

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
3 APRIL 2008**

AONB UNIT ACTIVITY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To receive details of the work areas and progress achieved by the AONB Unit since the last meeting of the JAC.

2.0 SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ACHIEVED

- 2.1 Appendix 1 gives separate details of the meetings and site visits that have been carried out by the AONB Officer, Assistant AONB Officer and AONB Administrative Assistant in the period October 2007 to 25th March 2008. Appendix 2 gives full details of the wide range of projects that the AONB Project Fund has assisted during the year. Appendix 3 gives details of the Consultations that the JAC has received during the year.
- 2.2 Countryside management work has been continuing, through the AONB Project Fund. A good variety of projects has been completed, ranging in size and complexity. Of particular note would be the clearance of a section of Park wall at Wiganthorpe and the fencing of the SINC at Littledale to allow grazing by Exmoor ponies. The latter project has been on the books for the last 3 years and so it is good to have finally cleared all the hurdles and got it completed!
- 2.3 The Welburn Local Information/Walks leaflet was launched at the beginning of December and a 2008 Northern Group AONBs calendar was prepared and circulated in time for Christmas. The leaflet launch attracted good publicity in local papers, with press releases also to a range of country and outdoor publications. The AONB Newsletter would normally have been delivered in mid-October but the postal strikes resulted in a re-scheduling – to weeks in December, January and February.
- 2.4 Volunteer activity has again been significant during the last six months. PRoW surveying has been continuing, whilst an organised task clearing scrub at Littledale SINC attracted 4 people. This scrub clearance work has been continued by a couple of very enthusiastic volunteers, working with the local NYCC Ranger.
- 2.5 Work continued with assessing and allocating grants then delivering projects using the Sustainable Development Fund. The £70,000 budget for 2007/08 has been over-committed, with £65,065 offered to projects and £6,300 paid to the North York Moors National Park for administration and technical assistance. One medium-sized project is not going to take up its full grant offer, so the underspend has been committed to two other projects.
- 2.6 A very successful series of Young Ranger Club days were held in the October half-term holidays at the Castle Howard Arboretum visitor centre. Full details of the activities and attendance are shown in Appendix 4.

- 2.7 Two major new funding/activity opportunities have been developing since the last JAC meeting. The CAN DO Partnership had been advised by the HLF not to pursue a Landscape Partnership Scheme bid but instead to concentrate on the Heritage Grants programme. A bid was submitted in November and we learned in early March that this has been successful. Work has also been continuing to develop a LEADER programme for the eastern part of North Yorkshire, following approval by Yorkshire Forward of the North York Moors, Coast and Hills partnership's initial Stage 1 bid.
- 2.8 In addition to 'current projects' a significant amount of forward planning and preparation has also been carried out. This has principally been in connection with the Parish Planning events due to be held in May and June, the Discovery Project and Ranger Club activities, walks events for next season and some Listed Building restoration and hedge planting project planning.
- 2.9 Staff grading issues have continued to cast a shadow over the last 6 months, although the situation is now resolved. The gradings for the AONB Officer and Assistant AONB Officer posts have now been returned to their previous level, together with some scope for incremental progression. Following the Job Evaluation exercise, it is felt that the new gradings accurately reflect the responsibilities of all the posts in the AONB Unit, which should ensure that future recruitment operations will attract high-quality candidates.
- 2.10 It is hoped that the Joint Advisory Committee's budget will again be fully spent this year, although it looks likely that there will be a small underspend on Core activities. The budget for countryside management work has been over-committed, in relation to the amount of grant aid offered by Natural England. Reserves have been used to make up some of the shortfall in grant and therefore maintain the Committee's momentum in funding practical work on the ground.
- 2.11 A bid for grant aid for 2008/09 was submitted to Natural England in February 2008. At the time of writing this report there was no final news as to the result of this bid, although we remain hopeful that Core functions will be funded as requested and that a settlement will be achieved for SDF and Projects. It is possible that the work detailed in the 2008/09 Action Programme report on this Agenda will need to be scaled-back if our grant allocation is lower than the sum we have bid for.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the report be received for information.