



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 15 MAY 2007, IN CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD OFFICES, THE LODGE, CHINNOR, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 1.00 PM.**

**Present:**

Richard Brown	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Rhys Goodwin	Board Member
Sir John Johnson	Board Member
Shirley Judges	Board Member
Richard Pushman	Board Member
Steve Rodrick	CCB Chief Officer
Cllr Alan Walters	Board Member

**In Attendance:**

Clare Gray	Clerk, Buckinghamshire County Council
Chris Smith	CCB Finance Officer
Mike Woods	Buckinghamshire County Council

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mr John Griffin, Mr K Mayne, Mr Bill Storey and Mr Alistair Helliwell (Natural England).

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 February 2007 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

**Item 4 Matters Arising**

A planning application had been made to South Oxfordshire District Council for the solar pv panels and the decision is expected in June 2007. A grant of £5,000 had also been applied for from a government renewable energy scheme. There would be a display panel in the building showing how much energy had been generated by the solar panels.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no members of the public present to ask questions.

**6. DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2006-07**

Members received the report of the Financial Advisor which had been recently circulated, which gave an update on the Statement of Accounts for 2006/7 subject to the year end adjustment. The final statement would be submitted to the Board Meeting in June 2007.

The Financial Advisor made the following points in his presentation:-

- The actual expenditure to date was £571,232 which should ensure that the Board should be entitled to the full grant of £454,000 from Natural England.
- The net surplus was £15,702. In addition £3,600 income should be added to this amount (totalling £19,200) which was sponsorship from the Bucks Building Society for the door drop newsletter.
- This would contribute to the reserves to help meet the costs of those projects which were not being funded.
- The Board noted that with regard to Promotion and Awareness £6,000 of the actual income of £27,902 should be moved to People and Places.
- The reserves and balances needed to be reviewed to look at future need and to look at projects which would roll over for 2007/8.
- A payroll oddity was noted as an invoice had been received from Bucks County Council for £2,500 for Member Allowances for 2005 which needed to be paid.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- The Chairman had contacted Natural England to express concern about the delay in transferring grant money. Natural England did not have their Board Meeting to discuss Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty until mid – late April which meant that the grant offers were late. The grant was expected in June 2007.
- Members noted that whilst the Board had good reserves, this was crucial for the Board who could not rely on other sources of funding for operating costs.
- Treasury Management Policies would be discussed at a later meeting.
- An internal audit had been carried out by Hertfordshire County Council which showed that all systems were adequate.

Chris Smith and the staff were thanked for providing a good year end statement.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**The Committee NOTED the Statement of Accounts for 2006/7.**

#### **7. FINANCE REPORT 2007-08**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer and the Financial Adviser, which gave an update on the finance statement to the end of March 2007. The grant offer of £467,000 had been accepted. The grant offer had not included the £12,000 requested to help cover some of the costs of reviewing the AONB Management Plan.

Members noted the information on the Project Grants and those Projects which had not received funding. The funding for Projects could not be negotiated. The following points were made about some of the Projects:-

- Two Projects which were already underway had not received funding – Visitor Survey and Getting Closer to Nature. The Visitor Survey was time limited as it was a survey conducted every 10 years. Reserve funding and donations would be used to ensure these projects continued and previous work was not wasted.
- The Chiltern Historic Landscape Project would be postponed until 2008-9 at the earliest.
- Members emphasised the importance of promoting the historic environment.

- Access for All had no funding but would be reduced in scale with alternative funding considered.
- Woodland management was seen as a priority area of work which had not received funding. Surveys have shown that up to 40% of ancient semi natural woodland was not included in the definitive inventory of ancient woodland in 1992. The Forestry Commission is now encouraging widespread resurveying of ancient woodland as it is a national priority habitat. This could be discussed further with the Forestry Commission and Woodland Trust.
- People and Places was also time limited because of the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which ends in September 2008.
- Concern was expressed about the support from Natural England which seemed not to be in line fully with the aims of the AONB.
- Money should be reallocated from the Land Management Scheme to support those Projects which had not been funded.

It was agreed that a press release should be drafted this week and forwarded to District and County Councils expressing concern about the shortfall in funding for certain projects. The press release should be sent to MPs.

**RECOMMENDED that:-**

- 1. The Board ACCEPTS the offer of £467,620 core grant from Natural England.**
  - 2. The Board LOBBIES Natural England in good time for the 2008/9 budget setting to introduce an improved process for submitting and approving grant awards based on clearer guidance, more timely awards and scope for local negotiation.**
  - 3. The Board REVISES the Work Programme as recommended and releases reserves of up to £26,000, initially by re-allocating funds from the Land Management Scheme and re-allocating up to £4,000 from the core budget.**
  - 4. The Board NOTES that cost of living awards have not been made to staff but AGREES an interim award of 2% be made in May backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 pending the final outcome of the national negotiations.**
  - 5. The Board AGREES that a press release be prepared outlining the Board's concerns regarding funding.**
- 8. REVIEW OF THE AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer on the proposed process of reviewing the Management Plan and the need to engage the services of a consultant at an approximate cost of £15,000.

The Board has the statutory duty for the preparation and review of the AONB Management Plan and this needs to be completed by May 2008. Members were informed that Natural England had declined to provide an additional £12,000 for this task. The additional workload is significant and there is insufficient capacity within the Board's staff. The staff also do not possess the experience of producing a Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessments. These Assessments have to be carried out due to EU Regulations. It was therefore proposed that a consultant be appointed who has expertise in this field, Alan Wheeler. He was the primary author to two previous Plans. The Chief Officer reported that as a member of staff would be going on maternity leave shortly, this would release funding to help with the Plan.

The following reasons were put forward as to why this work should not be put out to tender:-

1. It is not possible to be precise about the added work load involved as this is an iterative process.
2. The timetable is tight and the time taken to put this work out to tender will delay the start and will almost certainly mean missing the deadline of May 2008.
3. Alan Wheeler has a unique combination of knowledge of the Chilterns and experience of preparing a management plan for the Chilterns. He is very familiar with the process and well known to staff and partners which will enable him to make progress with limited supervision. He has also confirmed his availability over the next 12 months.
4. The day rate and willingness to limit his fees (based on current knowledge of what is involved) to £15,000, represents good value for money. His involvement would also reduce the need for the Chief Officer to provide supervision.

A Committee Member asked whether it was within Standing Orders to not put this work out to tender. There was a discussion about whether to spread the cost over two years or to waive Standing Orders and pay £15,000 in 2007-8. A Member commented that it may be worth reviewing the amount where the tendering process was required as it was quite low in the Contract Standing Orders. The Committee agreed that the Standing Orders should be waived on the basis of the points made above.

**RECOMMENDED that**

1. **The proposed process for reviewing the AONB Management Plan be NOTED.**
2. **The services of Alan Wheeler be SECURED, an environmental consultant, to support the review process and in particular to prepare the Strategic Environmental Assessment.**
3. **A budget of up to £20,000 be ALLOCATED for the review over two years (£15,000 in 2007-08 and £5,000 in 2008-09).**
4. **Natural England be REQUESTED to provide datasets for the review and SEA.**

**9. REPORT ON SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

Members received the report of the Access Officer and Office Manager on the progress made in implementing the Sustainability Plan in 2006-7 and looked at the proposed actions for 2007-8.

The Chief Officer reported that the main aim of the Plan was to achieve carbon neutrality by 2010-11 providing the carbon offset scheme is supported. If this was not possible neutrality would be hard to achieve as the existing building was not energy efficient and the costs and logistics of retro fitting all the measures necessary would be prohibitive.

Members welcomed the Plan and discussed other ways of meeting the Plans aims. They emphasised the importance of car sharing and of planting trees to offset journeys undertaken by cars.

**RECOMMENDED that:**

1. **The Board NOTES the good progress made in implementing the Sustainability Plan for 2006/07.**

2. **The Board APPROVES the proposed actions for 2007/08.**
3. **The Board DEVELOPS the carbon offset scheme with an initial budget of up to £250.**
4. **The Board ADOPTS the aim of achieving carbon neutrality by 2010/11, subject to developing the carbon offset scheme.**

#### **10. APPLICATION FOR THE LEADER PROGRAMME**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer on the applications for the LEADER programme. The Programme will be supported by funding from the Rural Development Programme for England using government and EU funding. It supports rural development measures which support economic, social and environmental activity. The amount of funding is approximately £400,000 per successful area for a period covering 2008-2011. AONB's would be a good fit for the proposed Programmes. Bucks County Council were being very positive about this Programme and were looking to submit 2 bids, one covering the north of the County and the other the South, but both being serviced by a secretariat within the Council. Some of the areas being looked at were forestry, farming, tourism and heritage. SEEDA required expressions of interest to be submitted by early June, a full application by mid October, for funds to be available by Spring 2008.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- Meetings had been held on the LEADER Programme, where there had been strong support from the north of the County. It was suggested to show a balance of support for the south of the County, that a Planning Officer should be invited from Chiltern District Council.
- Some Projects did not require match funding and were financially supported 100%.
- The Chief Officer was not aware of any other bids from neighbouring areas but he would follow this up with each Authority.

#### **RECOMMENDED that:**

**The Board supports any bids to the LEADER Programme which may benefit the Chilterns and help deliver the AONB Management Plan.**

#### **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Committee noted that there was a vacancy for the National Association of AONB's.

#### **12. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on Wednesday 19 September 2007 at 10.30am,

The following meeting will be held on Tuesday 11 December 2007 at 10.30am.

#### **13. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the press and public be excluded for the following item under Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12a because the report contains information relating to the financial affairs of a particular person.**

**14. CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ON MATERNITY LEAVE RELATING TO THE ACCESS OFFICER**

**CHAIRMAN**