



**The
Chilterns
CONSERVATION BOARD**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD HELD ON TUESDAY 19 JUNE 2007 IN MID-BEDS DISTRICT COUNCIL, CHICKSANDS, BEDFORDSHIRE, COMMENCING AT 10.02 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.50 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

Member

Appointing Body

Appointed by Local Authorities

Cllr David Barnard	North Herts District council
Cllr Roger Emmett	Wycombe District Council
Cllr Rhys Goodwin	Bedfordshire County Council
Cllr Marion Mustoe	South Beds District Council
Cllr Ian Reay	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Chris Richards	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Cllr Jeremy Ryman	Chiltern District Council
Cllr Bill Storey	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Jules Thomson	South Oxfordshire District Council

Appointed by Secretary of State

Sir John Johnson (Chairman)	Secretary of State
Dr Heather Barrett-Mold	Secretary of State
Bettina Kirkham	Secretary of State
Dr Simon Mortimer	Secretary of State
John Willson	Secretary of State

Elected by Parish Councils

Mary Goldsmith	Bedfordshire
Barbara Wallis	Buckinghamshire
Julia Wells	Oxfordshire

Officers

Maureen Keyworth	BCC and Clerk to the Board
Steve Rodrick	CCB Chief Officer
Chris Smith	CCB Finance Officer
Colin White	CCB Planning Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Margaret Jarrett, Mike Fox, Cllr Brian Golby, John Griffin, Shirley Judges, Kevin Mayne, Cllr Richard Pushman, Cllr David Nimmo Smith, Cllr Alan Walters and Mike Render.

Changes in membership are as follows:

Luton Borough Council: Cllr Don Worldling replaces Cllr Andy Strange
Three Rivers District Council: Cllr Brian Norman replaces Cllr Chris Brearley
Chiltern District Council: Cllr Jeremy Ryman replaces Cllr Susan Howkins

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 19 June 2007 were confirmed.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Item 7: Report from the Executive Committee

Members noted that the Accord with the Chilterns Woodland Project had been amended in accordance with members' comments, and signed.

Item 10: Hedgerow Survey Report

This project has been awarded a further grant by Defra to continue with the work.

Members were reminded of the visit to Hampden Bottom Farm on 9 July 2007.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No members of the public were present.

6. APPROVAL OF STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2005-06

Members received the report of the Finance Officer, the purpose of which was to seek approval for the revised presentation of the 2005/06 accounts and accompanying Statement of Assurance.

Although the Audit Commission should have commented on the Annual Return by the end of 2006, they have only just done so. The Accounts have been approved with a request for an amendment on how the Pension Liability is presented.

Members were also asked to approve the Statement of Assurance, which was not available last year.

RESOLVED

1. The Board NOTED the changes to the Annual Return required by the Audit Commission and APPROVED the revisions.

2. The Board Authorised the Chairman and the Chief Officer to initial changes to the Annual Return (Section 1).

3. The Board APPROVED the Statement of Assurance (Section 2).

7. APPROVAL OF STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2006-07

Members received the report of the Finance Officer, the purpose of which was to

seek Board approval to the 2006/07 Statement of Accounts.

The Committee noted that the Statement of Accounts is subject to external audit by the Audit Commission.

The following was noted:

- There is a surplus for the year of approximately £19,000 as a result of underspends in some projects. As a result, approximately £12,000 has been put into earmarked reserves and approximately £6,180 into general reserve.
- Total core expenditure amounted to approximately £570,000
- Core income included £454,000 from Natural England, £102,000 from Local Authorities, £14,862 in interest earned and £6429 from merchandise activity.
- Ongoing projects, and reserves supporting them (£82,737) have been carried forward into 2007/08.
- With regard to the Historic Landscape Characterisation project, members noted the final draft would shortly be published and had come in on budget.
- The Pensions Liability has improved. The Pension Fund is managed by Buckinghamshire County Council and the figure published in the accounts is the AONB share of the potential liability. The Pensions reserve is also managed by BCC. The LGPS is re-valued every three years and the BCC Scheme revaluation will be published in December 2007. By then it was hoped that the Fund will have increased and the deficit will have reduced further.

RESOLVED:

The Board APPROVED the Statement of Accounts

8. APPROVAL OF STATEMENT OF INTERNAL CONTROL

Members received the report of the Finance Officer the purpose of which was to secure Board approval for:

- The revised Statement of Internal Control (SIC)
- The Service Assurance Statement, which is a measure of organisational health
- The revised Risk Assessment

and to accept the Internal Audit Report and recommendations, subject to members' comments.

The Committee noted that there was a statutory requirement to complete these documents under the Accounting and Audit Regulations 2006. The SIC was required to be updated annually to reflect any changes. The Internal Audit Report from Hertfordshire County Council was good, with minor recommendations. However, the final recommendation – a Five Year Programme – was difficult to provide given future uncertainties regarding finance. Instead a three year forecast will be prepared.

Plans were already in place for issues relating to Internal Control. With regard to improvements to cash flow forecasting, Officers were aware this was an area which needed improving. It will be monitored on a regular basis and reported to each Executive Committee as well as monthly reports being provided to the Chief Officer.

With regard to measuring risk assessment, a member suggested an extra column to show the calculation which brought about the level of risk.

The use of Microsoft Project software as a monitoring tool was supported. It was

important that projects were monitored because much of the funding was dependent on the project being completed within a designated timescale. It was normal for one person to be responsible for managing the software, with regular meetings with staff involved in the projects.

RESOLVED:

The Board:

- 1. APPROVED the Statement of Internal Control**
- 2. APPROVED the revised Service Assurance Statement**
- 3. APPROVED the revised Risk Assessment**
- 4. ACCEPTED the Internal Audit Report and recommendations, subject to the comments above.**

9. APPOINTMENT TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Cllr Chris Brearley did not stand for re-election at Three Rivers District Council and, therefore, there was a Local Authority vacancy on the Executive Committee.

Cllr Richards, Cllr Ryman and Cllr Mrs Mustoe all expressed an interest in sitting on the Executive Committee. Cllr Richards and Cllr Mrs Mustoe gave a brief statement on their interests and reasons for wanting to sit on the Committee.

A ballot took place and Cllr Mrs Mustoe was elected to the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED:

The Board APPOINTED Cllr Mrs Marion Mustoe from South Beds District Council to fill the Local Authority vacancy on the Executive Committee.

10. APPOINTMENT TO PLANNING COMMITTEE

Cllr Mrs Susan Howkins did not stand for re-election at Chiltern District Council and, therefore, there was a Local Authority vacancy on the Planning Committee.

Cllr Storey and Cllr Ryman each expressed an interest in sitting on the Planning Committee. Each gave a brief statement on their interests and reasons for wanting to sit on the Committee.

A ballot took place and Cllr Storey was elected to the Planning Committee.

RESOLVED:

The Board APPOINTED Cllr Bill Storey from Hertfordshire County Council to fill the Local Authority vacancy on the Executive Committee.

11. 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 and to seek agreement to aim for carbon neutrality for the Board by 2011.

Key points were:

- There was a small surplus on the core budget of approximately £15,000.

- Natural England made a core grant offer of £467,620 which is a 3% increase on 2006/07.
- The application for grant aid from Natural England of £12,000 for additional costs for the revised management plan was refused. It was agreed to re-allocate some of the core budget to create a budget of up to £20,000 over two years towards the production of a revised plan.
- Natural England offered grant aid of £32,000 which represented a 55% cut compared to that offered in 2006/07. NE also indicated it will only provide £70,000 towards the Sustainable Development Fund (£80,000 in 2006-07). However, bids had been invited of up to £100,000. The National Association of AONBs will be raising this issue with NE, and Barry Gardiner at Defra. The AONB also issued a press release with regard to the loss of funding which received good media coverage. The Chairman has written to the Chairman of NE.
- An interim cost of living award of 2% was awarded to staff, backdated to 1 April 2007, pending the outcome of national negotiations with local authorities.
- Under the Sustainability Plan it was agreed that the Board should aim for carbon neutrality by 2011. Once the photo voltaic cells have been installed at the office, the carbon emission will reduce from 20 tonnes to 15 tonnes per annum. More tree planting was also suggested. The Chief Officer reported that a carbon offset scheme based on giving away low energy light bulbs was being investigated.
- It was decided to support the submission of a bid to the LEADER programme, which was co-funded by the EU and the Treasury. Buckinghamshire County Council would take on the role of lead bidder with the proposal being prepared by the Board. Cross regional bids are being encouraged and the Chilterns bid is, therefore, likely to be considered favourably. The Board will know this time next year whether the bid has been successful. The money would be used to create a framework based on themes, such as tourism. The programme will be useful for the voluntary sector and charities. Matched funding would be applicable in some areas.
- The Access Officer would be going on maternity leave from July 2007 to April 2008. In her absence it was decided to reduce the number of projects and appoint a Consultant to help deliver the rest. The Committee also agreed the request of the Access Officer to return to work on a part time basis.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Board NOTED the discussion and decisions of the Executive Committee.**
- 2. AGREED to adopt the target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2011.**

12. REPORT FROM THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members received the report of the 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 and seek comments on a planning application. Key points were:

The Chilterns Buildings Design Guide

Advice had been sought from DCLG and the Planning Inspectorate with a view to ensuring that the Design Guide became a supplementary planning document. The Inspectorate had suggested that the Board should prepare the Guide on behalf of the Local Authorities acting as their agents to ensure that it became SPD. A meeting will be held in the near future with key planning officers to discuss the Guide and the

Management Plan.

AONB Management Plan Review

The Committee had discussed the Plan and compiled a Table based on the comments made, which will be used at the meeting with planning officers. The current indicators in the plan were considered to be still appropriate.

DCLG Consultation – Changes to permitted development (Householder Microgeneration)

Members were informed that one of the key issues in the consultation was the removal of AONBs and National Parks from the protection afforded to them under Article 1(5) of the GPDO. It was suggested that only Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites would be protected. The Board has made strong representation for AONBs and National Parks to be included and for the protection to be extended to cover more open land.

Members also noted that the planning application submitted for the photovoltaic cells at the Board's office had been approved. A grant application had been made for 50% of the costs.

Aylesbury Vale Growth

Subsequent to the meeting of the Planning Committee the District Council announced that growth would take place to the south and east of Aylesbury Town. Public consultation would take place from mid-July to the end of August.

Planning Applications Update

Last year the Board received details of 167 applications. Formal representations were made on 26, with 25 objections and one support.

With regard to the planning application for development at High Heavens Waste Site on the edge of High Wycombe, representations were made on behalf of the Board, objecting to two very large buildings, one for waste reception and one for maturation of green compost waste. These buildings would be visible off-site. The Planning Officer had met with Bucks CC officers who explained the need for the buildings and for waste material to be enclosed to prevent odour. Although planting does screen much of the site, the buildings will have an impact on the landscape. The application had been forwarded to the Secretary of State because it departs from the Development Plan..

Members discussed the need for such sites in and around AONBs and the difficulty in finding sites which did not impact on the AONB. The original colour suggested for the covering of the buildings was white in order to allow the maximum amount of light to the interior, but the colour on the sides could be darker.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Board noted: the progress made in connection with the Chilterns Buildings Design Guide; the suggestions made for planning training; the responses made on the DCLG Consultation and other Development Plan documents; the current situation regarding responses on planning applications, and the details of the Planning Committee Tour.**
- 2. The Board considered what additional comments, if any, should be made in connection with the proposal at High Heavens.**

13. REPORT ON THE PLANNING WHITE PAPER

Members received the report of the Planning Officer, the purpose of which was to propose and approve responses to the Planning White Paper and associated public consultation exercises. This was brought to members' attention because the consultation period ends on 17 August and the Planning Committee would not meet again until September. The report contained the key issues in the White Paper and the suggested response on behalf of the Board.

The main aim of the White Paper is to streamline the planning system and introduce new systems to make decisions on major infrastructure projects more timely and efficient, as well as setting certain policies at national level for those projects as well as improving engagement in the system. Although there were very few major infrastructure projects relating to the AONB there are some that will have an impact.

The White Paper suggests that key infrastructure projects should be dealt with by an Infrastructure Planning Commission, separate from government, who will pass any decisions on these projects based on national policy statements. The process will be simplified and made clearer. Public participation is fundamental to the process. It was important that the Environment should receive greater recognition.

Included in the suggested representation from the Board is the need for AONB Boards to be considered as statutory consultees. Currently only National Parks are included.

The current policy framework will be reviewed. This includes removal of the requirement for all SPDs to be listed in the LA local development scheme. Removal of this requirement means it should speed up the process particularly for items such as the Design Guide. It is also proposed that the blanket requirement for sustainability appraisal should be removed.

Two other consultations are also being considered:

Planning Performance Agreements – a new way of managing large scale major projects.

Government has suggested changes in the way that these are dealt with. There are no major implications for the AONB.

The consultation report divides major development into two areas – large-scale major and small-scale major applications. Only large-scale major applications would be removed from the 13 week determination requirement.

Changes to Permitted Development – permitted development rights for householders

In this consultation Government proposes that restrictions in conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites should also apply to designated areas. It is suggested that the restrictions applicable to Article 1(5) land should be extended to cover open spaces and other areas.

With regard to paved gardens, Government suggests it is not necessary to introduce restrictions because it is not a national problem. The Planning Officer considered that it was a national problem and that no gardens should have a hard surface of more than 50% because water is not able to soak into the ground and this could result in flash floods.

In discussion the following was noted:

- The need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment could be the threshold for what constitutes a large scale major development.
- The Chairman considered that proper status should be given to the Board's comments when planning authorities make planning decisions, and another member suggested that the contents of the White Paper should be used to remedy the situation towards having AONBs as statutory consultees.
- The advent of an Independent Infrastructure Planning Commission was welcomed. The Commission will have knowledgeable experts in certain fields, but will have the flexibility to draw on further expertise as needed. However, concern was expressed that an Independent Commission may not be accountable to anyone. It was proposed that an amendment be made to paragraph 4 of the response to say that the Commission should not make decisions but make recommendations to the Secretary of State. The Planning Officer agreed to build this into the response.
- The Planning Officer emphasised the need to support the Government's intention to review the current approach to retail development and introduce a new test which has a strong focus on the town centre first policy. It would protect the AONB and encourage revitalisation of Town Centres.
- Members agreed that this was a good and balanced response and noted that it would be circulated to other AONBs, and other colleagues, in the south and eastern regions, as well as the National Association of AONBs.

RESOLVED:

The Board APPROVED the responses to the Planning White Paper, and associated consultation documents as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. The response to include those suggestions made in the meeting.

14. REVISED PROJECTS PROGRAMME 2007-08

Members received the report of the Chief Officer.

Members were aware that the Natural England grant was less than applied for. It was noted from the figures in table 1 of the report that very little support had been received from NE with regard to project grants, except for Chalk Streams.

The Executive Committee suggested that the £30,000 set aside for the Land Management Scheme to be re-allocated to support some of the projects. This would leave approximately £10,000-£15,000 for the Land Management Scheme. The Chief Officer suggested they carry on like this for the rest of the year without giving up hope of receiving further funding.

Members noted that the core grant funding was received in May 2008 and the rest of the funding has only just been sent. With regard to 2008/09 NE was proposing a funding review of protected areas this autumn. It was hoped the review would not take long and that funding would be available at the beginning of the new financial year.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Board NOTED with regret the impact of the shortfall of grant aid from Natural England and supported the adjustments to the work programme proposed by the Executive Committee.**

2. The Board AGREED to reallocate reserves allocated to the Land Management Fund to support the grant shortfall for projects, but to retain the scheme funded by the balance expected to be approximately £10,000.

3. The Board AGREED that letters should be sent to all MPs within the AONB.

15. LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGY

Members received the report of the Activities and Education Officer, the purpose of which was to present the Board with a draft Lifelong Learning Strategy document for discussion.

The appendix to the Report gave an indication of the current status of the strategy. In the context of resources, there is a large army of volunteers to draw on and further develop.

It was suggested that Dunstable Gateway be included in the strategy and it was noted that there are teams working there already. SR asked members to consider to what extent the Board should engage directly with schools and groups in light of current resources. If further work was to be done, more people would be needed.

With regard to People and Places, It was suggested that people linked to monuments could be identified and that information placed on the website. Placards could then be put up to explain the importance of the monument However, time would be a constraint to this.

RESOLVED:

The Board APPROVED the Lifelong Learning Strategy subject to any amendments.

16. STATEMENT ON ENERGY CROPS

Members received the report of the Countryside Officer, the purpose of which was to seek the Board's approval of the draft Energy Crop Scheme Guidance document. A presentation was also given.

A member informed the Committee of his involvement with Thames Valley Energy working with Didcot. TVE wanted the crop to be produced on the best land in order to give the best yield. He had visited another power station which will burn anything with a renewable energy certificate, including palm kernel extract.

Government was under pressure to increase development and other stations will want products. This was an opportunity to help in setting guidelines. Crops such as Miscanthus would be visible and harvesting involves heavy duty equipment. There are also associated works with crops, such as widening of lanes and field access.

Last year four applications were made in the Chilterns for energy crops. It was suggested that the situation be reviewed in 12 months to see whether applications increase and whether there are any further impacts not already noted.

RESOLVED:

The Board ENDORSED in principle the draft guidance and the approach to

production of future guidance.

17. ASSESSMENT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Members received the report of the Chief Officer the purpose of which was to recommend that the Board adopt the initial assessment of the potential impact of climate change on the Chilterns AONB.

The Chief Officer referred to discussion at the last Board meeting and suggested that the hierarchy in paragraph 2 of the report be adopted. Although there may not be a dramatic change in the Chilterns as a result of climate change in the short term, there should be monitoring for warning signs

RESOLVED:

The Board AGREED

- 1. to adopt the initial assessment of the potential impact of climate change on the Chilterns, and the associated action plan.**
- 2. to develop its policy on renewable energy options.**
- 3. that the Climate Change Group review the assessment at least twice per year.**

18. INTRODUCTION TO REVIEW OF AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to advise the Board on the programme, appointment of a consultant and introduce the afternoon session on the Management Plan.

The Committee noted that Alan Wheeler, an environmental and planning consultant, has been appointed to support the Board in production of the AONB Management Plan.

Members were referred to the four themes adopted by NE and the need to consider how to intertwine them through the various chapters in the Management Plan.

RESOLVED:

The Board AGREED to advise on the basic structure for the reviewed Management Plan.

19. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Board will be held on Wednesday 10 October 2007 at 10.00am at Chesham Town Council, Chesham.

Future Dates:

22 January 2008

20. AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

Members discussed the revised format and contents for the AONB Management Plan

Review.

CHAIRMAN