

**HOWARDIAN HILLS  
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY  
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
13 APRIL 2017**

**BUSINESS PLANNING – REVIEW OF DELIVERY MECHANISMS**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To receive an update on new mechanisms for AONB project delivery.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At the meeting of the JAC in April 2016, the Joint Advisory Committee considered a Report detailing the re-structure of the AONB Team and possible future delivery/support mechanisms. It was resolved that an update report would be presented in April 2017, to review progress and evaluate the different mechanisms.

**3.0 PROJECT DELIVERY/SUPPORT MECHANISMS 2016/17**

- 3.1 In April 2016 it was envisaged that AONB Team staff would need to concentrate on larger programmes of work, and commission other organisations or specialists to deliver things on our behalf. We felt that we were likely to be doing fewer small projects that took up disproportionately large amounts of staff time, and replacing these either with bigger projects or by out-sourcing where it offered best value. The roles of the AONB Manager and AONB Officer were likely to change more to that of 'facilitators' rather than 'doers', because the demands of the core work of the Unit (e.g. planning consultations, development of partner projects/grant bids) would be likely to make that a more efficient way of working.
- 3.2 Administrative support. One of the most significant effects of the AONB Team restructure was the loss of the AONB Assistant post, which removed the Team's capacity to take Notes of Core Partners Group meetings, order goods and services, process invoices, complete administrative tasks and assist with the preparation of Junior Ranger Club sessions. This was anticipated and alternative self-service mechanisms were already being used by the AONB Manager and AONB Officer. It was intended to approach the North York Moors National Park to seek Business Support assistance with note-taking at meetings and other administrative services.
- 3.3 What happened in 2016/17 – The North York Moors National Park supplied a Business Support Officer who took Notes at all four of the Core Partner Group meetings. Other assistance was secured to produce mail-merge labels for the distribution of our Annual Report and Newsletter, and to copy some ecological survey information requested by a land manager. This service cost a total of £275, with the photocopying having been supplied free-of-charge as it was carried out by the Business Support Apprentice.
- 3.4 Additional staff resource. In April 2016 it was envisaged that we would appoint staff to two one day per week fixed-term contract posts which would end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. One post was envisaged to commence in approximately July 2016, with the other starting on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016.
- 3.5 What happened in 2016/17 – Francesca Pert, who was Liz Bassindale's Maternity Cover in 2011/12, was appointed to the first post. The second post was filled by Frances Standen, who used to be the Communications Officer at the Kent Downs AONB. Given their respective skill sets, Francesca concentrated on project delivery and assisting with the Junior Ranger Club. Frances dealt with several publicity-related projects including our partnership work with Visit York and Ryedale District Council, the production of a new set of display banners and a reprint of the Nunnington Walks leaflet. Unfortunately recruitment took longer than anticipated and hence the postholders only took up their duties in late September. In a change of plan forced by an unexpected move to another part of the country, Frances' working days were concentrated into 3 months and she finished at Christmas 2016.

Although she completed some good projects very efficiently, it was difficult for the AONB Manager and AONB Officer to adequately keep up with briefing her, and some tasks couldn't be completed before she left. This has left the AONB Manager and AONB Officer struggling to complete these, in particular the banners. It's difficult to see how we could have done things differently, but the lessons need to be borne in mind for the future.

- 3.4 Partnership working. It was envisaged that the AONB Manager and AONB Officer would spend more time developing partnerships, making use of the expertise and staff resources of other organisations to deliver benefits (including access to external funding) for the AONB.
- 3.5 What happened in 2016/17 – The bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the RYEvitalise project was already in motion in April 2016 but work continued with this. A Phase 1 bid was submitted in summer and confirmation of success received in the autumn. A total of over £3m will be received into the project area (assuming confirmation of the Phase 2 programme), with £1,500 per year contribution from the AONB in each of the two Phase 1 'development years' and £5,000 per year for four Phase 2 'delivery years'. Other partnership projects in which we have an interest/secured coverage within the AONB, include:
- A North York Moors turtle dove survey and conservation project.
  - A continuation/expansion of the Cornfield Flowers project.
  - A survey of the western fringe of the National Park and AONB, to inform thoughts on the possibility of applying for National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding.
  - Development of a partnership with the County Council's Countryside Access Service, to improve resolution of reported issues and install replacement roadside fingerposts.
  - A study of Tranquillity within the AONB and National Park, carried out by a visiting American academic.
- 3.6 Commissioning – It was envisaged that the AONB Manager and AONB Officer would 'commission' more and larger projects, so as to use the internal staff resources more efficiently.
- 3.7 What happened in 2016/17 – A number of larger or more complex projects were contracted-out rather than being delivered by the AONB Team directly. These included:
- Preparation of Easy Access routes. This was contracted-out to iFootpath, who prepared six routes for the price of four, to a much better standard and method of presentation than would have been achieved by the AONB Team and at a cheaper cost.
  - Carrying out a survey of important geodiversity sites. A contractor was lined-up for this work but the project was put on hold pending the outcome of a large Heritage Lottery Fund bid that planned to survey significantly more sites and also carry out a large programme of work with local schools. In February the HLF rejected the survey element of the project, so a re-think is currently taking place.
  - Preparation of a geodiversity information leaflet. A quote was obtained for carrying out this work but the project was put on hold following the emergence of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid.
  - Assistance with the Monument Management Scheme. A contractor was engaged to prepare site management plans for 7 Scheduled Monuments, using some of the underspend on the Historic England element of the funding.
  - Carrying out large programmes of work. Rather than doing the work in a piecemeal fashion, a large contract was let to renovate or reinstate 16 traditional village name signs. Carrying out the works in one batch significantly reduced the duplication of paperwork involved.
- 3.8 Contract-in NYMNPA specialist staff. It was envisaged that National Park staff might be engaged to work a certain number of days to deliver a specific and tightly-defined project. Examples of such projects might have included multi-owner programmes of drystone wall restoration, tradition direction sign and village name sign restoration or programmes of individual & in-field tree planting.

3.9 What happened in 2016/17 – This mechanism wasn't explored. It wasn't felt that there was a significant enough programme of work to justify the effort of setting up an arrangement.

#### 4.0 **PROPOSED PROJECT DELIVERY/SUPPORT MECHANISMS 2017/18**

4.1 Administrative support. The arrangement of using North York Moors National Park Business Support Officers to take Notes of the Core Partners Group meetings and produce labels for distributing publications will continue. More use will also be made of their technical skills wherever possible, to carry out tasks more efficiently than AONB Team staff would be able to.

4.2 Additional staff resource. Francesca Pert's contract has been extended for a further 12 months, to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. She will continue assisting with the delivery of practical projects and the Junior Ranger Club but will also deal with publicity projects now as well.

4.3 Partnership working. The partnership projects developed in 2016/17 are only just starting their delivery phase so work is likely to concentrate on these. Some are more advanced than others and the Cornfield Flowers project still needs to submit its bid for funding. Although new partnerships will be considered if they emerge, there is already a significant amount of work involved in ensuring that these existing ones deliver successfully, especially bearing in mind that we also have a significant commitment in delivering the AONB Monument Management Scheme.

4.4 Commissioning. This mechanism worked well in 2016/17 and will be continued. The most significant project, subject to the funding package being agreed, will be the survey of potentially important geodiversity sites in the AONB. This will still involve a significant amount of input from the AONB Team, who will need to produce maps and secure landowner permission to survey. Other suitable projects will be out-sourced where this offers the most efficient method of delivery.

4.5 Contract-in NYMNPA specialist staff. At present it isn't envisaged that this mechanism will be used in 2017/18. No large programmes of work have currently been identified that would justify the setting up of an arrangement.

#### 5.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

The report be received for information.