



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILTERN CONSERVATION BOARD HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 OCTOBER 2007 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL, CHESHAM, COMMENCING AT 10.36 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 1.00 PM

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Member**

**Appointing Body**

**Appointed by Local Authorities**

Cllr David Barnard	North Herts District council
Cllr Roger Emmett	Wycombe District Council
Cllr Brian Golby	Mid Beds District Council
Cllr Rhys Goodwin	Bedfordshire County Council
Cllr Marion Mustoe	South Beds District Council
Cllr Brian Norman	Three Rivers District Council
Cllr Ian Reay	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Chris Richards	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Cllr Jeremy Ryman	Chiltern District Council
Cllr David Nimmo Smith	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Bill Storey	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Alan Walters	South Bucks District Council
Cllr Don Worlding	Luton Borough Council

**Appointed by Secretary of State**

Sir John Johnson (Chairman)	Secretary of State
Dr Heather Barrett-Mold	Secretary of State
Mike Fox	Secretary of State
Bettina Kirkham	Secretary of State
Kevin Mayne	Secretary of State
Dr Simon Mortimer	Secretary of State
Dr Mike Render	Secretary of State
John Willson	Secretary of State

**Elected by Parish Councils**

Mary Goldsmith	Bedfordshire
John Griffin	Oxfordshire
Margaret Jarrett	Hertfordshire
Barbara Wallis	Buckinghamshire
Julia Wells	Oxfordshire

**Officers**

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

## **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies were received from Richard Pushman, Shirley Judges and Maurice Newland.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were made.

## **3. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2007 were confirmed subject to the following amendment:

Under apologies of absence, add: Cllr David Nimmo Smith, Cllr Alan Walters

## **4. MATTERS ARISING**

### **Item 12 Report from the Planning Committee**

#### **Aylesbury Vale Growth**

The consultation period ended on 31 August 2007. Formal representation was made on behalf of the Board, through the Planning Committee.

## **5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no speakers.

## **6. REPORT FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer.

The following was noted:

- The current financial position is satisfactory.
- The Annual Return for 2006/07 has been sent to the Audit Commission.
- The Chairman and Chief Officer attended a Stakeholder Meeting at Natural England.
- With regard to health care, the HSBC Health Cash Plan was agreed. Members noted that arrangements were made on a monthly basis, it was not an annual commitment.
- The Committee approved a Flexible Retirement Policy based on the one in place for Buckinghamshire County Council. It was agreed that the Board should prepare its own policy within twelve months.
- The Committee is looking into further provision of human resources support particularly with regard to updating personnel policies and terms and conditions of employment.
- The Chlterns has been invited to submit a full bid to the LEADER programme, by January 2008. Business Link will be co-ordinating the preparation of the bid. With regard to the Interreg IVb, members noted that work is currently being undertaken with partners in developing links between the countryside and urban areas around Paris and London. Kent County Council is doing most of the preparatory work.

**The Board NOTED the report from the Executive Committee**

## **7. REPORT FROM 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.

Points of note:

- It was agreed to publish guidance for parish councils and other community groups on planning matters and the AONB, and follow up with training, to be held in late Winter, early Spring.
- With regard to the provision of affordable housing, the Planning Committee agreed that rather than producing guidance and policies in general, each case would be treated on its own merit and any vital implications would be picked up, such as the effect of high density issues, the urbanisation of villages, and loss of gardens and trees through backland development. Concern was expressed that back gardens were being considered as brownfield sites and were included in Local Authority housing targets.

The Private Members Bill related to this has been rejected, but the issue is still being pursued. It was suggested that representation on this could also be made through the National Association of AONBs and the Local Government Association. The Planning Officer agreed to look into the current status of the Bill. He confirmed that he often saw planning applications which included land with domestic curtilage which would originally have been open land. Members also noted that often Local Authorities will reject such applications which are subsequently approved by the Secretary of State.

Suggestions have been made that flash flooding may be partly attributable to concreting over green space.

- A significant number of development plan documents were being issued for public consultation. Strong representations have been made on the Luton and South Bedfordshire Core Strategy Issues and Options report. It has been suggested that a Country Park would be provided within the AONB in order to enable development. However, this is not identified within the document and no option has been put forward for this.
- The Annual Planning Committee Tour visited areas in South Oxfordshire and Wycombe to look at successful diversification schemes. However, the provision of polytunnels at Grange Farm was not considered to be good practice and strong representations would be made to Wycombe District Council.
- The Planning Officer was congratulated on the successful Planning Conference, held at Whipsnade. There was a good range of speakers, including the Planning Officer himself.
- With regard to the Aylesbury allocated sites, although there was an acceptance by officers that development would take place, there was a strong case for development going to the north of Aylesbury. It was hoped that the Planning Officer could take these views into account in the final consultation. In Luton and South Beds there was similar pressure with regard to development.

### **1. The Board NOTED the report from the Planning Committee**

**2. The Board AGREED to consider what additional issues, if any, it should consider in connection with the provision of affordable housing schemes.**

## **8. CREATING A CARBON OFFSET SCHEME**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer and Planning Officer, the purpose of which was to advise the Board to establish its own carbon offset scheme. The current carbon generation was 31.4 tonnes per annum broken down as follows:

20.9 tonnes (office, staff and members)

10.5 tones (emissions generated by delegates attending CCB events)

The aim was to achieve carbon neutrality within three years, which will include the adoption of a green tariff for electricity once the current contract expires in 2008.

It was suggested that the scheme would include distribution of free low energy light bulbs to community facilities, as well as the planting of trees. A percentage of delegate fees from conferences would be put towards any costs incurred and there would also be savings through reduced operating costs of the Board's offices.

Members were in agreement with the scheme and the following comments were made:

- Having low energy light bulbs in community facilities was advantageous. However, there was a need to ensure that such facilities should also make further energy reductions. It was suggested that guidance should be provided in this connection.
- Landowners may be willing to provide further space for tree planting. Due care should be given to the type of trees which are to be planted. The Chief Officer explained that species such as oak and ash would be planted as they were long lived and suited to the Chilterns.
- Caution was needed on how the offsetting scheme works. It was suggested that the scheme should be publicised with an explanation as to why the Board was adopting it.
- Regular evaluations should be made as to the effectiveness of the scheme and could be reported back under the sustainability Report.
- The Chiltern Society was visiting Woking Borough Council on 18 October. The Borough Council is the first Council to adopt a Planet Change Strategy. Board members were invited to attend if they wished.

## **RESOLVED**

### **The Board AGREED**

- 1. That it should create its own Carbon Emissions Offsetting Scheme based, in n2007/08, on planting 100 native trees and giving away 150 low energy light bulbs.**
- 2. That a budget of £2,000 be created based on £500 savings on energy and mileage costs, £1,000 raised from delegates' fees for events the board organises and £500 allocated from the core budget.**
- 3. In future years it will review best practice in this area.**

## **9. WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS**

Members received the report of the Chief Officer, the purpose of which was to seek views on how the Board could work more closely with parish councils.

Members agreed on the need to work more closely with parish councils. It was suggested that meetings held by Local Authorities with parish councils would be a good forum for officers from the AONB to attend. The AONB could also make contributions to the parish newsletters. Meetings with the Planning Officer would also be particularly useful and in this connection, contact could be made through the County Associations, who were always keen to find new speakers. The need to use current meeting forums was emphasised.

The Chalk Arc initiative was suggested as an opportunity to raise the CCB's profile.

The take up by Parishes of the Sustainable Development Fund was disappointing and the possibility of guidance on providing case studies to support any application was suggested. The Chief Officer confirmed that training would take place with regard to the SDF and the LEADER programme.

All members agreed that the Grant Scheme for Parishes was of great value and it was suggested that the scheme could be extended to provide medium sized grants which could be match funded and tied in with delivery of AONB objectives. The minimum amount of £250 would remain as a grant, with the introduction of a sliding scale of matched funding if larger amounts were requested. Parish Council representatives agreed to meet with the Chief Officer in order to form an action plan.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1. The Board AGREED to work more closely with Parish and Town Councils.**
- 2. That the Board identify how its wishes to achieve this aim to enable proposals to be incorporated in the budget for 2008/09**

## **10. REPORT ON PEOPLE AND PLACES PROJECT**

Members received the report of the Information and Interpretation Officer, the purpose of which was to seek suggestions of famous figures to include in the project and for recruitment of more volunteers. An example of the type of information needed was attached to the report.

Members were asked to submit information on famous figures by 15 January 2008 in the first instance.

It was suggested that Parish Councils could also be involved in this project.

Caution was needed with regard to recommending sites which may not have adequate access facilities or transport links.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Board suggests potential volunteers to help with the project.**
- 2. That the Board identifies further famous people and places that should be included.**

## 11. REPORT ON LAND USE CHANGES

Members received the report of the Chief Officers, Farming and Land Use Officer and Dr Simon Mortimer, Board Member, the purpose of which was to advise the Board of factors currently and likely to influence land use in the next few years, which need to be taken into account in reviewing the AONB management plan. Further discussion on this item took place in the afternoon, following the main meeting.

The aim of the report was to raise issues which may need to be monitored within the Management Plan. Dr Mortimer stated that the trends reported on last year were continuing. There were increased areas of minority crops such as borage and poppies. However, even though some changes are significant, they may not have a major impact on the landscape of the Chilterns because of current regulations. Better protection of hedgerows was an example of such regulations.

The possible decline in livestock was of more concern, particularly dairy herds. Large areas of land were now fragmented and used for small scale and hobby farming. The most significant impact on the Chilterns will be intensification of housing. Villages were having an impact on surrounding agricultural land, and small buildings, tracks and fences were increasing as a result of increased equestrian use.

Members were asked for their views on how important land use change was and its possible impact to 2013 and beyond.

Points of note were:

- Arable farming will become more profitable due to a global increase in grain prices and the demand for bio fuels increases. The intensity of farming will increase, with more use of fertilizer and pesticides. A concern was the potential loss of carbon stored in the soil as a result of more intensive cultivation.
- Vigilance was needed with regard to access along field boundaries – footpaths are getting narrower.
- Field margins are being narrowed, resulting in the loss of wildlife habitat.
- Agricultural land close to urban land and communities should be protected to maintain rural character.

Members agreed on the need to have an impact assessment in order to look at what could be done to support and protect land and wildlife.

### **RESOLVED**

**That the Board should consider likely changes to land use and possible means of influencing those changes which it wishes to be incorporated in the review of the AONB Management Plan.**

## 12. DATE OF NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Conservation Board will be held on 22 January 2008 at Benson Village Hall, Benson.

**CHAIRMAN**