

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Friday 25th June 2021
Teleconference 10.00 - 12.40

MINUTES

Meeting Attendees

Steve Mulberry (Chairman)
Dr Eirene Williams (Community – Vice Chair)
Rob Joules (National Trust)
Brian Butler (NFU)
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (N Devon Council)
Cllr Jeff Wilton-Love (Devon County Council)
Chris Preece (Voluntary Sector – NDAS)
Pete Burgess (DWT)
Lewis Andrews (Community Rep.)
Shaun Harrington (Torrige District Council)
Richard Prowse (Tarka Country Trust)
Rose Roberts (Community Rep.)
Richard Berridge (Community Rep.)
Claire Moodie (Community Rep.)
Penny Mills (CPRE)
Brett Grosvenor (EA)
Christine Goodall (NE)
(17 voting members)

Apologies

Martin Batt (Community – Vice Chair)
Paul Green (Community Rep.)
Rose Day (Community Rep.)
Hugh Bone (Torrige Parishes Rep)
Mike Kelly (Community Rep.)
Mel Austen (Biosphere Partnership)
Paula Ferris (Coastwise ND)
Sarah Jennings (DCC)

Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (Manager)
Dave Edgcombe (Projects Officer)
Laura Carolan (Communications Officer)
Andrew Austen (NDC)
Kirstie Pritchard (DCC)

Guest Speaker from 11.30

Mike Moser (North Devon Biosphere Nature Improvement Working Group)

- 1. Welcome, introductions and apologies - Chairman Steve Mulberry** welcomed Partnership members to the Zoom meeting. **JCW** welcomed new member Cllr Jeff Wilton-Love on behalf of Devon County Council and reported apologies.
- 2. Minutes of the last meeting on 26th February 2021 and matters arising. Minutes agreed.**
Matters arising:
 - **Rockham Steps** – **KP** reported that DCC have received a range of expensive options awaiting new Manager to start to assess options. Rope access firm are currently removing the upper steps that will be re-used if viable. Contact Steve Gardner at DCC if further questions.
 - **Green Recovery Challenge Fund** – **BG** reported that DWT have submitted a bid for £300k for 'Natural Solutions' for biodiversity, flood management etc. focussed on Upper Torrige & Hartland streams in Years 1&2, then Upper Taw, Ilfracombe and Combe Martin areas in Years 3&4.
 - **Staycation Pressures** – **LC** reported that she is maintaining engagement with national Communications officers group to share issues and good practice, reporting to Defra too, plus local group around Braunton Burrows working with partners and NDC.

3. Governance

- **Election of new Partnership Chair in October 2021** – **SM** reminded members that his four-year term due to end this Autumn and of the forthcoming election. Find **attached** a nomination form for self or others, requiring a seconder and details of the candidate including why they want the role and what they can bring to it. **ACTION – ALL.**

4. AONB Manager’s Report – additional points:

a) **Presentations on the North Devon Pioneer ELM Trial results and ELM Advocacy Project by JCW.** See links to reports on [Farming and Land Management | North Devon Coast \(northdevon-aonb.org.uk\)](http://northdevon-aonb.org.uk)

- **BB** asked if likely that lowland sheep and beef farms would become more extensive and dairy farms might intensify to remain profitable, with consequent loss to more wildlife rich habitats?
- **PB** suggested important to engage with wide range of farms to understand and address different behaviours and challenges, as well as opportunities from new schemes
- **JW-L** requested copies of the presentation (attached)

b) **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)**

- **SM** set the context for the programme, following the Glover Review of Protected Landscapes two years ago, a Written Ministerial Statement (attached) on landscapes was made on Thursday 24 June that launched this new programme to address recommendations in the Review alongside ambitions in the government’s 25 Year Environment Plan. A government consultation will follow this summer but plans for a National Landscape Service seem to have been toned down.
- **DE** presented the detail of the programme and how it would be delivered in the North Devon AONB working with a local contractor and opening for grant applications in early July. **PB** suggested contacting Mike Symes at the Braunton FF to publicise. **BB** raised issues of extensification versus intensification, plus likelihood that people may rent out land/grass rather than engage with schemes. **PB** highlighted importance of survey and monitoring work to better understand area and potential, this should be built into projects. **BB** concerned that despite priorities for people engagement and more access, it has been a challenging time for farmers so they may not be receptive.
- See - [Farming In Protected Landscapes | North Devon Coast \(northdevon-aonb.org.uk\)](http://northdevon-aonb.org.uk)

c) **Request for Extension to the AONB designated area** – letter received from Natural England (**attached**) showing four priority areas to be designated, but no detail on future programme or prioritisation (additional details provided as a FAQ document after the meeting - North Devon unlikely to be a high priority given indicators used as basis for prioritisation).

d) **Sustainable Development Fund** – 9 enquiries received but no applications submitted yet. **MW** highlighted interest from group working on bid for a Surf Reserve. **LC** reported on launch next week of an AONB “Nature and Climate Challenge” fund with a deadline for bids at the end of July, as a subset of the overall fund, aimed at communities, schools and parishes. See website Grants section and **attached flyer**.

e) **Communications Reports** – over 1000 followers on Instagram. Revised E-News format due out next week. Developing a communications summary/FAQ for website to focus down on four key roles of the AONB and then share that more clearly with the public to increase public understanding of roles and priorities. ‘Then and Now’ booklet progressing working with Beaford, due out in July.

f) **NAAONB**

- **Art in the Landscape Strategy** – **JCW** presented a summary of the recommendations and requested endorsement of them by the Partnership to support ongoing work by the NAAONB. **DECISION: The strategy was unanimously endorsed.**
- **Conference** – **JCW, SM, MB and EW** attending. Bookings still open.

5. **Landscape Report and Planning Update – additional points as follows: -**

- Little change since last meeting, slightly increased workload, already 17 more applications responded to in just three months and ongoing increase in demand for tourism related development.
- Three significant projects – ‘major development’ of 12 holiday lodges in open field at Hollaway Cross on A39 near Horns Cross, requiring major highways work too; Lee Bay Hotel site still awaiting decision – community disappointed at lack of affordable housing; Yelland brownfield development was refused but submitted an appeal against NDC’s decision.
- **Power Line Removal** – awaiting delivery in the Autumn.
- **Croyde Enforcement Issues** – concern at number of challenges and limited response from NDC team. AONB have raised some issues as have the Parish Council.
- **AA** reported that the Georgeham Parish Neighbourhood Plan is still open for public consultations until 9 July 2021 - [Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2031 - Georgeham Parish Council](#)
- **NDC Planners** – major staff changes in progress with Maria Bailey joining as Head of Planning, **SM** suggested useful to provide some training on AONB issues in the Autumn.
- **SH** expressed thanks for the good quality work done by the AONB team and Planning Panel members, very useful for the planning team. Wanted to mention additional challenge from Certificates of Lawfulness, for example TDC recently won an appeal on one at Dolton, but now gone to Judicial Review.

6. **North Devon Biosphere Nature Plan and Declaration** – Presentation by Mike Moser, chair of the Biosphere’s Nature Improvement Working Group.

- Mike acknowledged important context for AONBs of the Colchester Declaration and strong input from the AONB team and chairman, particularly Martin Batt who chaired the Coast working group, extending his thanks to all, including the 40 people on the working groups.
- Process – analysis of root causes of ecological decline; inter-connection of farming/ nature/ tourism in the area; engaged with farmers and acknowledge key role without blaming; created a vision for 2030 with 5-year plans to deliver through five action plans – coast, grassland & arable, trees and woodlands, towns and villages, watercourses and waterbodies. **Goals: First:** 30% by 2030 of semi-natural habitats in good or recovering condition (about 30% of Biosphere is semi-natural habitats but not in good condition) and **Second:** remaining 70% of land has nature recovery integrated into its management.
- Highlighted the levers and resources for change; importance of working with all partners and farmers/landowners. **Declaration** for individuals and organisations (linked through Pledge for Nature project – new officer Emily Willoughby) to sign up to over the next five years. **Launch** – with Sacha Dench (the Human Swan) flying round Britain to raise awareness of Climate Challenge, w/b 8 July. Zoom workshops to engage people over summer and autumn.

- **AONB role and responsibilities** – **JCW** suggested people look at Plan and who is leading on which actions. AONB is down to lead and support on a number of actions in the Coast plan only, but dependent on staff time and resources.
- **Discussion:** **SM** emphasised importance of addressing habitat condition and creation rather than major focus on species introductions; **PB** explained that keystone species such as beaver could lead and encourage habitat improvement and creation, plus work to introduce choughs or Big Blue butterfly would contribute to habitat improvements. **EW** commented on an apparent contradiction in the Nature Recovery Plan and associated initiatives, between restoring the landscape to the approximate state for which it was designated as an AONB in 1959, and the introduction of habitats and ecological communities now considered desirable for biodiversity. Nevertheless, the public and landowners often fail to understand that some ecological disturbance and change increases species richness. **MM** agreed but in some cases land management had become too tidy, and with larger machinery, this is creating hard boundaries – losing the spaces and places that nature favours; **BB** expressed concern at possible return of red kites and their impact on buzzards. **PB** reminded members of importance of feasibility work, meeting legislative requirements and working in partnership on potential species reintroductions. **JCW** raised challenge of addressing nature recovery alongside increasing public access as potentially difficult to do both on same site. Thanks were expressed to Mike for excellent and enthusiastic presentation.
- **DECISION: Partnership agreed to endorse the Biosphere Nature Recovery Plan.**
- **Action: JCW** – to circulate link to Partnership when formal consultation opens for individual members to respond to.

9. Updates from Partners: –

- **Devon Wildlife Trust** – **PB** reported on progress of Devon Treescapes project addressing Ash Dieback. Development stage completed awaiting decision from NLHF on second stage hopefully by September. Also highlighted the campaign to record “notable trees” for nature, cultural or societal reasons at <https://devontreescapes.com/home> **Action: All** Please share.
- **CPRE** – **PM** increased public concern at tree felling and removal or destruction of hedgerows, difficult to find advice for the public. **PB** mentioned increase in reports to DWT but sometimes this was coppicing that looked extreme but was part of normal management. Main source is Forestry Commission regarding felling licenses or planners for conservation areas or Tree Protection Orders.
- **National Trust** – **RJ** mentioned recent court case in relation to Baggy Point and ongoing work to protect heritage sites. Mention of World Sand-Dune Day and the Art Trail of Cows in the dunes at Woolacombe.
- **Natural England** – **CG** responded to comment about increase in NE resources, to say this was just for one year and to support specific pieces of work such as nature recovery, a boost to designated sites monitoring etc. but not specifically to areas within the AONB.
- **Clean Devon** – **PM** reported on progress of this initiative with a range of partners in terms of roadside litter, verge management etc. see [Home - Clean Devon](#)

10. Date of Next Meeting - Friday 8 October 2021, 10-12.30 (format TBC)