

CEO's Report of work completed for NAAONB Business Plan October 2013 - October 2014

Report to: The Annual General Meeting of the National Association for AONBs

Subject: CEO's Report of work completed for NAAONB Business Plan Oct 2013 - Oct 2014

Date: 20th November 2014

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Purpose: For information

Our focus over this last year has been to:

- complete delivery of agreed business plan objectives
- agree future business plan priorities
- position the AONB Family for the next spending round
- ensure UK government has a clear understanding of the AONB partnerships and the issues they face
- increase productivity through development of collaborative working
- grow resources for the NAAONB and AONB Family
- remain responsive to the needs of the AONB Family and individual members
- increase the performance and productivity of the NAAONB

In doing so we have:

- improved AONB Family productivity through action learning
- increased collaboration and collective action across the AONB Family
- ensured clarity around the impact of further cuts and changes to the MoA (in England)
- maintained productive relationships with politicians and civil servants
- articulated the value of the AONB model to a wide audience
- had a significant input to policy development in England and Wales
- provided new income streams for activity at the local level

A detailed commentary on progress is included in Annex 1 - Business Plan Activity Report October 2013 - October 2014.

This year has been a year of transition, and in common with all AONB partnerships, this has taken place within the context of decreasing public sector funding. We worked hard to secure a favourable settlement for AONB partnerships in England for the 2014/15 financial year and whilst still significant, the cut was less than that applied to Defra budgets in general and the same as the National Park Authorities. Likewise, we worked closely with the AONB Family in England and Defra to ensure that there were no further cuts in-year, despite additional pressures on Defra budgets. This work has proved successful.

With the continued support of additional staff seconded to the NAAONB, we have made important steps towards changing the way we work. Our intention of fostering an interdependent network of AONB staff and partnership members, working collaboratively on delivering collective actions, is being realised. We have demonstrated the importance of action learning as a progressive move away from traditional training, with results seen across many areas of AONB working, particularly around national communications, corporate engagement, and sustainable tourism. Likewise, we have worked hard to diversify our funding streams, secure external funding for projects and develop productive

relationships with new partners, some from the private sector. Importantly, the NAAONB successfully bid for funding from the Cabinet Office/DECC for an NAAONB-led Community Energy Peer to Peer Mentoring partnership. This partnership is delivering a programme of study visits, events and practical tools to support social action that drive active woodland management with individuals, communities and AONB partnerships clearly benefitting at the local level.

Basecamp, our online forum, is being used regularly by AONB partnership staff and is proving a valuable tool for information exchange, collaborative learning and consensus building. Online platforms will be further enhanced as our Knowledge Platform is populated with examples of good practice from across the AONB Family.

Communication has remained central to our work with the completion of a nationally supported communications strategy. Work is now taking place on developing and delivering on an action plan and national brand strategy. Likewise, the importance of our national conference as a communications and networking platform has been recognised, and we delivered another well attended and well received Landscapes for Life Conference in Penrith during the summer.

Meetings have been held with Members of both chambers of Parliament in England, Assembly Members in Wales, senior civil servants and board members of both Natural England and Natural Resources Wales to raise not only the importance of the AONB Family but the challenges you are currently facing. These meetings have been well received and have clearly helped inform debate. We have also worked to ensure Ministers and other key decision makers have an opportunity to experience first-hand the work you do on the ground.

Our relationship with Defra, Natural England, and Natural Resources Wales also remains central to going forwards. The tripartite relationship, and its associated work programme, underpins our relationship with government at a UK level, and the strategic partnership we have with Natural Resources Wales does likewise in Wales. It is essential that we maintain these crucial relationships with governments and that we maximise the effectiveness of the role we play as a channel of communication between AONB partnerships and their respective governments.

We have maintained a steady input to the debate in Wales over public service delivery, and presented responses and evidence to Welsh Government on a number of subjects relevant to AONB partnerships. Work in Wales around the protected landscape policy statement and governance review continues to be particularly significant, not only for Welsh AONB partnerships but for the AONB Family as a whole. Likewise, we have provided considered input to many consultation responses in England. We must think further on enhanced devolution and how we want this to impact on the AONB Family.

We continue to work with others to maximise effectiveness. Our close links with CNP, the Alliance of National Parks Cymru, CPRE, CPRW, to name just a few, highlight the value we place in close working with other third sector organisations. These working alliances allow us to provide data and intelligence to other organisations working to support your purpose in ways that we cannot.

We continue to ensure AONB partnerships remain at the forefront of sustainable tourism development in England, particularly around the joint work we are doing with VisitEngland on a strategic approach to tourism. Likewise, we are working closely with the National Park Authorities and VisitBritain on further development of the role of protected areas in the **Britain is Great** campaign.

Whilst we cannot see into the future, and remain mindful of the difficult decisions national and local politicians are making, we are clearly punching above our weight. It is easy to make comparisons between the NAAONB and other national organisations but we mustn't forget that we are operating with a budget comparable to that of a small Wildlife Trust. In addition, our relationship with governments is fundamentally different from that of many other third sector organisations.

We continue to remain opportunist with regards wider collaboration with National Park Authorities. The recent LUC report on maximising revenues for protected landscapes gives us a very strong base from which we can move forward together. This will not only strengthen the protected landscapes family but will, no doubt, provide opportunities for income generation on the ground that wouldn't exist otherwise.

For the National Association for AONBs it has been a year of major transition. The need to invest in change and move away from existing relationships during a period of falling income meant utilising some of our reserves in 2013. Action taken to increase income and reduce expenditure, coupled with the aspirations and budget set out in the next Business Plan, will help to replenish reserves and deliver a carefully focused programme of targeted activity.

Whilst we cannot predict the future, we do know it will be different. Cuts to the public sector will continue, and their impact will be significant. We are in the most difficult funding environment in memory, and our whole approach to managing these special landscapes is changing. We cannot approach this in isolation. We need to remain adaptable, progressive and collaborative, and remain mindful that change, whilst often led by individuals and ideas, is most effective when tested, applied and propagated through collective action.