



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE THE CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD HELD ON WEDNESDAY 28 MARCH 2007 IN ST. KATHARINE'S, PARMOOR, FRIETH, HENLEY ON THAMES, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 1.12 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Member

Appointing Body

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr Chris Brearley	Three Rivers District Council
Cllr Roger Emmett	Wycombe District Council
Cllr Brian Golby	Mid Beds District Council
Cllr Rhys Goodwin	Bedfordshire County Council
Cllr Susan Howkins	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Marion Mustoe	South Beds District Council
Richard Pushman	Buckinghamshire County Council
Cllr Ian Reay	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Chris Richards	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Cllr David Nimmo Smith	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Bill Storey	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Jules Thomson	South Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Alan Walters	South Bucks District Council

Appointed by Secretary of State

Sir John Johnson (Chairman)	Secretary of State
Mike Fox	Secretary of State
Bettina Kirkham	Secretary of State
Kevin Mayne	Secretary of State
Dr Simon Mortimer	Secretary of State
John Willson	Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

John Griffin	Oxfordshire
Margaret Jarrett	Hertfordshire
Shirley Judges	Buckinghamshire
Barbara Wallis	Buckinghamshire
Julia Wells	Oxfordshire

Officers

Tracy Adams	CCB Farming & Land Use Officer
Kath Daly	CCB Countryside Officer
Steve Rodrick	CCB Chief Officer
Chris Smith	CCB Finance Officer
Maureen Keyworth	BCC and Clerk to the Board

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Cllr David Barnard, Cllr Andy Strange, Dr Mike Render, and Cllr Mary Goldsmith.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23 January 2007 were confirmed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

6. APPOINTMENTS TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND PANEL

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to appoint members to the Sustainable Development Fund Panel.

The Board noted that Mike Render and Jules Thomson were standing down and the Chairman thanked them for their work on the SDF.

Those remaining members expressed a wish to continue on the Panel.

The Board discussed whether changes were needed in the set up of the Panel and agreed that it should remain as it is for the time being.

RESOLVED

The Board AGREED to appoint five members to the Sustainable Development Fund Panel for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008, as follows:

2 Local Authority appointed members

**Brian Golby
Alan Walters**

2 Secretary of State appointed members

**Mike Fox
John Willson**

1 Parish Council appointed member

Julia Wells

7. REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to report decisions made under delegated authority.

The Chairman introduced Chris Smith, who would take over from Mike Collier as Finance Officer to the Board on 1 April 2007.

The Chief Officer reported that the financial position to the end of January was satisfactory and it was anticipated there would be a small surplus on the core budget at the year end.

The core grant payments had been received from Natural England but the Board was yet to receive the outstanding project grant claim. (*Addendum: subsequent to the meeting the grant claim was received.*)

The Audit Commission had not yet audited the accounts for 2005/06.

It was uncertain what the changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme would mean for the Board. The triennial re-valuation of the LGPF was due later this year.

Members were presented with a draft Accord between the Board and the Chiltern Woodland Project, outlining how joint working will take place and welcoming this alliance.

In discussion some members expressed concern that this Accord may set a precedent for other Charities to approach the Board for similar agreements. The Chief Officer commented that any other charity that wants to work with the Board could enter into an Accord to define the relationship as appropriate.

Members noted that this was not an agreement but an accord which sets out the relationship between the two parties in a clear way.

Confusion arose regarding the wording in one of the points which referred to the employment of a manager. This referred to the Chiltern Woodland Project Manager and was not a new post. It was agreed to refine the wording and remove this reference.

RESOLVED:

1. The Board **NOTED** the items considered at the Executive Committee
2. The Board **ENDORSED** the Accord with the Chiltern Woodland Project.

8. REPORT FROM THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members received the report of Barbara Wallis, Board member and Colin White, Planning Officer, the purpose of which was to bring to the attention of the Board the items considered by the Planning Committee and decisions taken under delegated powers.

The Roofing Note was due to be published on 29 March, but there were still problems regarding its adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document. Advice was being sought from Government but to date no response had been received.

It had been agreed that the Annual Planning Forum, organised for officers, would be cancelled due to declining attendance and the Committee was looking at other ways to address issues. It was considered important to continue with education for

planning officers and councillors. Members noted that the Planning Officer did training sessions for undergraduates at Oxford Brookes and Reading. Officers already in post do have training via the Planning Institute but currently there was no link into this. Information regarding AONB is sent to planning officers. It was considered that lunch time seminars were the best way of imparting information. The Planning Officer had given a number of lunch time seminars. Seminars are also offered to local authority members and once the District Council elections have taken place they will be offered again.

It was suggested that the Board produce and distribute a summary of planning issues for Parish Councils.

Discussion took place on the role of members and officers in decision making, as well as the fact that, nationally, there was a shortage of Planning Officers. Those in post may not be aware of the local geography, and it took time for officers to get a feel for their areas.

The AONB Management Plan Review was underway and would be a standing item on the agenda of the Planning Committee.

Two DCLG consultations were discussed at Planning Committee, both of which had positive messages regarding the need to provide more forms of renewable energy generation in major developments. However, there was no mention of dealing with existing dwellings with regard to energy efficiency and water usage, and the need to consider more sustainable building materials.

The Secretary of State's proposed changes to the East of England Plan had also been discussed and concerns were raised with regard to car parking provision for new rural developments with little access to public transport. Adherence to the standards set was not working in rural areas where car ownership is generally higher.

Use of sustainable building materials needed to be promoted as well as the detrimental effects of using certain building materials, such as concrete.

There was a need to ensure the AONB guidance was used as supplementary planning documents.

Members noted that the Board had been consulted on 163 applications, and made formal representations on 25. Twenty two of the applications have been determined, and 18 were decided in line with the Board's comments.

RESOLVED

The Board NOTED the Report.

9. REPORT FROM THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND PANEL

Members received the Report of the Countryside Officer, the purpose of which was to review the operation of the scheme to date and consider any amendments for 2007-08.

The Board noted that it was expected that Natural England would provide a grant for next year but this had not yet been confirmed.

At its last meeting the Development Fund Panel reviewed the performance of the

fund and looked at whether any amendments were needed. It also received a report from Land Use Consultants on a study on how the fund had operated across England in 2005-06. The Panel was surprised at the way the fund went this year with regard to applications. There had been a slower start than expected. There was no shortage of applications but the issue was timing, with funding still being allocated in January 2007.

The Board noted that 43% of the total grant had gone to nature conservation projects, 32% to awareness & enjoyment projects and 21% to access projects. It was noted that only a small percentage of grants had been given for Historic Environment and Built Heritage. 81% of the grant had gone either to local community or registered charities, which was higher than the national figures. The majority of grants were awarded to charitable and community groups.

One issue arising from the consultant's report was that urban areas surrounding the AONB did not appear to have been targeted for sustainable funding. As a way of encouraging this, it had been suggested that 5% be set aside for such projects.

The SDF Grants Advisory Panel proposed adjustments to the scheme for 2007-08 to include encouragement of projects dealing with renewable energy generation; marketing or processing of local products; sustainable tourism and support/development of new partnerships. It also recommended encouragement of applications from businesses, and groups/communities not traditionally involved in the conservation of the AONB. Members suggested that urban areas should also be included as a separate heading.

The Panel also proposed that the guidelines be amended to encourage projects that deliver on the ground as opposed to feasibility studies. A member suggested that this should not be included in the guidelines because feasibility studies ensure projects are properly carried out. However, it was considered that because of the limited funding a special case would need to be made for feasibility studies.

Members noted that officers did support applicants and provide guidance on completing application forms. An example of a completed form will be put on the website.

RESOLVED

- 1. The Board APPROVED the proposed amendments to the operation of the Scheme**
- 2. The Board AGREED to provide feedback on the proposals for promotion of the scheme in 2007-08**

10. HEDGEROW SURVEY REPORT

Members received a report and presentation from Tracy Adams, Farming and Land Use Officer and Dr Simon Mortimer, Board Member.

The Chairman reminded members that there will be a farm visit to Hampden Bottom Farm, near Gt. Missenden, on 9 July where there will be examples of good hedge management under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

Members agreed that training was needed on hedge management, from farmers to homeowner and smallholder level. It was also suggested that Parish Councils could be involved in recording information for the survey. A positive response had been

received from local groups. The Survey will help provide a baseline for improving hedges and it was hoped this work would continue provided funding was available.

A summary of the report will be available on the website.

It was suggested that the information gathered could be matched to the Historic Landscape Characterisation to see if any of the hedges surveyed were part of old systems which could provide further historical information.

The Chairman suggested that an article on the Hedge Survey should be put in the Chiltern News.

The Board AGREED to

- 1. Develop an action programme to improve the condition of hedges**
- 2. Continue to encourage farmers to take up hedgerow management options within Stewardship Schemes.**
- 3. Continue to seek to engage with non-farming landowners to encourage sensitive management of hedges.**
- 4. Investigate whether local groups could be involved in future surveys**
- 5. Incorporate the hedgerow survey within the land use survey**

11. PROPOSAL TO CREATE A LAND MANAGEMENT FUND

Members received the report of Steve Rodrick, Chief Officer and Dr Simon Mortimer, Board Member, the purpose of which was to seek Board support for the creation of a Chilterns Land Management Fund.

The Report proposed providing funds, to be administered by the Board, for land management work such as nature conservation, landscaping and historic environment. Such work would be different to that done through the Sustainable Development Fund. The Fund would provide money for small projects where it will make a difference to land management. It will have a flexible approach to the needs of small landowners for whom HLS is not an option. The money would be administered in a flexible way by staff members providing small grants for work to influence land management. Any contentious issues would be referred to the SDF Panel.

If this trial proved to be successful, it was agreed that it should form part of a bid to Natural England in future years.

A member expressed reservations for this fund as a sustainable proposal and considered that project grant funding should be in place before committing. The Chief Officer commended the proposal to the Board because the time was right as reflected in the success of the Sustainable Development Fund and the new Stewardship Schemes and on the back of the Land Use and hedgerow survey information. The Management Plan contained projects which this Fund could deliver and any delay could undermine its effectiveness. Another member suggested that the Board did need to be aware of the wider implications of the budget and the recruitment of an Assistant Planning Officer should be high on the agenda.

The Higher Level Scheme will not cover more than half of 1% of the AONB in the coming year, whereas the Fund could cover 15 sites, which was positive. This would be a significant contribution by the Board.

Members agreed that was an excellent proposal and hoped that some of the sites could demonstrate what the Board considers good practice working.

A member suggested that a board member should also be appointed to look at any proposals and in this connection it was agreed Dr Simon Mortimer should monitor proposals being made, alongside the Chief Officer.

It was also agreed that Commons should be added to the list of proposals that would be considered.

RESOLVED

The Board AGREED that

- 1. A Chilterns Land Management fund be created with an initial fund of £30,000.**
- 2. Progress reports will presented to each Board meeting in 2007-08**
- 3. Authority to award grants of up to £2,000 be given to the Chief Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Land Management Group – Dr Simon Mortimer.**
- 4. The Chief Officer be authorised to refer what may be regarded as contentious cases to the Sustainable Development Panel.**
- 4. A bid for grant aid to support the scheme be submitted to Natural England for 2008/09**

12. REPORT FROM THE CLIMATE CHANGE GROUP

Members received a report and presentation by the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to report the progress of the Climate Change Group and to seek feedback on its initial assessment.

The Board noted that the table outlining the initial assessment of potential impacts of climate change on key characteristics of the Chilterns, would be converted into Action and Management Plans for the Board.

In discussion of the table, the following was noted

- The need to reduce energy use in existing buildings.
- The Board should be seen to be using and encouraging best practice.
- The possibility that more people will stay in the UK for holidays rather than travel abroad.
- Use of water power across the Thames. The proposed hydro-electric scheme at Goring was discussed, which will provide power for up to 100 households. Romney Weir, near Windsor, was the subject of a planning application and Sonning Mill, near Reading, was already generating power. It was possible that old water mills in the Chilterns could be re-generated.
- The impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on climate change with regard to bio fuels. Members noted there had been a mini reform of the CAP which had come from the energy sector.
- The potential impact on historic features by the increase in the rabbit population and damage incurred due to burrowing; increased production of cereal crops which will lead to more ploughing and could disturb unidentified historical sites.
- Encouraging local industry to use wood as fuel for heating.

RESOLVED:

The Board AGREED to

- 1. Provide feedback on the initial assessment of climate change impacts in the AONB**
- 2. Provide feedback on the initial assessment of the impacts of renewable energy technologies.**

13. TRAINING FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to ask the Board to support provision of additional technical training for Board members.

It was suggested that training take the form of afternoon sessions following the board meetings and separate sessions, such as field trips. Members were in favour of training sessions following the board meetings. Weekend sessions were suggested but concern was expressed at the amount of staff time which this may entail. However, visits to stalls at shows could form part of training.

In addition to those in the report, the following topics were suggested:

- Farming for Business
- Composting – visits to sites where composting took place. This was discussed in connection with the need to reduce landfill.
- A ‘Who’s Who’ with regard to relationships and contacts to enable increased networking.
- Geographical context for Board meeting venues.
- The urban fringe, i.e. urban areas such as Chiltern Towns.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Board AGREED that a series of training sessions be organised for Board members.**
- 2. Members AGREED to advise on the subjects they would find most useful to learn more about.**

14. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Board will be held on Tuesday 19 June 2007 at Mid Beds District Council. Future meetings are as follows:

Board (10.00am)

Wednesday 10 October including AGM

Tuesday 22 January 2008

Executive Committee (10.30am)

Tuesday 15 May 2007

Wednesday 19 September 2007 (Please note change of date)

Tuesday 11 December 2007

15. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Members noted the items presented for information.

An Archaeology and History Day was being held on 22 July at Cholesbury Village Hall from 12.00 to 4.00pm. There will be a full range of exhibitions and activities for

all the family. Roelie Reed, who was studying for an Archaeology Certificate has agreed to be the contact officer.

Members noted that Susan Howkins, Chris Brearley and Jules Thomson would not be standing for their respective District Councils and would, therefore, not be eligible to remain on the Board. The Chairman thanked these members for their support and hard work.

16. POST BOARD MEETING TRAINING SESSION - CLIMATE CHANGE

Following the lunch break members received a training session on Climate Change, following on from the report presented by the Chief Officer, under item 12.

CHAIRMAN