the opinion of the authority's officers, may have a significant effect on the AONB and where the AONB designation is likely to be cited within the planning officer's report as a significant issue. This includes adverse effects resulting either individually or cumulatively, or where a scheme may set a precedent. It will include both applications within the AONB and those outside the designated area that are likely to impact on the character and qualities of the AONB.

Such applications may include:

- Major planning applications that are located outside, or close to the edge of, built up areas as defined within local plans or development frameworks, and in the rural areas of the AONB. Major planning applications are defined in the GDPO 1995 as:
 - Residential developments involving 10 or more dwellings or (where the number of dwellings is not indicated) where the site is more 0.5Ha.
 - Other development where the floorspace proposed is more than 1000 square metres or where the site is more than 1Ha.
 - Minerals and waste management applications involving new or extended mineral extraction areas, or restoration of old or existing sites, or any site used for the management of waste.
- Telecommunication masts, renewable energy developments and other prominent structures within the landscape.
- Applications where a structure or associated lighting or noise may impact on the character and tranquillity of the AONB."

Proposed:

"Consult the Dorset AONB team for advice on planning applications where in the opinion of the local planning authority, they may have a significant impact on the AONB and where the provision of advice would assist the decision-making process.

Such applications may include:

- Major planning applications that are located outside, or close to the edge of, built up areas as defined within local plans or development frameworks, and in the rural areas of the AONB. Major planning applications will be defined as:
 - Residential developments involving 10 or more dwellings or (where the number of dwellings is not indicated) where the site is more 0.5Ha.
 - Other development where the floorspace proposed is more than 1000 square metres or where the site is more than 1Ha.
 - Minerals and waste management applications over 1Ha involving new or extended mineral extraction areas, or restoration of old or existing sites, or any site used for the management of waste.
- Telecommunication masts, renewable energy developments and other prominent structures within the landscape.
- Applications where a structure or associated lighting or noise may impact on the character and tranquillity of the AONB."