

# **Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

## **Joint Committee**

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2007, 10:00am**

**The Esperance Room, Civic Centre, Cannock Chase Council, Beecroft Road, Cannock, Staffordshire WS11 1BG**

### **M I N U T E S**

Present: Cllr Neil Roberts – Lichfield District Council  
(Chairman)

#### **Name**

#### **Representing**

#### **Members**

Cllr David Billson	South Staffordshire Council
Cllr John Wakefield	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Tony Williams	Cannock Chase Council

#### **Officers**

Jackie Biard	Cannock Chase Council
Andy Goode	Staffordshire County Council
John Smith	Lichfield District Council
Geoff Unwin	Stafford Borough Council
Anne Walker	Cannock Chase AONB Unit

#### **Advisors**

Cllr Pat Ansell	Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, Chairman of the Advisory Partnership
Ian Hickman	Forestry Commission
Ruth Hÿtch	Cannock Chase AONB Unit
Lisa Delrio	Staffordshire County Council, Honorary Secretary
Juliet Hands	Staffordshire County Council, Treasurer to the Joint Committee
Sally Powell	Natural England

#### **Also in Attendance**

Steve Dean	Staffordshire County Council
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Apologies were received from Cllr Doug Davis (Stafford Borough Council), Hayden Jones (South Staffordshire Council)

**Note by Clerk** – Mrs Delrio took the Chair for the election of the Chairman. This election had been deferred from the 13<sup>th</sup> September meeting as it had not achieved quorum.

## **Appointment of Chairman and Vice Chairman**

**RESOLVED** – (a) That Cllr N Roberts be appointed as Chairman of the Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee up to the annual meeting of the Joint Committee in 2008.

### **Cllr Roberts took the Chair**

(b) That Cllr Williams be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee up to the annual meeting of the Joint Committee in 2008.

## **Minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

**110 RESOLVED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman

## **Matters Arising**

**111** Ruth Hÿtch informed the meeting that John Bell, project manager of Chase Heritage Trail would be invited to make a presentation at a future meeting.

Cllr Roberts introduced Juliet Hands, who had recently taken over from Joy Curry as the Partnership's accountant.

## **Declaration of Interests**

**112** There were no declarations of interest.

## **Action Plan Progress**

**113** The Chairman of the Officers' Working Group, Geoff Unwin, updated members on progress since the last meeting. A report had been circulated prior to the meeting. The following was highlighted:

- Progress on the Management Plan Review would be reported by Ruth Hÿtch later on the Agenda.
- Partner Project Grant schemes are progressing well. Wild About Play is very popular and additional events are planned. The project involving Young Carers has also been successful and has exceeded its target for participation. As part of the Two Valley Project a public event is planned in January to coincide with the production of a management plan. The project with Young Enterprise is continuing. An update on Sustainable Development Fund will be presented as part of the financial report later in the meeting.
- Signage – 5 Parish Councils had expressed an interest in the village entry signs.
- 5 Visitor Centres – the sub-group has expressed a wish to revise and reprint the joint information booklet. The first of a programme of new interpretation signage is due to be installed at the Wolseley Centre.
- Interpretation – input from the Partnership on the Chase Heritage Trail and the Great War Hut at Cannock Chase Visitor Centre, Marquis Drive.

- Website – upgraded to include the Management Plan Review and will also have 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary information posted in due course. Members of the Partnership are invited to log on to the website and register as a user if they had not already done so. Comments on the new layout should be forwarded to the AONB Unit.
- Under grounding – as noted in the report, funding is available from Ofgem and suitable schemes should be forwarded to the AONB Unit.
- Fixed Point Photography – has proved very popular and well received along with the additional training sessions.
- Consultation – 3 events relating to Management Plan Review had taken place at Cannock Wood, Etching Hill and Walton with varying degrees of attendance.
- Parish Councils Day – well attended and received. It included presentations about the AONB and a walk to Birches Valley Forest Centre from Cannock Chase Visitor Centre.
- Awareness Days – Historic Awareness Day led by Steve Dean, attendees were entranced by Steve’s knowledge. A repeat of this may be held next year. The Autumn Sweep was also well attended, people collected a number of unusual items. There is a wish to repeat this next year also. Two further events will be held before the end of March, one at Shoal Hill on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008 the other will be a forest craft day on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008.
- North Devon AONB – Cllr Roberts visited in September, Ruth in November. Cannock Chase AONB is linked to North Devon AONB as part of the National Association of AONBs Board Buddy system. Natural England is keen for AONBs to network and benchmark to produce best practice. There are similarities with Cannock Chase despite North Devon being coastal. Our Fixed Point Photography and Highways Design projects are examples of good practice along with our work with lead authorities. It is proposed that North Devon will deliver one of the workshop sessions jointly with Cannock Chase AONB at the National Association of AONBs Annual Conference in July. Cllr Roberts commented that the North Devon AONB consisted of three areas along the coast from Cornwall. He found the information exchange and hospitality very good and noted that if any other members of the partnership would like to visit, their opposite numbers would be happy to show people around the area.
- Topic Groups – following a review, it is proposed to merge the two existing Topic Groups to form a project delivery group.
- Secretariat for the Joint Committee – following discussion with the Officers Working Group it was agreed that the AONB Unit would take on the responsibility of the secretariat.

Cllr Roberts thanked Geoff for his report.

Cllr Ansell commented that Cannock Wood Parish Council was looking forward to the installation of the village entry signs. Cannock Wood’s County Fair provided a venue for the first of the Management Plan Review consultation events, which was well attended. Good support had also been given by officers from Lichfield District Council.

Cllr Roberts noted that he had received good feedback from a number of people who had attended the awareness days and fixed point photography sessions. There had been much enthusiasm and learning.

Cllr Williams expressed his thanks to Steve Dean for the informative Historic Awareness Day, he had a relative who had served in the Great War.

**114 Resolved** The Joint Committee noted the progress made since the last meeting.

### **Archaeological Walkover Survey Project**

Presentation by Steve Dean, Project Manager

**115** The slide presentation is attached to the minutes for information.

Steve outlined the background to the walkover survey completed with support from project grant funding and progress of the Great War hut project. The following was pointed out:

- Postcards from soldiers based at the camps during the First World War indicated the conditions they experienced.
- The camp would hold about 20,000 men and had all the facilities of a small town including post office, WH Smiths, roads, sewerage system, churches, cinemas, etc. There were complaints from local people that the facilities were better in the camps than in nearby Stafford.
- Erskin postcards featuring Cannock Chase provide documentary records of the time.
- Maps of the proposals for the training camps exist, but not the actual plans. The walkover surveys have provided this additional information.
- Links with New Zealand military have been established through a relative of someone who attended the camp.
- Areas that still survive include road systems, hut bases and training trenches in Oldacre.
- The survey found evidence of phased development of trenches as military personnel learned more about warfare in World War I.
- Accommodation huts were removed and reused by the local community when the camps were closed at the end of the war.
- One, located at Gayton, had been used as a village hall for around 70 years.
- Funding from various sources including the Local Members Initiative and Aggregates Levy have enabled relocating the hut close to the Visitor Centre at Marquis Drive (not the original site, but more secure).
- Postcards illustrate the interiors of the accommodation huts and have been used a source of evidence to fit out part of the hut accurately. The other area will contain artefacts and museum pieces.
- Birmingham and Manchester PALS re-enactment groups are interested in holding events.
- Also keen to find out how the community was affected by the influx of military personnel, examples from Erskin and Tolkein of their experiences.
- Steve is writing articles for Brocton Parish Council and the Landor Society requesting local information.

- Information received includes experience of German Prisoners of War, who worked locally, but also performed in shows for local people.
- Development of the Great War Hut as a museum will also include first person re-enactors (experience of Shugborough staff) and school visits.

Steve asked if there were any questions.

Ian Hickman asked if the walkover survey also included Forestry Commission landholdings. Steve noted that a record had been made of the Rifle Ranges and this would be passed on to them. Ian also noted that the Liddar system had been used in Wyre Forest and asked if this would be useful in Cannock Chase. Steve replied that the system was expensive, however they were working with the Environment Agency to see if they had coverage of Cannock Chase. Ian asked if this could be a future project for the AONB Partnership. Cllr Roberts outlined the field trip he took part in at the National Association of AONBs annual conference in Winchester. He had visited Savernake Forest and a similar visual record had been made. He agreed that if funding was available then this would be a good project. Steve noted that areas of scrub, gorse and trees preserved earthworks in good condition. Cllr Ansell asked if HLF funding could be accessed, Steve replied that local community groups are more successful in applying for such grants than local authorities.

The Mesinine model had recently been partially exposed by amateur enthusiasts and has survived in better condition than previously known. It is a national and internationally important site and management issues need to be addressed to preserve what is left. It was constructed by the New Zealand Rifle Brigade for the people of Stafford. There are, however, other issues to take into account such as SAC and SSSIs.

Jackie Biard asked if there were any plans to designate the sites as scheduled monuments. Steve replied that there is sufficient protection because of the SAC and SSSIs. The scheduling process is also on hold as the heritage protection review bill is being prepared. The Heritage Partnership agreements see the relevance of monuments, however with AONB designation, sufficient protection should be provided. Sympathetic operators (such as Forestry Commission and Staffordshire County Council) also provide a better way forward.

Cllr Roberts thanked Steve for providing a delightful insight into the history of the AONB. He noted that he would be happy to provide a conduit to regional organisations to access appropriate funding. Cllr Ansell also offered to assist.

### **Proposed Meetings Schedule 2008-09**

**116** Ruth outlined the sequence of meetings, which were delivered in a particular order. It had been agreed last year that the Joint Committee would hold 3 meetings per year. The proposed calendar is extended to March 2009 to take into account approval of the revised Management Plan. Ruth asked if there were any amendments required to contact the AONB Unit by the end of December 2007 and alternatives can be arranged. Cllr Roberts requested that the meetings are included in diaries by members.

**117 Resolved** The Joint Committee agreed the proposed schedule of meetings for 2008-09.

## **Job Evaluation**

**118** A report was circulated prior to the meeting. This issue affected the AONB Unit staff. The item was due to be considered at Staffordshire County Council's Cabinet meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2008, however it had been postponed until January. The new pay model is due to be implemented from April 2008. Geoff noted that the report included the impact on future salaries and also the back pay element.

Ian asked if the salary costs included all on costs. Geoff confirmed that this was the case.

Cllr Roberts noted that he recognised that the process of Job Evaluation had been fraught and not all members of the AONB Unit had been satisfied as individuals. He looks forward to this moving forward.

**119 Resolved** The Joint Committee

a) noted the commitment by Staffordshire County Council to implement its new pay model and

b) approved the proposals set out in 3.3 and 3.4 of the report to fund the implementation of the new pay model.

## **Financial Update**

**120** A report was circulated prior to the meeting. Juliet outlined Appendix 1 which related to core costs and projects in support of actions and shows spend to date as well as commitments.

Appendix 2 details Partner Projects and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) projects. The majority of SDF has either been committed or with the panel for approval. A small amount remains to be allocated.

Appendix 3 details the proposed bid for core costs 2008-09. It is anticipated that core funding from Natural England is secure, however Partner Projects and SDF may be at risk. If the latter 2 elements are not available other sources of funding will need to be sought. It was noted that since the last meeting, the reserve fund had been set up which currently stands at £10,213.68.

As mentioned in the accompanying report, the Audit Commission has requested information regarding the AONB Joint Committee. The external auditors have been confirmed as PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

Cllr Roberts asked about the amount of under spend in Partner Projects, which was greater than anticipated at this time of year. Ruth replied that in some cases it was as a result of the late approval of projects. The main element of the Two Valley Project would take place in January. Discovering Nature on Cannock

Chase delivered by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust had overachieved in numbers of participants, but had under spent. Additional events will be taking place to ensure that all the grant allocated is spent. The Young Enterprise Programme had undergone a period of change of staff, but they are now back in contact with the AONB Unit. Overall spend should be achieved by the year end.

**121 Resolved** The Joint Committee:

a) noted progress on spend for 2007/08;

b) approved the proposals for the budget 2008/09 to be included in the draft funding bid and

c) the draft joint bid to Natural England for core, project grant and Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) funding in 2008/09, as well as its supporting documents (Annual Action Plan and Business Plan), was approved for final submission to Natural England on a date to be confirmed. (Any amendments to the draft will be reported at a future meeting of the Joint Committee. Any material difference will be brought forward to the Joint Committee in the relevant timescales by the Officers Working Group early in 2008).

### **National Association of AONBs Annual Conference and Cannock Chase AONB 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**

**122** A report was circulated prior to the meeting outlining progress to date. Ruth noted that the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations would be an excellent way of marking the standing of Cannock Chase AONB. It is hoped to hold an event on 16<sup>th</sup> September, designation day, to which Helen Phillips will be invited to attend. Up to 6 smaller events will also be held during the year. Funding and sponsorship opportunities for events and activities will be sought. Provision has been made for memorabilia items and discussions are ongoing with Friends of Cannock Chase who are celebrating their Diamond Anniversary. A local photographer produced a series of photographs of the AONB as part of his college course which with funding could be published.

Members of staff from the AONB Unit along with Cllr Roberts are on the sub-committee co-ordinating the National Association of AONBs Annual Conference. A framework had been developed for the 2008 conference, due to be held at Harper Adams University College, Newport. Ruth noted that experience is standing us in good stead, allowing key messages to be included in the programme. Guy Corbett-Marshall from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust had agreed to deliver a keynote speech, input from partner organisations such as Cannock Chase Council and the Forestry Commission as well as the National Forest Company had also been agreed and one of the site visits will be led by Steve Dean. The final day usually includes a ministerial or senior government presentation. The minister responsible for AONBs is Jonathan Shaw, however if he is unable to attend, Liam Byrne, Minister for the West Midlands may be invited.

Cllr Roberts requested assistance from Cllr Wakefield with an invitation from Staffordshire County Council to the Minister to visit Staffordshire to coincide with the National Conference. Cllr Wakefield suggested that the Chief Executives Department may be able to assist.

Cllr Ansell noted that Guy Corbett-Marshall is an excellent speaker and a good choice. Cllr Roberts thanked the local partners for their commitment and also Jill Smith (Company Secretary of the National Association of AONBs) as the co-ordinating force. He was confident that this will enhance the reputation of Cannock Chase AONB, which despite its small size is able to 'punch above its weight'. He also stated that he will be using regional partnerships to promote the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cannock Chase AONB and Shropshire Hills AONB.

**123 Resolved** The Joint Committee:

- a) noted progress to date;
- b) supported identification of sponsors for activity programme; and
- c) agreed the programme of activity proposed to date.

**Natural England Update**

Oral Report of Sally Powell, Regional Account Manager

**124** Cllr Roberts welcomed Sally back following sickness absence. Sally informed the meeting that updates were available on Natural England's website including the reports presented to its Board yesterday (12<sup>th</sup> December). The purpose of the report was to seek advice on the way forward in light of the reduced grant in aid offer from Defra. Option 2, which included staff redeployment, indicates savings of £12.5 million in 2008-09 financial year, £5.6 million reduction in staff costs. For AONBs, the aim is to maintain the current core funds, with some element of SDF and projects. In addition, Defra are also asking for a further 5% (£8.5 million) reduction in Natural England's budget. If this is implemented, project and SDF funding will also be affected. At present, AONBs are protected. Further discussions were due to be held next week, then dates for bids to be submitted will be determined and circulated.

Cllr Roberts noted that although local authorities are used to working with reduced and squeezed budget, however he was not happy with this outcome for AONBs and wished that this was reported back to Natural England. Co-funding from other sources will be investigated, but this may also have other impacts. It was disappointing that this was happening in the anniversary year.

**Management Plan Review**

Report of the AONB Officer

**125** A report was circulated prior to the meeting and Ruth updated members on progress. There had been some slippage in the timetable due to day-to-day requirements. The Strategic Environmental Assessment scoping report had been completed and circulated for comment. It is the decision of Natural England that an Appropriate Assessment is also undertaken.

Cllr Roberts noted the progress of the review and commented that the launch of Stage 3 of the Regional Spatial Strategy took place at the end of November. This is available from the West Midlands Regional Assembly. Issues relating to the environmental element of RSS activity include climate change, green infrastructure, etc. A planning forum of local authorities in Staffordshire is due

to take place in February 2008 to compile a county-wide response. As Chairman of the Staffordshire Planning Forum, he noted that he is able to encourage inclusion of the AONB at a high level in respect of landscape and tranquillity. Ruth noted that it is intended to prepare a joint response with Shropshire Hills and Malvern Hills AONBs. Cllr Williams supported this approach. In Stage 2, AONBs were not included as an asset and the aim should be that they are included. Cllr Roberts noted that it should be recognised the role that AONBs play in leisure, landscape, etc.

Cllr Ansell commented on the Destination Management Partnership (DMP), of which she is a board member. It is appropriate that we have a member on the sustainability sub-group representing the 'jewel in the crown' of Staffordshire. Cllr Roberts noted that all recognise that the DMP is useful and that we were not encouraging everyone on the M6 to turn off to visit the AONB, a balance is needed. Any route that the Joint Committee can help to promote Staffordshire and the AONB is to be reinforced. Ruth noted that the AONB Unit is also a member of the DMP, albeit not an active one, it is a matter of directing limited resources. Cllr Wakefield commented that Staffordshire's DMP is the most successful in the Midlands and will shortly be relocating to Shugborough.

**126 Resolved** The Joint Committee noted progress to date.

### **Partner News**

Item for Members to update all from their own part of the AONB

**127** The Joint Committee received oral reports on the following:

### **Forestry Commission**

- Advisory Partnership Meeting – an excellent meeting with 2 speakers. Rob Chapman of BT Openreach included in his presentation information about telegraph poles and that unlike electricity cables there is no funding to underground cabling. Simon Eddleston, E.On UK, presented on wind farms, most of which are offshore.
- Royal Visit on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2008 to mark the official opening of the new classroom at Birches Valley and the Chase Heritage Trail. Cllr Ansell will be attending as Chairman of the Chase Heritage Trail Committee.
- Forest concerts – Status Quo have been announced as playing on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2008.
- Cycle Trails - £200,000 has been awarded to increase the number of cycle trails in the more robust areas of Cannock Chase. Cllr Roberts asked if there was an option of Sustrans funding for cycle trails around the AONB. Ian replied that a draft route to Marquis Drive is in discussion. The trails on Forestry Commission land are aimed at mountain bikes and higher skill levels, Sustrans routes are aimed at family cycling. Cllr Ansell noted that there are proposals for a Sustrans route in Rawnsley Road, Hednesford.

### **Cannock Chase Council**

- Continuing work on completion of the Chase Heritage Trail

- Liaising with the Forestry Commission in relation to application for a further classroom at Birches Valley Forest Centre and a Go Ape! Proposal, also at Birches Valley.
- Castle Ring – access improvements including resurfacing the car park.
- Draft West Midlands branding strategy – concern that AONBs are not included, Cllr Williams suggested lobbying for inclusion and will offer support to Ruth in this respect.
- Environmental Working Group to be convened providing information to LSP's, Ruth to be invited.

### **Lichfield District Council**

- Successful trial of grazing at Chasewater Heathlands.
- Practical group established to keep alive green routes at Muckley Corner.
- Herds of deer can be seen on farmland off the A51 by Seedy Mill Golf Course.

### **Staffordshire County Council**

- Continued heathland management, 4.5ha of heather cut. Cut heather bales were sent to Prees Heath, Shropshire for butterfly conservation and 4 bales tested for suitability as biomass fuel. One area was left to dry naturally.
- Chase Heritage Trail – feedback on partnership working with Cannock Chase District Council and Staffordshire County Council Countryside and Highways officers has received much praise.
- Association of Professional Foresters annual event will be held in September, joint working with the Forestry Commission. The event will take place at Marquis Drive and is expected to attract thousands of visitors.
- Sustrans – national route 5, from Marquis Drive to include Sherbrook, Brocton Coppice and Milford to Stafford. Natural England is recommending that an Appropriate Assessment is completed.
- Great War Hut – official opening will take place on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2008.
- Highways – supports for signs around Shugborough and Hatherton have been painted black to be more in keeping with the protected landscape. Hatherton Parish Council is delighted with the work that Highways have undertaken. This indicates a way forward with minimising the impact of highways improvements.
- Beaudesert Hall – emergency recording by laser scanning (funding from Staffordshire County Council, Lichfield District Council and Sustainable Development Funding). An HLF bid is being prepared for the site.

### **Any Planning Items that may require consideration**

Relevant papers will be tabled

**128** Ruth attended the launch of the consultation for the RSS Phase III. A joint response for Phase II, was submitted by the West Midlands AONBs and they are working together on Phase III.

Development Control – Ruth reported that a number of applications had been reviewed. An objection had been recorded for 5 detached dwellings in Cannock Chase Council's area which encroached into the open countryside. Jackie noted

that recommendations had not yet been made, however it does not meet with local plans or Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan.

Ruth noted that the majority of the planning activity related to LDFs. Lichfield District Council's Core Strategy options paper had been issued and an initial assessment indicated a good coverage of AONB issues. Developer Contributions in Cannock Chase Council's SPD draft was commented on, however it excluded access to funds for projects on Forestry Commission landholdings or the AONB. While 38% of Cannock Chase Council's area is AONB, there was a strong desire that developers worked on urban open spaces. Ruth hoped that recommendations to the committee included open access land. Confirmation of this is required.

Cllr Roberts noted that following quarry activity in Hazelslade an area in between Hednesford and Beau Desert Golf Club became a deposit site for tipping. An agreement was reached in November to include this area within the golf club's boundary to extend the holes in this area. The land is within the AONB and abuts Forestry Commission land. Cllr Roberts requested that a representative of the AONB Unit makes a presentation to the golf club to give an overview of the AONB. It was noted that the golf club is in stewardship relating to its heathland management.

Jackie informed the meeting that an application was pending for a wind farm at Bleak House. A planning control committee meeting the following week would be receiving a presentation from Haworth Power, Jackie and Ruth to attend as visitors.

### **Any Other Business**

**129** Cllr Roberts noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2007 were not officially received at the last meeting due to the quorate issue. This was undertaken at this point.

### **Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting**

**130** The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2008, venue to be determined.

Cllr Roberts thanked Cannock Chase Council for hosting the meeting and wished all seasonal greetings.

### **Part Two Exclusion of the Public and Press**

The Chairman to move:

"That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the local Government Act 1972 (as amended) indicated below"

None.