

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Friday 27th January 2017
Henry Williamson Room, Barnstaple Library

MINUTES

Meeting attendees

Steve Pitcher (Chairman)
Rose Day (Community Rep.)
Hon. John Rous (CLA)
Andy Bell (ND Biosphere Reserve)
Terry Green (Community Rep.)
Cllr. Alan Whittle (TDC)
Brett Grosvenor (EA)
Barbara Fryer (Community Rep.)
Richard Butler (Community Rep.)
Paula Ferris (Coastwise ND)
Caroline Leaver (Community Rep.)
Paul Green (Community Rep.)
Lesley Garlick (DCC)
Richard Dyer (NFU)
Richard Prowse (Tarka Country Trust)
Lewis Andrews (TDC)
Cllr. Robin Julian (DCC)
Jonathan Fairhurst (NT)
Justin Gillett (NE)
Trevor Stanbury (NDMB)

Apologies

Steve Mulberry (Vice Chairman)
Rob Joules (NT)
Cllr Pat Barker (ND+)
Cllr Rodney Cann (NDC)
Alison Boyle (Community Rep.)
Cllr. Andrea Davis (ENP)
Charlotte Russell (Historic England)
Pete Burgess (DWT)
Andy Jones (NDDC)
Chrissie Ingle (AONB team)

Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (Manager)
Dave Edgcombe (Projects Officer)
Cat Oliver (Education Officer)
Gigha Klinkenborg (Administrator)

Speaker/Public

Andrew Woollacott (Christie Devon Estates)
John Breeds

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

The Chairman welcomed partners and attendees Trevor Stanbury the new tourism representative on the Partnership (North Devon Marketing Bureau), Justin Gillett (Natural England), John Breeds (Braunton Countryside Centre) and Andrew Woollacott (Savills, agent for Christie Devon Estates).

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising. Minutes agreed as an accurate record. Matters arising:-

- **Planning Protocol** – (Post Meeting Update – signed by all three authorities)
- **Dogs** – an outstanding action point. **Action: team.**
- **Wild Shorts – SDF project** - Some outstanding short films produced on our coastal environment. Some are an excellent advert for the AONB and we can use them, see them at:- <http://www.northdevonmovingimage.org.uk/wild-shorts-competition.html>
- **Atlantic Coast Cooperative Trust** – The trustees have offered their support in promoting the SDF, some schools have engaged with Coastal Creatures and we will join their Community Forum. It's a good link and we are grateful to Rose Day for the introduction.

- **Tranquility Monitoring** – This has not progressed yet as issues around definitions and measures.

3. AONB Manager's Report

JCW presented her report adding the following points:

i. Management Plan Delivery

- **Coastal Creatures & Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project** – both projects successfully engaging people with wildlife, ongoing benefits into next year.
- **Geology Project** – HLF advised us to defer the bid to 2017.

ii. Activities in Development

- **Marine Plan** – team attending workshops on evidence to inform policies
- **Farmer meetings** – Engagement meetings with farmers planned for the early Spring.
- **Defra Pioneers** – update from **Andy Bell**: Defra's 25 Year Environment Strategy will be tested through four Pioneer areas. North Devon Biosphere is the '**Landscape Pioneer**' and the AONB is represented on the working group. Baseline information will be gathered on land cover, detail on the condition of habitats and services obtained from them (water, carbon storage etc.), plus the amount and impact of public and private funding into the areas in order to measure the value of the Natural Environment. An example is being used of Natural Flood Management in Braunton on the Acland stream to test the approach. **Marine Pioneer** – North Devon has been confirmed as the target area alongside Suffolk. MMO is providing national coordination, with Defra funding a local coordinator hosted by the BR. The focus will be the marine protected areas, MCZs and potential fisheries improvement plan. The extent of the area will be 20 miles out to sea including Lundy and up the Bridgwater Bay, possibly to Extreme High Water Mark in the estuary. Pioneers not formally launched, but should happen shortly.
- **Paula Ferris** raised opportunities for citizen science engagement through the Universities with their marine focus; and issues around Horsey Island flooding following sluice gate collapse and ongoing erosion. High tides could be a problem and the inside bank could become the main sea defence. There is no clarity on responsibilities or funding to protect the site and historic environment. **Andy Bell** reported on potential opportunities through SWEEP (SW Partnership for Environmental and Economic Prosperity) - £5m NERC funding with Universities of Exeter, Plymouth and the Plymouth Marine Laboratory under Prof Ian Bateman to look at the benefits of the natural environment for the economy.
- **Action: JCW** Pioneers to be on the Partnership Agenda in future.

iii. Management Plan Monitoring and Reporting

- **Mid-Term Monitoring report from DBRC** – update to the report received in 2015 shows little change apart from a slight increase in land under agriculture and agri-environment schemes, a couple more County Wildlife Sites surveyed, and two beaches, Instow and Ilfracombe, with reduced water quality partly due to a change in methodology. At Instow, upstream work is ongoing with 80%-90% of pollution from agricultural sources. **JCW** reported back on wildlife monitoring in the AONB – this tends to be site or project specific, so very little data available currently apart

from on birds and bats. **Comments: Justin Gillett** – main focus for Natural England is SSSIs but work is moving into landscape scale monitoring rather than just sites. **Brett Grosvenor** - Instow is affected by a huge catchment, dominated by weather conditions. Environment Agency is working with Defra but the cost benefit assessment shows £10m required to improve the estuary. The water quality at Ilfracombe is improving.

- The issue of intensive dairy farming, slurry spreading and their impact on the environment was raised, with a request for clarification on the role of planning to control this? **Brett Grosvenor** responded that this is a priority and monitoring is being carried out. The TDC representative explained that intensification of farming is problematic in such an area. The outstanding application for a slurry lagoon at Beckland Farm is complicated and working with all partners to progress this. Legal advice has stated that slurry spreading is not a planning consideration. Natural England has objected on the grounds of air quality. TDC planners, Natural England and Environment Agency will be meeting with Geoffrey Cox MP in March to discuss this application. A number of members raised issues from different viewpoints, and **JCW** reported concerns with intensification of farming expressed by other protected landscapes at a regional and national level.

iv. Sustainable Development Fund

- The budget for 2016/17 is £25,000. We have received 20 applications, 1 pending and £3,584 left to allocate. **JCW** requested **All Partners** to publicise the SDF grant scheme for next year that is now open with projects able to start from 1 April 2017.

v. Quarterly Communications report and Events for 2017

- Explore the Coast website will be closing soon, having transferred content and contacted businesses to amend their links to the new site.
- Events - Many thanks to all partnership members who helped at events this year, it is much appreciated and allows greater understanding of our project work. New venues this year were successful and we are exploring more events in the major towns. **Action: All** - Let team know if you can help with any 2017 events.
- Media – we have noticed changes to engagement with traditional media and more difficult to get guaranteed coverage. Using local publications more to reach residents. The Coastal Creatures ‘What’s that Wednesday’ social media posts, that highlight a coastal species, are proving popular. It was suggested that paid adverts on Facebook could be explored.

vi. Business Plan and Budget for 2017-18 Draft

- Review of the year – **JCW** will be contacting partners for their progress against Management Plan delivery - **Action: All**.
- Funding is indicative as awaiting confirmation from the local authorities
- Annual priorities will be Historic Environment and Health & Wellbeing. Historic England has encouraged us to make a ‘capacity building’ bid for an officer to work with partners and volunteers on prehistoric and WW2 sites. We will be seeking partners and match funding. **Terry Green** offered support from NDAS, and would like to include strip fields and grazing practices. The SDF Panel

has agreed to commission some projects on Health and Wellbeing to support delivery on this theme.

- The Draft was agreed and will be circulated when finalised. **Action: JCW**

4. Local Geodiversity Action Plan

Due to illness, a presentation was not made (but attached to Minutes). The draft plan will be circulated to partners for comments, to be finalised by end of March 2017.

5. Braunton Burrows - Management and Aerial Survey Presentation by Andrew Woollacott, Christie Devon Estates

- The present management of Braunton Burrows has been underway for just over two years with some considerable changes. The investment at Saunton on electricity services, drainage and sewerage had supported the busiest year ever on the site.
- Monitoring landscape change and condition had been assisted by using Google Earth images, filmed in 2013, but now updated in 2016 by the use of drone technology providing 360 degree views, GPS located images and time-lapse/zoom opportunities (see link and live feed on their Facebook page, 'Braunton Burrows Public Information' and a new website www.christieestates.co.uk)
- The estate is working with a number of stakeholders including Plantlife, to monitor specific species
- **Justin Gillett from Natural England** reported that the peak of biodiversity was during the 1950's – 1970's, with the area receiving National Nature Reserve designation in 1964 (since removed). Since then the dunes have over-stabilised with too much scrub and less bare sand, with implications for the range of plants. In the 1990s, grazing trials were carried out on 100ha which led to the use of Higher Level Stewardship payments from 2008 to support grazing of some 600ha and a programme of scrub removal, which is continuing to the present day. This is one of the fastest moving sand dunes in Europe. Rabbit grazing that maintained short grass across much of the area was curtailed by the incidence of myxomatosis in the 1970s
- Comments from those present included: concern that dogs were being given priority rather than wildlife; the boardwalk was an important access route but needed repair; request for a link between new website and AONB website; tensions between grazier and the public; collapse and changes to Flagpole Dune have upset the public but don't understand why this has been allowed to happen; dramatic changes at Crow Point – NE advised that although Shoreline Management Plan policy would be not to protect the 'neck', the underlying bedrock will provide some shelter to the dunes and to wave impact further upriver; request for more information and communication with the public to explain what is being done on the Burrows and why.
- The Partnership member who had requested this agenda item raised some additional concerns of the local community: - allowing the movement of the sand dunes which threatens the agricultural land in the long term; not maintaining the Burrows as part of the coastal sea defences; grazing cows with calves creating tension with walkers and dogs; and considerable public funding going into the area but restricting benefits to the public. The issues were being raised at the AONB Partnership as the natural assets should be an economic driver for the area and the AONB should use them to promote access and understanding.

- **Andrew Woollacott** responded by explaining that there were numerous constraints on the estate in relation to the designations covering the area (AONB, SSSI, UNESCO Biosphere etc.) and the legal/contractual agreements in place. Evidence on some of the issues raised would be required to support any policy and management changes.
- **Justin Gillett** responded that Natural England is carrying out monitoring and data collection and currently no evidence to suggest a change to policy is required. Maintaining public access is an important part of the agreements.
- The Chairman thanked Andrew and Justin for their presentations and suggested a way forward may be to set up a technical management group to look at issues raised. **Action: AONB** team to meet with Andrew Woollacott

6. Project Update on Coastal Creatures by Cat Oliver

- A range of training workshops delivered to partners and volunteers
- Volunteers and partners will be carrying out two species' surveys per month
- Beach cleans being supported with partners and community groups
- 750 people and 30 partners have been engaged with the project over the last four months
- Combe Martin Bioblitz with schools, local partners and MBA on 14 March.
- Summer programme of activities and training being planned, engaging volunteers, residents, schools and visitors

7. Project Update on Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project by Dave Edcombe

- Data from monitoring surveys carried out in North Devon during the development stage and first year of the project will be uploaded to Devon's and the National Biodiversity Network's records.
- A mobile Bat Beacon with displays and interactive panel will be displayed at Combe Martin Museum and Braunton Countryside Centre this year.
- Successful programme of Bat Walks in 2016 supported by Dave. Programme of walks, talks and activities being planned in North Devon from April to October.
- Support provided by Dave to two community projects to provide a bat viewing platform at Braunton and an Audio Bat trail from the Braunton Countryside Centre funded by SDF grants

8. Landscape Report – Dave Edcombe

- Report on planning applications commented on by the AONB
- Successful line removal and most poles from the Croyde site; trial digs being carried out at Woolacombe for undergrounding lines and negotiations with BT regarding possible inclusion of broadband for Morteheo with the scheme.

9. National Association of AONBs – report presented by Rose Day

10. News from Partners

- **Richard Prowse** – The Tarka Country Trust's Community Wildlife Fund will reopen for applications in April. The 'Life on the Verge' co-ordinator, Clare Manning has started and the Trust is seeking a treasurer
- **Cllr. Alan Whittle** – commended the work of the AONB team

- **Jonathan Fairhurst** – the National Trust has received a positive response to the grazing on Woolacombe Warren.
- **Caroline Leaver** – Fullabrook CIC has grant money for projects and could be used as match funds to SDF, TCT grant and Coastal Communities funding.
- **Richard Dyer** – Intensification of farming and land management affects other sectors – the Government needs a strategy.
- **Trevor Stanbury** – North Devon Marketing Bureau has the North Devon destination marketing website www.northdevon.com and invites AONB and partners to add photos and information. Advised that NDC will be recruiting a new regeneration officer with responsibility for tourism. **Action: Team** to input on AONB section.

11. Any other business

Barbara Fryer – Making decisions by email for the Planning panel and the SDF panel is difficult and she requested convening meetings to discuss issues.

12. Date of next meeting

**Friday 26th May 2017 at Lee Bay, North Devon
followed by a beach walk and citizen science activity with Cat Oliver**