

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
5 APRIL 2012**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR AONBs (NAAONB) ACTIVITY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To receive details of the initiatives currently being progressed by the NAAONB.

2.0 UPDATE ON INITIATIVES

- 2.1 The JAC Chairman attended the northern Chairmen's Meeting in York on 25th January, which also had representatives from the other northern AONBs. The Notes of the meeting are attached as Appendix 1 and these provide a good summary of the current state-of-play with national AONB/NAAONB issues.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the progress on various initiatives described in Appendix 1 be noted.



Chair and Lead Officer meeting – York – 25th January 2012

Meeting Notes

Peter Stevens welcomed attendees to the meeting.

The CEO updated attendees on national activity. Specifically covering the following areas of work:

The Defra sponsorship change project

Richard Clarke has taken a lead on working up these projects ensuring that we effectively have someone on the inside with a thorough understanding of the way that AONB partnerships operate. Whilst Richard has been working for Defra our communications have been daily. We have, however, lost Richard as a NAAONB resource over this period – a price that we considered worth paying.

All elements of this change project have been set within the context of decentralisation, and as a reminder the six key threads of the decentralisation agenda are (to):

- Lift the burden of bureaucracy
- Empower communities to do things their way
- Increase local control of public finances
- Diversify the supply of public services
- Open up government to public scrutiny
- Strengthen accountability to local people

Element 1 – The approach to funding

2 areas of consideration:

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- The general split of funding across what have historically been known as core, project and SDF pots, and the funding formula
- The mechanism by which money is delivered to the AONB partnerships

The recommendation is that **the single pot is retained, with no reference to core, project and SDF, and it will be up to the AONB partnership to decide how it apportions the Defra contribution** – the last point of detail being important. Reference to Defra's contribution as a grant limits its use as match funding (particularly in relation to European-funded projects). If individual AONBs require further clarification on how this single pot allocation has been derived then requests for further information should be made to Defra directly.

The possibility of 100% funding by Defra has also been discussed but only considered worth pursuing if the current money to Local Authorities from DCLG that makes up the match funding could be routed through Defra. This is not an option. In fact, discussions would suggest that we should be mindful of the very real possibility that all monies to LAs, wherever they are destined, are routed unhypothecated through DCLG to LAs.

The funding formula that determines the distribution of grant has also been the subject of discussion. There has been pressure for a review, with the Cotswolds making the case for a fairer distribution of money, citing the fact that Cannock Chase receives £2491 per sq. km whereas the North Pennines receives only £187 per sq. km. **The recommendation is that the funding formula shouldn't be revisited at this stage** as any redistribution of a shrinking pot will result in losers as well as winners. Focus should be placed on diversifying income streams, particularly from non-exchequer sources. This has resulted in the second of a series of training events designed to look at just this. We are currently planning a third for the end of this financial year.

It is widely accepted that the relevance of the funding formula will be significantly reduced following the next spending review. However, there is a commitment by Defra to review it in 2015/16 should this still be a wish of the AONB Family.

Mechanism

4 options:

- Continue as is – with Defra funding going directly to the 34 lead authorities
- Defra funding to go directly to the LAs as part of the Revenue Support Grant
- All funding administered by the NAAONB (but apportioned by Defra)

- Establishment of a new national 'landscape trust' type charity that receives funding from Defra and distributes it to all of the AONBs

No concrete recommendation as yet, although it is likely to continue as is.

Element 2 – Synergies

Four NGOs that work with PLs in England – NAAONB, ENPAA, UK ANPA, and EAI

Review of how these organisations work; are there any areas of overlap? Where work could be complementary; any gaps that need filling?

4 options

- Defra takes no further action
- The four NGOs are combined to form a single PL organisation
- Greater collaboration between NGOs is strongly encouraged by Defra
- Defra gently encourages the four organisations to come up with a collaboration plan*

Investigation highlighted the fact that these organisations are already working closely in many areas. There are firm links established between ENPAA, UK ANPA, and the NAAONB. The NAAONB and ENPAA have produced a collaboration note highlighting areas of shared interest; there is a fledgling programme of chair-level bilaterals; the NAAONB will be working with NE on a shared outcome agreement that reflects and complements that agreed with ENPAA; the process of drawing up national consultation responses now involves ENPAA as a matter of course. There is further work to do in relation to collaboration with EAI.

Element 3 - Monitoring and reporting

Defra's intention is to move from a quarterly to an annual reporting cycle – based on the RAG model, with the NAAONB pulling together an annual report collating specific examples of delivery from across its membership. This annual report would serve to showcase the work of AONB partnerships in England and form an important component of our communications and advocacy work.

Regional co-ordinator posts

The CEO updated the meeting on the position regarding the regional co-ordinator posts, highlighting the letter sent to the regional fora, post holders, and the NAAONB stating Defra's intention to route the monies for these posts through the NAAONB. The intention to make this extra staff resource available to all AONBs in England was made clear. There was a discussion on the mechanics and some concern over how much time the post holders would have available for wider work, having taken into account legacy work in the former regions. Likewise there was concern over the length of time funding would be made available to support these posts from Defra. The CEO explained that it is the intention to work up national projects that would draw down funding to support these posts in the future and whilst we are generously supported by Defra currently we must look to non-exchequer funding, more than we have in the past, to maintain not only these posts but the NAAONB itself, as AONB partnerships are having to do.

Guidance document

The NAAONB has scoped a 'guidance document' that will highlight the value of AONBs, Section 85, the Silkin Test etc. and set the designation within the context of the current government agenda. This document will be produced by the NAAONB and it is envisaged that it will be endorsed by Defra. This guidance will complement the next round of management plans.

Rural Economic Growth Review

The CEO outlined the NAAONB response to the consultation on rural economic growth, acknowledged the significant role played by High Weald AONB Partnership and Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB Partnership, and flagged the value of the final document in relation to articulating the role of AONBs in helping support rural development.

The Defra response to the REGR was discussed including the provision of monies to promote sustainable tourism in AONBs. It was suggested by the Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership Lead Officer, Elliott Lorimer, that an officer from Defra might speak at their Sustainable tourism symposium in May.

Action – HD to follow this up with Defra

Following this update there was a discussion that touched on the following issues.

There was an acknowledgement that Defra has supported the AONBs over what has been, and still is, a difficult time and that working towards delivery of Defra's objectives is a natural and appropriate response.

Corporate risk

The issue of leadership was raised as part of the corporate risk assessment discussed during the Chair and Lead Officer meetings in 2011. Whilst the NAAONB has taken action to manage most of the risks, the issue of further developing leadership skills has not received any attention. To clarify, leadership in this context is about developing capabilities, growing skills, communicating effectively, and generally identifying and making better use of the skills and relationships that exist within the AONB Family.

The NAAONB proposed initiating a programme of development that was met with broad support and the clear link between this and one of Defra's objectives for the AONBs was highlighted.

NAAONB strategic plan

The CEO highlighted the importance of our nationally agreed strategic plan, reminded members as to what it contained, and suggested that it could be used to effectively champion the work of not only the NAAONB but the AONB Family.

NAAONB Communications

The Communications and Development Manager reported that

- The first phase of www.landscapesforlife.org.uk is now complete and the second phase will be complete by year end. She thanked everyone for their hard work before Christmas to make this possible.
- AONB News, the NAAONB's email newsletter, remains the most efficient way of getting lots of information out to the AONB Family and partner organisations. The NAAONB relies on the communication officers of each AONB to forward this on to wider partnership staff and members. She reminded people that if they were not receiving it direct and wished to, then they should get in touch.

- Board papers were also a useful source of information and if you were too busy to read all the papers, most useful reading was deemed as agenda, previous meetings minutes and the activity report which would give a snapshot of what was going on.
- Between AONB News editions and the quarterly Board meetings, important information was sent out as email “Updates”
- The current NAAONB email traffic was so intense that both the CEO and the Communications Manager were finding it difficult to keep up with responses. She asked for understanding while the backlog was cleared and asked if the information was urgently required that they could be contacted on their mobiles – Howard 07576 321614 and Jill 07969 888823
- Conference 2012 would take place in York, 17-19th July.

January 25th 2012