



**Cannock Chase AONB Partnership Annual General Meeting of the Joint Committee
Thursday 16th July 2020 at 10.30 AM
Remotely via Microsoft Teams**

(Draft) minutes

1. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

- 1.1 The election of Chair and Vice-Chair for the next 12 months was overseen by John Rowe, Honorary Secretary of the Joint Committee
- 1.2 A call for nominations of chair was made. Cllr Bates nominated Cllr Frances Beatty to be appointed as Chair for the next 12 Months. Cllr Heath seconded the proposal. No further nominations were received. A vote was then taken on the nomination of Cllr Frances Beatty to be appointed as Chair for the next 12 Months.

1.3 Resolved:

That Councillor Frances Beatty is appointed Chair of the AONB Joint Committee for the next 12 months.

- 1.4 A call for nominations for vice-chair was made. Cllr Beatty nominated Cllr Len Bates to be appointed as vice-chair for the next 12 Months. Councillor Heath seconded the proposal. No further nominations were received. A vote was then taken on the nomination of Cllr Len Bates to be appointed as vice-chair for the next 12 Months.

1.5 Resolved:

That Councillor Len Bates is appointed Vice-chair of the AONB Joint Committee for the next 12 months.

2. Welcome and introductions

- 2.1 FB extended welcome to Committee members and to those who are not members of the Committee.

Members present

Cllr Frances Beatty
Cllr Len Bates

Representing

Stafford Borough Council
South Staffordshire Borough
Council

Cllr Gill Heath	Staffordshire County Council
Ian Marshall	AONB Unit
Richard Harris	AONB Unit
Julia Banbury	AONB Unit
Glenn Watson	Cannock Chase Council
Janene Cox	Staffordshire County Council
(part of meeting)	
Anthony Humphreys	Staffordshire County Council
John Rowe	Staffordshire County Council
Hazel McDowall	Natural England
Mike Shurmer	RSPB
Roger Broadbent	West Midland Bird Club
Stephen Stray	Lichfield District Council

Members of the Public:

Alistair Dewar
Stuart Haynes

Guests:

Claire Heeks	FPCR
Keith Nye	FPCR
Stephanie Crewe	LUC

3. Apologies for absence

3.1 Apologies were received from the following Members and officers:

Cllr Mark Winnington, Staffordshire County Council
Patrick Jervis, South Staffordshire Borough Council
Dick Turton, Ramblers, Walsall Group
Doug Stanley, Forestry England
Gary Kelsey, Forestry England
Nick Carter, Historic England
Shaun Denny, Cemex

3.2 SH asked if the meeting can be recorded. It was advised that the constitution of the Joint Committee does not currently allow meetings to be recorded.

4. Financial report

4.1 The meeting received a report from the Treasurer to the Joint Committee.

4.2 Final revenue outturn 2019/20. The AONB was underspent by approximately £7k. Defra was returned £4.5k and approximately £2.3k underspend was transferred into the AONB Reserve. The closing reserve balance is circa £55k and has reduced significantly in 2019/20 as a result of the completion of

additional works totalling circa £97k for the distribution and allocation of retained prior year underspends.

The Sustainable Development Fund incurred spend of £19k and is outlined in Appendix 2 to the report.

[Footnote: It was noted that whilst spend for the year was shown to be £183k, it was actually a lot higher and closer to £280k as it included £97k additional works funded from reserve]

- 4.3 Revenue budget 2020/21. Total funding for 2020/21 is approximately £192k. This represents a slight increase on 2019/20 due to Defra's contribution increasing by £2k. The extra £2k has been moved into AONB projects along with a proportion of the budget (£10k) previously allocated to the Sustainable Development Fund.
- 4.4 GH congratulated the team on spending the underspend.
- 4.5 SH asked where the Defra money has been spent i.e. the £97k. AH referred to the opening balance and closing balance in Appendix 5. The spend is also summarised in the Annual Review.
- 4.6 **Resolved:**

- (a) That the Committee approved the Financial outturn 2019/20**
- (b) That the Committee notes progress on the current net revenue spend for 2020/21.**

5. AONB Guides

- 5.1 The meeting received a report of the AONB Landscape Planning Officer on a range of planning guides and initiatives which have the aim of ensuring that the natural beauty of the AONB is protected and enhanced.

(a) AONB Design Guide
- 5.2 The meeting received a presentation by Claire Heeks of FPCR (slides attached) which led to the following discussion.
- 5.3 FB felt it was an excellent guide.
- 5.4 MS acknowledged it was a really good piece of work. He would like to incorporate more nature and biodiversity into the document, taking the opportunity to raise these issues in people's minds as part of design. JB did incorporate some of MS's comments and expressed she was sorry if he felt it didn't go far enough.

- 5.5 Answering questions from Members about dissemination of the Guide(s), JB explained both the Design Guide and the Views and Setting Guide will be available on the AONB website and will be sent out to Local Planning Authorities. Opportunities to provide virtual / on-line training for Local Authority planning officers and Councillors are being explored. The guides could also be sent out to consultant planners/architects – focussing on the larger local practices that regularly submit applications in and around the AONB.
- 5.6 FB – Design should include design features in terms of climate change, water capture, solar panels. It is such an important document that it should be incorporated into local plans, and the AONB would welcome adoption by local authorities as an SPD. More discussions should be had with the Planning Authorities on the status of the document. JB reported there had been a lot of discussion on the status of the documents during workshops and consultation with partners. By using the Guide planning authorities would be fulfilling their duty to have regard to the AONB under the CROW Act (2000). JB will be using the guides and referring planning case officers to the Guides in her planning consultation responses. The Guide provides robust baseline evidence and good, sound advice, and is easy to use. Discussions are to be held with individual authorities on how best to utilise it.
- 5.7 LB thought it was an excellent document and felt it was necessary to share it with as many as possible, flagging up in particular the local housing authority. A training session could be offered at South Staffs. LB offered to help enable that. FB highlighted that AONBs don't have statutory powers, but we should seek to influence and engage, to ensure the use of the guides is maximised.
- 5.8 HMc felt it was an excellent piece of work and planning officers were involved in its development. Natural England will also be using it in their planning responses. The Officer Working Group will take forward an action with planning authorities and developers to get best use from the Guide. FB requested that the guide is taken forward with planning authorities and developers. IM -AONB to provide plan to achieve this.
- 5.9 FPCR were thanked for the presentation and for all their hard work.

(b) Views and Setting Guide

- 5.10 The meeting received a presentation by Stephanie Crew from LUC (slides attached) which led to the following discussion.
- 5.11 JB thanked SC for the presentation and added for clarity that the Viewpoint Specific Guidance is given for representative viewpoints. This is not intended to replace site and development specific landscape and visual impact appraisal.

- 5.12 SC confirmed that the 20 views are representative views. The locations provide a representation of typical views, spread out geographically around the AONB. JB added that the number of views was in part limited by budget constraints.
- 5.13 HMc felt it was an excellent document, and considers the setting, an often-forgotten element. The document gives step-by-step guide so developers can think about the impact on views within the AONB.
- 5.14 FB asked about dissemination – JB confirmed it will be disseminated as for the Design Guide, once it is endorsed by the Joint Committee, and will be used by the AONB in planning responses and to draw attention to the issues of views and settings to local planning authorities.
- 5.15 LUC was thanked for the presentation and for all their hard work.

(c) Car park improvements - Key Landscape Principles

- 5.16 JB explained that this document has been prepared to provide design advice for landowners on any potential changes in car parking in the AONB being considered as a result of the SAC Partnership DIP Car Park Strategy, and in response to conversations with Chris Walsh (SAC Partnership) about potential landscape implications of car park works. It sets out design considerations and detailed key principles to minimise visual impact, protect and enhance biodiversity and protect heritage features. The major landowners have been consulted including local planning authorities who manage sites in the AONB. The version available with Committee papers is a draft and will be updated to embed the photographs of good practice within the text. If endorsed by the Joint Committee it will be available on the AONB website and sent to landowners who manage car parks to provide design pointers when considering car park improvements in the AONB.
- 5.17 FB asked if planning consent is needed. JB explained that this would depend on the proposal and the document advises landowners to seek the advice of the planning authority. FB recommended that we alert landowners to the document.
- 5.18 SH introduced himself and explained about the Save Cannock Chase group. The group objects to pay parking and restrictions to free access across the Chase. 80% of the group's members oppose SAC plans. JB reiterated the only aspect the AONB is dealing with is design. The questions raised are for the SAC partnership. SH asked for clarification on the current position of the implementation plans? He raised a broader question for the AONB. The DIP has been approved by all stakeholders. Where we are with that? FB responded we are not answering SAC questions. IM reported that both implementation plans have been approved and published on LA websites. GW identified LAs are obliged to protect the SAC and have produced

mitigation plans. The DIPs are a method of managing car parks, with options to rationalise some, expand others. LAs have to be mindful of their legal responsibilities to the SAC. The plans present principles, and at this stage are not dealing with details. The details are not known at this stage, and there will be future opportunities for further consultation and engagement.

- 5.19 RB raised that car park charges is an issue with WMBG and other stakeholders. Car park closures deter special interest groups. Having said that the design of car parks is an excellent document.
- 5.20 SH asked when is the next public consultation on the SAC Partnership's car parking proposals? FB said it is not a matter for this Committee. GW advised that precise dates can't be given at this stage. SH explained his biggest fear is that this will go forward without any input from residents.

(d) Dark skies

- 5.21 JB reported that the AONB is hoping to collaborate with CPRE Staffordshire to raise awareness of dark skies and lighting in the AONB. CPRE have an established 'Star Count' citizen science project where members of the public are invited to go out on clear night in February and count the number of stars they can see in a particular constellation. We are looking to develop this at a local level around the AONB to raise awareness of the dark skies in the AONB and issues around light spillage and light pollution.
- 5.22 There would also be the opportunity to develop lighting guidance, with the help of specialists.
- 5.23 **Resolved:**

(a) That the Committee endorses the AONB Design Guide and Views and Setting Guide

(b) That the Committee endorses the AONB Car Park Improvements – Key Landscape Principles

(c) That the Committee notes the progress to develop a Dark skies Project with CPRE Staffordshire

6. AONB Annual Review 2019-20

- 6.1 Members received the report of AONB Development Officer presenting the AONB Annual Review 2019/20.
- 6.2 This is the first annual review that has been produced for 4 years. The AONB team has delivered a wide range of works. Some projects have carried over in 2020-21 but were started in the previous financial year so it is felt it is important to record them. The report sets out finances at the end and shows that we have spent almost all of budget and the underspend. SH's attention

was drawn to page 12 which shows how the AONB underspend was utilised. During 2019/20 Defra were holding monthly monitoring meetings with the AONB. They are delighted with our performance and monitoring requirements will now revert back to the normal requirements.

6.3 Resolved:

That the Committee approves the Annual Review for publication and dissemination

7. Impacts of COVID-19 on Cannock Chase and AONB delivery

- 7.1 Members received a report of the AONB Development Officer setting out the impacts of the pandemic on Cannock Chase and AONB delivery.
- 7.2 All AONB staff have been working remotely since 3rd week of March. We have been able to hold virtual meetings, so our work has not been as affected as it could have been without this facility. The impacts of COVID-19 on AONB activities have been assessed using a traffic light system. Members are referred to the Report for high risk activities that have had to be cancelled. We have delayed the invitation for applications for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF). RH has been working to refine the SDF documents. We are still hopeful we will attract funding this year.
- 7.3 Some other projects have taken longer to conclude due to partner or consultancy staff being furloughed. Compared to other AONBs, however, we have been relatively little effected. RB reported the West Midlands Bird Club is still working on long-eared owl survey.
- 7.4 Landowners have reported unprecedented numbers of visitors since lockdown restrictions have been eased. Unintended consequences of this have been large social gatherings, 2 major fires, and a range of anti-social behaviours. The local response to the pandemic was to close visitor centres during the lockdown; they are now re-opening them in line with govt guidance. We want to encourage responsible behaviour. All AONBs have been experiencing unprecedented numbers and antisocial behaviour.
- 7.5 We can anticipate higher than average number of visitors with all the associated problems and pressures this is causing to landowners and local communities. It is suggested that this requires a collective response and the AONB is offering to convene a meeting with major landowners in order to discuss what the issues are and best way to have a co-ordinated response.
- 7.6 The suggestion for a landowner meeting was supported.

- 7.7 MS proposed that the conversation between landowners should extend beyond COVID-19 to look at broader AONB-wide issues like nature recovery, visitor management and climate change, and include the SAC partnership.
- 7.8 GH supports a meeting with landowners. Recognised it is important that landowners join up. She highlighted the danger from plastic and broken bottles.
- 7.9 RB was grateful to IM directing him to Police for reporting incidents on the Chase. Whilst doing Nightjar work, he has noticed vehicles speeding across the Chase. The Police have been responsive, and recognises they are under huge pressure on the Chase. Whilst out on the Chase he has been concerned about numbers of vehicles and speeding, not just in association with Covid-19.
- 7.10 SH asked if the public could attend the proposed meeting? IM confirmed that the meeting was for the landowners and emergency services to discuss their response.

7.11 **Resolved:**

That the committee supports the AONB Unit's offer to bring together the major landowners, authorities, emergency services and SAC Partnership in order to discuss the impacts of unprecedented visitor numbers on Cannock Chase and how to respond.

8. Communications Strategy and Place Brand

- 8.1 Members received a report of the AONB Development Officer which set out progress on a communications strategy for the AONB and the development of a place brand for Cannock Chase.

(a) Communications Strategy

- 8.2 Members were reminded of the presentation they received in December last year from SCC Communications team on the review of AONB internal and external communications. This highlighted shortcomings internally with the Partnership and with external stakeholders in our communications approach. A draft communication strategy has now been produced, incorporating the views of partners including the 6-visitor centre group, and Visitor Management Task & Finish Group.

(b) Place Brand

- 8.3 The need for a Place Brand for Cannock Chase was one of the key recommendations of the Communications Review. Place brand consultants FDA Design were appointed utilising part of last year's budget underspend. 6

initial concept designs were circulated for comments, from which 3 were shortlisted. Further work was completed, and from this the 'Walker' image was the clear favourite from those engaged and consulted. With Committee endorsement, this concept design will be taken forward as the umbrella place brand for Cannock Chase.

8.4 Outputs will include brand guidelines and a sense of place toolkit for businesses to embed the place brand into their products and services ... So far, feedback has been positive. The priority now is to work with individual partners to see how this umbrella brand will work with and sit alongside their existing brands.

8.5 **Resolved:**

(a) That Committee notes progress on the development of a Communications Strategy

(b) That Committee endorses the 'Walker' concept design for a place brand for Cannock Chase.

9. Planning update

9.1 The meeting received a report of the AONB Landscape Planning Officer on development management and planning policy since the last meeting, as well as progress with HS2.

(a) Development management and planning policy

9.2 There has been a reduction in the number of planning applications since COVID-19. A brief summary of comments made on applications is included in the accompanying papers. Any queries on specific applications please get in touch with JB.

9.3 FB asked if Planning Authorities have taken account of AONB comments on planning consultation responses? JB reported that several consultations have been for amendments to applications where the AONB had objected and the proposals had been amended in response, indicating that notice is being taken. FB and LB requested a report to the next Committee meeting on this issue.

(b) High Speed Rail (HS2) Phase 2a

9.4 The Trent Sow Parklands HS2 Group now has a webpage hosted on the AONB website where the Design Principles document prepared for HS2 can be downloaded. Sam Caraway (Trent Sow HS2 Group's Project Manager) has been furloughed but is likely to be returning to work in August. Initial discussions with the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the proposed programme of Environmental Enhancements for the area were positive.

However; NLHF have indicated that because of Covid 19, all funds have been diverted to their emergency fund and new applications for funding are not proceeding for the time being.

9.5 **Resolved:**

(a) That Committee note progress made on planning matters since the last meeting.

(b) That Committee notes the update on HS2 Phase 2a

10. AONB Annual Conference 2020

10.1 Members received a report of the AONB Development Officer on proposals for running this year's AONB annual conference.

10.2 A face to face conference cannot be held this year due to Covid-19. There are three options, postpone a face to face conference until spring (although there is no guarantee restrictions would have been eased to allow this); hold the event in October as a virtual meeting; or cancel it altogether.

10.3 It was suggested to members that a virtual meeting this Autumn is the best way forward for keeping partners and stakeholders involved. Money allocated in budget for the conference (for venue hire and refreshments) can be used to engage IT support to hold a series of short webinars over several days.

10.4 GH supports virtual conference over 2-3 days. LB agreed. LB raised that we could ask a local MP to be principal speaker.

10.5 Committee was asked for feedback on possible future themes. The selection of a theme was delegated to officers.

10.6 **Resolved:**

(a) That Committee holds the Annual conference 2020 virtually.

(b) That Committee delegates the choice of conference theme to officers.

11. Any other business

11.1 FB suggested we hold a tour of the Chase for new Council members. GH queried how can we do it at the moment with the current restrictions on the pandemic. We may have to restrict to 6 people at the moment which would make it difficult due to Government guidelines. IM to arrange and send out invitation to gather interest.

11.2 SH expressed his disappointment that the AONB was not aware of percentage of opposition to the car parking plans on Cannock Chase.

12. Date and time of next meeting

12.1 IM to send round suggestion for next meeting in December.

ENDS