

Community Governance Group
Somerset County Council
County Hall
Taunton, TA1 4DY



QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Friday 20 February 2009

at

2.15pm

in the

Long Room, Halsway Manor, Crowcombe

To: The Members of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

Julian Gale
Group Manager, Community Governance
13 February, 2008

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Committee Administrator for the meeting – Norman Tottle (Community Governance) on tel (01823) 355571, fax (01823) 355258 or email. natottle@somerset.gov.uk

Guidance about procedures at the meeting is given on the last page.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

AGENDA

Agenda Item No.

- 1.. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest** – an opportunity for members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting.
3. **Accuracy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2008**
(copy appended) **and to consider any matters arising.**
4. **Public Question Time** – The Chairman will allow members of the public to ask questions or make statements about any matter on the agenda for this meeting, or present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit.
5. **Report of the AONB Manager (Paper A –attached).**
6. **Briefing Paper : Funding Opportunity under the INTERREG IV programme (Paper B –attached)**
7. **Rangers' Report (Paper C –attached)**
- 8 **Any Other Business of Urgency.**

Note : Further information about any of the reports for this meeting may be obtained from the report authors based at the Quantock Hills AONB Service, The Quantock Office, Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater, TA5 2EQ. Tel No 01823 451884 or e-mail : quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk

THE MEETING – GUIDANCE NOTES

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect Minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Norman Tottle – tel: (01823) 355571, fax (01823) 355258 or email. natottle@somerset.gov.uk

2. Notes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed and decisions taken at the meeting will be set out in the Minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. In the meantime, details of the decisions taken can be obtained from Norman Tottle – tel: (01823) 355571, fax (01823) 355258 or email natottle@somerset.gov.uk

3. Public Question Time

At the Chairman's invitation you may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about **any matter on the Committee's agenda**. You may also present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit. **The length of public question time will be no more than 20 minutes in total.**

A slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been signed. If you wish to speak, please tell Norman Tottle, the Committee Administrator, **before the meeting**.

You must direct your questions and comments through the Chairman. You may not take direct part in the debate.

The Chairman will decide when public participation is to finish.

If there are many people present at the meeting for one particular item, the Chairman may adjourn the meeting to allow views to be expressed more freely.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

An issue will not be deferred just because you cannot be present for the meeting.

Remember that the amount of time you speak will be restricted, normally to two minutes only.

4. Substitutions

Committee members are able to appoint substitutes if they are unable to attend the meeting.

(21 November 2008)

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held in the Music Room, Fyne Court, Broomfield on Friday 21 November 2008 at 2.15pm.

Present

Somerset County Council	Mr A H Trollope-Bellew (Chairman) Mr R Tully Mr J Edney (Sub for Brig C Wolverson)
Sedgemoor District Council	Mr D W Joslin
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Mr N Stuart-Thorn
West Somerset Council	Mr C Morgan (Vice-Chairman)
Parish Representatives	Mr T Ayre Mr J Edwards
Natural England	Mr S Marston
Forestry Commission	Mr N Salter

Also Present

Mr B James (SCC- Officer), Mr D Venner (Bicknoller PC), Mr M Treharne (Friends of Quantock), Mr J Clarke (Kingston St Mary PC), Dr P Radford (Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society), Mr K Rogers (Kilve PC), Mrs A Kent (Taunton Deane Bridleways Assoc), Mr D Edwards (North Petherton TC) and Mr J Ollerenshaw (Somerset Ramblers).

Apologies were received from Brig C Wolverson (SCC), Dr C Guerrier (TDBC), Mr T Taylor (WSC), Mr A Bradford (SDC), Mr J Swayne (SDC), Mr H Warmington (CLBA), Mr R Conway (SLAF), Mrs D Salvidge (QCA), Mrs C Parsons (Nether Stowey PC), Mrs L Kelly (Friends of Quantock), Mrs J Sansom (WQPC), Mr R Ford (Forestry Commission), Ms J Burton (SDC- Officer).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

115. The Chairman declared a personal interest in relation to the Sustainable Development Fund report as the landowner of the beech hedgebank restoration application. Mr Ayre declared personal interests relating to tourism and Hinkley Point.

MINUTES

116. (1) The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2008 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

Matters arising

Minute 108 (2) – Quantock Hills Tick Project

(2) A date had still to be agreed for the one day conference and this would be arranged once priority work on the Management Plan had been completed.

Minute 110 – Rights of Way- Restricted Byways

(3) John Edwards said that he had heard that the Trail Riders Fellowship had appealed in respect of their applications for upgrades to BOATS – no one could confirm whether this was correct.

Minute 113 (2) – Funding of AONB by Natural England

(4) Chris Edwards reported and Steve Marston confirmed that the final 5% of the settlement was now a specific cut not subject to attainment of targets.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

117. (1) There were no direct questions from members of the public, but the JAC discussed a letter that had been received from Mr John Lawrence-Mills of Manor Farm, Stogumber. This was about highway safety management issues and inadequate road warning signs at the annual pony round up by the Quantock Commoners and the separate issue of HGVs being directed onto the Quantocks by sat-nav systems. Chris Edwards referred to some developments that SCC Highways were undertaking concerning maps for sat-navs and providing some bigger and better traffic signs and he undertook to send a written response to Mr Lawrence-Mills.

REPORT OF THE AONB MANAGER

118. (1) The report of the AONB Manager was received and considered by the JAC. The report contained items on the AONB Staffing and Team Structure Review; Officers Working Group and Financial Contributions; Management Plan Review; and events and visits.

Staffing and Team Structure

(2) The JAC noted the staff changes following the move of Andy Davis, Partnership Ranger to New Zealand in early September and the move of Andy Harris, Ranger, into the Partnership Ranger post and proposals relating to the consequent restructuring of the team. Members were in agreement with the proposals and recommendation set out in sections 1 and 2 of the report and the JAC formally agreed to support the team structure change described in section 1 (the appointment of a P/T Volunteer and Outreach Support Officer in place of a F/T Ranger post).

Management Plan Review

(3) The JAC considered the draft Management Plan a text copy of which had been circulated to members following the consultations that had been held. In particular the JAC looked in detail at the wording of the action points and some minor amendments to the text were recommended. The JAC agreed to adopt the revised text of the Management Plan 2009/14 and support the proposed publishing strategy for the revised Management Plan.

(4) The remaining items in the report were noted.

FINANCE REPORT

119. The JAC considered a position report by the Development Officer on Core Funding expenditure for 2008/9 and Project Funding expenditure for 2008/9. The Development Officer outlined the main points contained in his report and gave explanations where necessary. The report was noted by the JAC.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND REPORT

120. The JAC considered a position report by the Development Officer on the Sustainable Development Fund expenditure for 2007/8. It was reported that £50,667 had currently been allocated leaving a sum of £10,999 still to be allocated. The report also contained a table outlining the projects where grants had been awarded and projects where funding was rejected. The JAC noted the report.

2009/10 BUDGET REQUEST REPORT

121. (1) The JAC considered a report by the Development Officer which set out the amounts being sought from funding partners for the 2009/10 financial year. The report also set out the proposed budget figures for next year together with details of the work the AONB Service is looking to undertake during the year. The report also took note of the financial pressures the District Councils are currently under and the AONB service working with the Officer Working

Group will look at options if AONB funding is cut in the next financial year. The Development Officer responded to questions concerning inflation, charging for equipment etc.

(2) The JAC agreed the partner contributions in principal subject to agreement by individual partners mechanism e.g. approval by portfolio holder, committee etc.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

122. Tim Russell outlined a proposal by Visit Somerset for a car free walking route, in conjunction with the Taunton-Minehead Bus Route 28, from Red Post , Triscombe – Wills Neck – West Bagborough. After discussion the JAC agreed to support this promotion and Tim Russell would take this forward.

(The meeting closed at 4.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Qhjac.mins.21 November 2008

**Quantock Hills JAC
20th February 2009
REPORT OF THE AONB MANAGER**

1 Management Plan Review

- 1.1** The Management Plan is now in its final stages of design and publishing. I am pleased to report that we have again collectively achieved an attractive document of real interest and information value as well as a clear vision with policies and associated actions.
- 1.2** Communications Officer Georgie Grant has been busy ensuring the Management Plan is designed and published to a high standard. She currently has a heavy workload for her part time post however she should be able to start work on the Management Plan broadsheet soon. A contract has been let to further develop the AONB website this will make it more user friendly and include the new plan.
- 1.3** The plan is being put through formal adoption processes by the commissioning Authorities of Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Sedgemoor District Council. I was pleased to be invited present the plan to West Somerset Council's Executive Committee on Jan 19th leading to a useful discussion, which was reported in the West Somerset free press. The Council formally adopted the plan at that meeting, the first of our Local Authority partners to do so.
- 1.4** Action Points with associated targets and delivery organisations have been put together in a five year program to create a Delivery Plan which will be published alongside the Management Plan. Consultation with partners is currently taking place on levels of involvement, targets and timings and the Delivery Plan will provide the background for ongoing development of the rolling Project Plan and annual Business Plan.

Quantock Hills AONB strategic, process and resource planning:

Management Plan

The strategic document adopted by core partners in the AONB Partnership. This sets out the vision, policies and actions for the next 5-years.

Delivery Plan

A 5-year aspirational plan that sets out how the AONB partnership (not just the AONB Service) will achieve the actions from the Management Plan and what measures will be adopted to ensure success.

Project Plan

A rolling 3-year programme with year 1 taken from the annual Business Plan and years 2 & 3 more flexible. This includes the work of partners and the AONB Service.

Annual Business Plan

Sets out the work of the AONB Service to achieve the Delivery Plan for the coming year. It sets out running costs as well as project costs and funding streams from core partners and external sources

2 Officers Working Group and Finance

2.1 At the Officers Working Group(OWG) meeting on the 26th January items addressed included the Partnership Satisfaction Survey (see below), terms of reference for the OWG based on the successful Dorset AONB model and the new Memorandum of Understanding for core funding partners. It was also agreed that the JAC Chairman should be invited to attend OWG meetings.

Key Action Points from the meeting were:

- Ask Norman Tottle (SCC) for electronic copy of JAC papers to be sent to the AONB Service for the website.
- OWG agenda item for next meeting 'Funding Links'
- Present a report to JAC on satisfaction survey to include brief statistics and recommendations
- Draft ToR based on Dorset AONB model
- CE to recommend moving JAC meetings to other locations until acoustic issue is remedied at Fyne Court
- Ask JAC chairman to attend OWG meetings once ToR have been agreed.

- Invite Forestry Commission to become party to MoU.
- Amendment TDBC contribution to be £16,500
- Amendment expand MoU contribution table to include Forestry Commission and Natural England and explain 95% contribution from Natural England 2010 / 11.
- Individual OWG members to take MoU back to their organisations and identify any issues

2.2 During the funding contributions discussion Taunton Deane informed the meeting that their contribution to the AONB was being reduced for the coming financial year to a maximum of £16,500, Sedgemoor confirmed that they would not be able to reinstate the full £21,500 contribution but were hoping to maintain the reduced contribution of £17,500, West Somerset and Somerset County Councils had not yet received confirmation of contributions.

Contributions for the coming two years are specified in the Memorandum of Understanding based on the Natural England model that members of the group are taking to their authorities for comment and signing. We are hoping this can be achieved by the end of March. A copy of the draft new MoA is included in this report as Appendix A.

3 Partners Satisfaction Survey

3.1 In the autumn of 2008 Somerset County Council carried out a partnership satisfaction survey for the Quantock Hills AONB Service as a success monitoring tool. This repeated a survey first carried out two years ago by the County Council and was also carried out for other environmental/countryside partnerships. Responses were received from 27 AONB partner organisations and the following is taken from the final report produced by SCC.

3.2 Summary of Responses:

- 87% of responses were “Good” or “Excellent”
- 12.6% were “Fair”
- 0.4% were “Poor” or “Very Poor”

Question	Total score*	Average Score out of 5	% 2008	% 2006	Relative Performance
Contacting the AONB Team - response time	107/135	4	79	78	+ 1%
Assessment of quality of reports and decision making process	104/135	3.8	77	82	- 5%
Joint project working - performance and working relationships	104/125	4.1	83	87	- 4%
Response to requests for information - quality and helpfulness of information	110/130	4.2	84.5	86	- 1.5%
The overall performance of the service	111/135	4.1	82	84	- 2%
How the service contributes to your organisations aims and objectives	94/115	4.1	82	80	+ 2%

* Please note, not all respondents completed scores for all of the questions so the total value of the points available will differ.

3.3 Partners' comments and Officers Working Group agreed responses are shown here by survey section:

Communication

From contacting the AONB team to the quality of material produced the majority of responses graded the Service as "good" or "excellent". The one negative feedback score received was where the respondent stated they had to ring twice to get information sent to them. A different partner stated "the response to requests for information is usually handled quickly and in an effective manner". The OWG concluded that no changes were required in this area.

Decision Making Process - Administration

Several suggestions for process changes were made by Natural England, including:

- Having written reports prior to Officer Working Group meetings.
- Having the more important issues at JAC meetings further up the agenda.
- Having briefer verbal and written reports at the JAC.
- Having a single report from the manager at each JAC on the progress of the AONB against the actions contained in the Management Plan i.e. to include a summary of both the Rangers and Development Officer work.

This was the only area of the survey where the average response dropped from just over 4 out of 5 to just under. These points were discussed at the OWG meeting and a range of responses were agreed, including some of the points in section 2 of this report. Further responses included establishing a year long “rotating” chairman (from the membership) for the OWG and linking Rangers’ JAC reports more closely to the Management Plan Action Points being delivered.

In addition, there were comments concerning the general management of the Service:

- The AONB Service does an excellent job managing the hills even though the paperwork forced on them is forever increasing!
- The service is very good generally, although some of the policies and projects are questionable

Joint Project Working – working relationships

The overall averaged response was over 4 out of five, specific suggestions and comments included:

- There is a need to strengthen the communication and understanding between the AONB and the WSC
- Can be chaotic/not very good at deadlines – a bit laid back
- I consider that the performance and working relationships could be made even more effective by:-
The AONB Service being proactive and seeking additional opportunities for project working and delivery of the AONB Management Plan. Seeking the endorsement of major funders to key staff changes and changes in service delivery before implementing them
- I have been particularly impressed as to how the AONB service has contributed to the successful Local Action LEADER initiative and the coordinated volunteer efforts in the area.

In response I have been working with our key officer from West Somerset Council and more engaged with the Council as a whole and better links to local

authority partners have been agreed. Development time for external funding can be difficult to find, however the team will increase the priority of this element.

Contribution to partner organisations' aims and objectives

- I have always greatly appreciated the help and support of the Rangers and their co-operation with the aims of the Fairfield Estate
- Very useful, we use a lot of the AONB and where we have worked together it has been to the benefit of our charitable purpose

4 AONB Service Staffing and Structure

4.1 The team has now been functioning for four months with its new staff structure after the loss of the Ranger post agreed by the JAC at our last meeting. The reduction in project delivery resource does make achieving our targets more difficult, however the ability to adapt is a key strength of this small multi-skilled team. Alongside their access and habitats/biodiversity project work Rangers Tim and Andy were able to provide valuable community support over the recent snowy week-end supporting the public, SCC Highways and the emergency services.

4.2 The contributions to the work of the AONB Service from our joint AONB/National Trust volunteer group are truly valuable and the employment of a Volunteer Co-ordinator and Outreach Officer will give significant support to this important element of the team. We have not yet received confirmation of all partners' financial contributions however (see 2.2 above); so as agreed at the last JAC recruitment for this one-year part time post is still on hold.

4.3 Our Landscape Planning Officer, Emma-Jane Preece, returns from maternity leave in mid-March and we looking forward to getting the JAC agreed Planning Protocol firmly embedded in her work. This return coincides neatly with the new Management Plan which provides the agenda for our positive engagement with the planning system over the coming years.

5 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 The JAC is recommended to:

- **Support the Management Plan delivery processes described in section 1**
- **Endorse the OWG actions described in section 2**
- **Note the report**

CHRIS EDWARDS
QUANTOCK HILLS AONB MANAGER

APPENDIX A

Memorandum of Understanding for partnership working and support to Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Between

Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, Sedgemoor District Council, West Somerset Council, The Forestry Commission and Natural England

1st April 2009 to 31st March 2011

1. Purpose

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework for the delivery of duties and obligations arising from Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, including the operation and management of an AONB Partnership, a staff team to act on behalf of the Partnership and the publishing, reviewing and monitoring of the AONB management plan.

It sets out a shared vision for and commitment to AONB management by all parties to the MoU. It outlines the expectations on all Parties to achieve this vision, including a local reflection of the national agreement between Natural England and the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB).

2. The Parties to the Agreement

Somerset County Council of County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY
Taunton Deane Borough Council of Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE
Sedgemoor District Council of Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR
West Somerset Council of Council Offices, Williton, Taunton, TA4 4QA
Natural England of Riverside Chambers, Castle Street, Taunton, TA1 4AP
The Forestry Commission of The Forest Office, Cockercombe, Over Stowey, Bridgwater. TA5 1HJ
Hereafter referred to as 'The Parties'.

3. A shared vision

The Parties to this MoU believe that:

- AONB management structures should be strongly supported by partners and relevant authorities.¹
- The statutory requirement to produce AONB Management Plans provides an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and achieve better outcomes.
- Security of funding and flexibility of funding for AONBs will deliver better outcomes.
- We need a "can do" culture which is not risk-averse but where lessons from novel approaches are encouraged and learnt from, in both success and failure.
- Monitoring of environmental outcomes is essential and needs to be undertaken to develop a sound, spatially-relevant evidence base.
- Opportunities should be taken to maximise the synergies between the outcomes of the AONB's Management Plan with Natural England's Strategic Objectives and the plans of other Parties.

¹ As defined by S85 of CRoW Act - relevant authority includes government departments, Natural England included, and public sector as well as statutory undertakers

4. Roles and Responsibilities

A) The AONB Partnership:

At the broadest scale the unconstituted wider AONB partnership involves a coalition of over 100 consultative bodies, organisations and individuals with a particular interest in the Quantocks. This broad partnership has an annual event and receives papers for (and an invitation to) all meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee, which occur at least four times a year.

The Joint Advisory Committee (*Annex 1 JAC Constitution*), established in 1974, forms a tighter partnership between the County, District and Parish councils along with representatives from Natural England, the Quantock Commoners Association, Friends of Quantock organisation, the Forestry Commission, Somerset Local Access Forum and Government Office South West. The AONB Service reports to this body, which directs the Service, acts as their watchdog and provides strategic and policy guidance.

Further governance is provided through the Officers Working Group which includes an officer each from the Core Funding Partnership of the four local authorities, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. This body meets a minimum of four times a year and addresses detailed funding, partnership and management plan delivery issues and Terms of Reference are being agreed for this group.

B) Other structures within the partnership

A number of working groups have been established to help with delivery and consultation of Management Plan objectives. These include the Quantock Commons Management Group, the Access Management Group and the Planning Officers Working Group'. There is also a JAC Planning sub-group and the AONB Service hosts and organises regular Police and Conservation Organisation Liaison meetings. Start and finish project delivery groups are set up as appropriate as is the Management Plan Review Group.

C) AONB staff unit

The purpose and objectives of the AONB partnership will be assisted by employment of a Staff Unit to act on its behalf. The Staff Unit will coordinate, champion, act as a focus and bring bodies together for action, and bid for funds. The staff unit will carry out the core functions set out in Annex 2.

The Staff Unit will work for the whole partnership and have its own identity. Activities will be delivered under the identity of the AONB Partnership, rather than that of the host authority or individual partners.

A degree of independence for the Partnership will be necessary, as there will be occasions when the AONB Partnership needs to be consulted by, or make comments / provide advice on schemes or activities of its constituent local authorities

5. Employment of Staff

An AONB Manager will be employed at a senior level to be able to act as a respected advocate for, and champion of, the AONB. S/he will be given authority to work with key partners at a senior level, for example Chief Executives, Regional Directors, lead Planning Officers, key committees & Local Authority members. This Officer will not be shared with other AONBs as a shared lead AONB Manager / AONB officer. S/he will not work outside the AONB, except in support of AONB objectives.

Natural England will be involved in the recruitment of the AONB Manager, including the job specification and terms and conditions, and will be represented on the interview panel.

Other staff will be employed on behalf of the partnership. By agreement, these staff may also work with, or across other AONB partnerships if this makes best use of skills, resources and economies of scale.

Such staff will not normally work outside an AONB except in support of AONB objectives. Job descriptions for AONB staff will be agreed by the partnership.

Staff will be employed by Somerset County Council, the “host authority”, who will be responsible for recruitment, employment services and accommodation.

Line management of the AONB manager for day to day purposes will be through the host authority. Other AONB staff will report to the AONB Manager. The staff team will work to a work programme agreed by the partnership/JAC. Progress will be monitored against the work programme.

6. Financial and administrative arrangements

The income and expenditure of the Partnership will be met in the first instance by the host authority, which will be responsible for the exercise of proper financial controls and for collecting agreed contributions from all parties.

The host authority will be responsible for submitting the annual AONB financial contribution application to Natural England by 31st December each year, in accordance with any guidance issued by Natural England. Natural England’s contribution will be paid in arrears to the host authority, on receipt of an agreed claim.

Specifically, the “Partnership Local Authorities” will:

- co-operate with and support the host authority and make annual contributions to 25% of agreed costs, or at the specified minimum level in line with schedule 1
- recognise the additional responsibilities of the host authority
- support the work of the partnership.

Specifically, Natural England will:

- work to the principles set out described in the National Agreement between Natural England and the National Association for AONBs (Annex 3)
- make annual contributions to financially support the work of the partnership. This contribution will be made in line with advice on the single pot contribution (Annex 4).
- commit itself to providing 3 year funding settlements to aid planning. Funding is confirmed as 95% of 2008/09 settlement for 2009/10 and 2010/11. A new 3 year settlement is anticipated from 2011/12.
- provide a recognised lead officer and contact who will be involved in the management of the AONB Unit, the Management Plan process and partnership activity.
- support the work of the partnership
- work across government and with national organisations to promote the role and value of AONBs to society and our natural environment.

Schedule 1 Financial Contributions

Local Authority Partners will contribute to core function (Annex 3) costs at the following amounts for Financial Year 09/10, with an intended minimum contribution for year 10/11, based on a minimum 25% contribution to core staff unit costs.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>FY 09/10</u>	<u>FY 10/11</u>
<u>Somerset County Council</u>	<u>£34,500</u>	<u>£34,500</u>
<u>Taunton Deane Borough Council</u>	<u>£16,500</u>	<u>£21,500</u>
<u>Sedgemoor District Council</u>	<u>£17,554</u>	<u>£17,554</u>

<u>West Somerset Council</u>	<u>£21,500</u>	<u>£21,500</u>
<u>The Forestry Commission</u>	<u>£17,300</u>	<u>£17,300</u>
<u>Natural England</u>	<u>£207, 941</u>	<u>£197,544 + £10,397 (5%) performance related</u>

7. Communication

For the purposes of this Memorandum of Understanding the following are the lead contacts:

Host Authority Somerset County Council: **Barry James**

Local Authority Taunton Deane Borough Council: **Ian Clark**

Local Authority Sedgemoor District Council: **Janette Burton**

Local Authority West Somerset Council: **Angela Lamplough**

Forestry Commission: **Nick Salter**

Natural England: **Steve Marston**

AONB Unit: **Chris Edwards**

Regular liaison arrangements within core funding partners will allow the AONB Staff Unit to link with other authorities, local strategic partnerships, AONB networks and a wide range of other bodies. Particular emphasis will be given to highlight the good practice and good news stories which emerge for the management plan and the various players who help to shape the AONB.

8. Duration of Agreement

This Memorandum of Understanding is effective from April 1st 2009. Its implementation will be reviewed by all parties within 2 years, with a view to continuation for a further 3 years from 2011/12 to 2013/14.

9. Endorsement

We endorse this Memorandum of Understanding for the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership and hereby agree to represent, to the best of our ability, the interests of the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership.

Signed by: _____ (date)

On behalf of: Somerset County Council

Signed by: _____ (date)

On behalf of: Taunton Deane Borough Council

Signed by: _____ (date)

On behalf of: Sedgemoor District Council

Signed by: _____ (date)

On behalf of: West Somerset Council

Signed by: *[Andrew Wood, Executive Director]*

On Behalf of: Natural England _____ (date)

Signed by: _____ (date)

On behalf of: The Forestry Commission

JAC Briefing Paper: Funding opportunity under the INTERREG IV programme

Author: Iain Porter, Development Officer

Date: 10 February 2009

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is provided to update the JAC on recent project development activity in relation to a cross-channel project bid.

The Quantock Hills AONB Service has been engaged in the development of a cross-channel partnership project worth £4.2m (€6.8m) under the INTERREG IV programme [France (channel) – England (2007 – 2013)]. There are four sub-projects (called Studios by Europe) that the project covers, though the Quantocks is looking to engage directly with only one of these, woodland management for woodfuel. The bid will be submitted to European Secretariat on 3rd March.

Project title: **SULIS** – Sustainable Landscapes: Integrated Solutions [tbc]

Start date: 1 January 2008

End date: 31 December 2012

2. Location of project activity (French and UK sides)

Devon County Council (Lead Partner – Accountable Body)	<i>Parc Naturel Regional Des Boucles De La Seine Normande (PNRBSN)</i>
Cornwall AONB	<i>Parc Naturel Regional D'armorique (PNRA)</i>
Cranborne Chase AONB	<i>Office National des Forets (ONF)</i>
Dorset AONB	<i>Chambre d'Agriculture de Finistaire</i>
East Devon AONB	<i>Fédération départementale des Civam du Finistere (FDCIVAM)</i>
National Trust	
North Devon AONB	<i>Parc Naturel Regional Des Marais Du Cotentin Et Du Bessin (PNRMCB)</i>
Plymouth University	
<u>Quantock Hills AONB</u>	South West Protected Landscape Forum
South Devon AONB	Tamar Valley AONB

3. Description of the project

Sustainable Landscapes and Management Solutions

The western Manche region has a shared landscape which is defined and informed by its geology, geography and heritage of human intervention with the richest and most distinctive areas being recognised through international designation as protected landscapes. The landscapes of the region have a strong physical and cultural unity particularly in the bocage landscapes, the vernacular buildings, land management practices, the produce of the landscape and the cultural traditions. Equally, the challenges of managing and sustaining the protected landscapes share common pressures and threats. At a socio-economic level industrialised economic development and suburbanisation threaten the land management systems that have sustained the landscape for generations. At an environmental level there are threats of habitat and species loss and a growing imperative to respond to climate change.

At a cultural level the landscape is threatened by ill-conceived, unsympathetic interventions and the loss of traditional knowledge and skills.

The formal objectives of the project are:

1. To audit best practice in the use of mapping to evaluate protected landscapes, their features and their management in the western Manche region.
2. To develop and improve tools and techniques that assist in the future management of protected landscapes in the western Manche region, and develop adaptation responses to the impact of climate change and globalisation.
3. To identify and demonstrate best practice in community involvement during the preparation of plans for the management of protected landscapes in the western Manche region.
4. To run a series of showcase projects that develop and demonstrate best practice in landscape management and the reduction of climate impacts in the western Manche region.
5. To produce a range of bi-lingual published materials and toolkits that disseminate the techniques and solutions that the project identifies and develops.
6. To engage an audience in the western Manche region beyond the existing partners that will both assist in dissemination of the project's activities and findings, and help identify opportunities for further cross-border collaboration in sustainable landscape management.

Main actions envisaged

1. Audits of activities -
 - a. An independent audit of practice in landscape mapping techniques used by AONBs and PNRs.
 - b. For selected landscape features including bocage, indigenous buildings and farmed land; audit the characteristics, value (both market value and non-financial value), supply chains, consumer awareness, management techniques, and vulnerability to socio-economic and climatic changes.
 - c. Audit the training and educational techniques used to support the management of protected landscapes and encourage community involvement.
2. Knowledge exchange
 - a. A bespoke programme of knowledge exchange of best practice in landscape management.
 - b. The creation of local stakeholder groups and cross-border working groups to promote improved landscape management and the development of local produce.
3. Developing solutions
 - a. To establish pilot projects that demonstrate best practice in landscape management techniques with the aim of improving existing practice and encouraging take-up of new approaches that can both preserve landscape value and enhance product value.

- b. To develop guidelines to help land and asset management techniques and practice adapt to and be more resilient to climate change.
 - c. Develop an education and training framework to develop skills in managing landscape assets.
4. Dissemination and longevity
- a. Publication of best practice guidelines, training materials and toolkits promoting best practice in landscape management.
 - b. Exhibitions, events and conferences promoting best practice in landscape management, focusing on the results of the audits, knowledge exchange and pilot projects.
 - c. End of project partner conference.
5. Project Management
- a. Project coordination and financial management.
 - b. Communication tools including translation, website, web-conferencing, video streaming, and dissemination of reports.
 - c. Conferences and partnership meetings.

Target group

The project is aimed at

- i) communities living in areas of protected landscape in the Manche region including residents, local organisations and land managers
- ii) professionals involved in the management of protected landscapes in particular the AONBs and PNRs, but also academics and other agencies.
- iii) small businesses working and operating in protected landscapes e.g. farmers, architects, suppliers, builders.

Delivery

The activities will be managed within four distinct sub-projects [known in Europe as Studios]:

1. **Bocage**. **This is the only sub-project that the Quantock Hills are actively involved in though we will be able to use the outputs / outcomes from other studios.** A Pilot project to undertake energy audits on neighbouring farms, leading to the usage of communal woodfuel processing equipment to process farm timber and the installation of wood fuelled boilers for farm heating. The Project is aimed at both reducing dependency on fossil fuels and underpinning sustainable management of small farm woodlands and landscape sensitive Beech hedgebanks. The initial energy audit will look at all farm energy use and include a carbon audit. It will also include an assessment of the woodfuel energy resources on the farm including trees and hedges and will establish a sustainable resource before the boiler is installed. There will be open days to advocate the wider use of the approach and any farms participating in the scheme will undertake to agree to future demonstration work. For the Quantocks this will undertake 15 farm audits and look to set up 2 cluster groups of farms that can utilise small woodlands and hedgerows for the production of woodfuel heating. Depending upon the amount of woodland resources there may be opportunity to

develop a co-operative that can feed woodfuel products (logs / chip) into a sustainable market chain.

2. Landscape Mapping. – See further information for details of this sub-project.
3. Low Impacts Building. - See further information for details of this sub-project.
4. Landscape Products. - See further information for details of this sub-project.

4. FINANCIAL PLAN*

Quantock Hills AONB Service project costs:

Item	Value	
	€	£
15 x Farm Audits	24,054	15,000
Cluster group set up & support	6,414	4,000
Farm open days, reports etc	9,622	6,000
Staff costs	13,727	8,560
Project Co-ordination fees	9,394	5,858
Travel & subsistence	1,924	1,200
Overheads	882	550
TOTAL	66,018	41,168

Funding for the Quantock element of the project:

	€	£
Cash	17,358	10,825
Staff costs (in-kind)	13,726	8,560
Overheads & travel (in-kind)	1,924	1,200
INTERREG Investment	33,008	20,584
TOTAL	66,018	41,168

*See further information for details on total project funding.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

This project is being entered under the following priority measure:

Priority-Measure 4-2: [Priority 4]: Ensure a sustainable environmental development of the common space

- Specific Objective 11: Mitigate and manage risks of environmental damage

The other sub-projects:

1. Landscape Mapping. This sub-project will lead on improving the evidence base for landscape management and the identification of sites and locations where sustainable solutions are best tested.
2. Low Impacts Building. A sub-project to promote and support the use of locally sourced building materials in particular earth and stone as a sustainable ,low impact method of building in the Protected Landscape areas of Cornwall, Devon, Normandy and Brittany thereby helping to conserve the areas` character, culture and communities; maintaining the existing built heritage in viable use; creating and safeguarding employment ;and contributing to a sustainable environment.

3. Landscape Products. This sub-project will look to exchange experiences in the development of local farmers / producers groups while promoting farming production techniques which respect the landscapes and enhance the quality products supply market.

Further Financial Information:

Total Project Value = £4.2m [€6.8m]

With 66% INTERREG investment in England and 34% in France.

Total Project Value by sub-project:

Studio	Project Value		INTERREG investment	
	€	£	€	£
Bocage	815,273	508,404	415,307	258,985
Landscape mapping	2,771,506	1,728,311	1,385,617	864,071
Low impact buildings	856,852	534,333	431,059	268,808
Landscape products	998,510	622,671	498,728	311,007
Coordination	729,373	454,837	359,990	224,490
Travel & accommodation	422,115	263,231	210,336	131,166
Project development	237,309	147,986	114,432	71,360
TOTAL	6,830,938	4,259,773	3,415,468	2,129,886

Rangers' Report July 08 to Feb 09

Quantock Hills AONB JAC

Halsway Manor 20th Feb 2009

Tim Russell, Senior Ranger, Andy Harris, Partnership Ranger

1.0 Introduction

This report period covers the last six months including the latter part of the summer, the autumn and majority of the winter months.

The report will be presented through a PowerPoint presentation and delivery of Action Points from the current Management Plan will be highlighted.

Rangers have delivered Action Points including: Guided Walks & Events program, habitat & visitor management, project management (often working with other AONB Team members), working with and training volunteers and partnership working.

2.0 Practical management

Practical work has focussed on habitat and commons management and access projects. Much of the work has been assisted by volunteers.

2.1 Access management:

Cothelstone Hill

Work has included improvements to the Cothelstone Hill easy-access track. New drainage and path resurfacing was required, now providing excellent access up from the car park. Much of the funding came from Natural England's Access Management Grant Scheme, which also provided funding for the new information board.

Volunteers have provided help in drainage works to the main footpath up to the Seven Sisters. Cross-track grips were re dug and shaped, taking water off the track and reducing erosion.

Kilve

Rangers working with SCC Rights of Way staff made improvements to the easy-access trail out to the picnic table at Kilve Pill. This track allows wheelchair and push chair access to the coast, (the only easy-access point to the coast in the AONB).

The Drove

Successful bidding from the Aggregates Levy Fund has allowed the National Trust to carry out important improvements to sections of The Drove between Triscombe Stone and Crowcombe Combe Gate. This ancient access route had suffered unsustainable damage and erosion over the last few years, now improved drainage and some re-surfacing has managed to repair some of the worst sections. This will allow greatly improved access for walkers, riders and cyclists (motor vehicle use is no longer permitted as the track has been classified as a Restricted Byway).

The Drove provides a vital link between the two main blocks of Access Land (the main thoroughfare linking access between the northern and southern commons). A single well defined and maintained route reduces the need for users to spread their impact. It is also a well known and much appreciated feature of the Quantock landscape keeping it in good, useable condition for the public is therefore particularly important.

2.2 Habitat management:

Vegetation management forms the main focus of habitat management and has taken place on the commons as well as SCC's Amenity Land holdings.

Bracken control

Due to unfavourable weather conditions last summer (during a small window of opportunity) only about 12 hectares of spraying was achieved on the common. The results of last season's spraying on Cothelstone Hill were extremely successful despite the bracken being a bit 'weather beaten' at the time of spraying.

Rhododendron control

Significant funding for winter work has been obtained from NE. This is being directed at removal of rhododendron throughout common from both heathland SSSI and ancient woodland SAC sites.

This work employed several firms of local contractors and the commoners themselves. The AONB Service also supervised a small contract to remove rhododendron from deciduous woodland near Triscombe Stone.

Scrub removal

Commoners have continued to remove silver birch from the western area of Great Bear (just to the north of Dead Woman's Ditch).

Grazing

Red Devon cattle continue to graze the open common and Dexters have been successfully utilised on Cothelstone Hill to compliment the Exmoor Pony grazing.

3.0 Events & events management

The AONB Service events program ran from April until November and was particularly popular. This report period covers the latter half of the events program and included: nightjar walks, bat walk, forest walk, heart of the hills walk, deer rut walks, a fungi foray and an eco burns walk. The events program for 2009 is currently being programmed.

Andy Harris has now taken on the role of external events co-ordinator as part of his Partnership Ranger responsibilities. Proposed events such as horse rides and orienteering are checked and organisers liaised with regarding the suitability of the event.

4.0 Volunteers

Rangers continue to put much emphasis into working with (and training) volunteers. The Quantock Conservation Volunteers have assisted both the AONB Service and National Trust in all aspects of conservation and visitor management throughout the AONB.

Volunteers have been actively involved with:

Scrub removal on Cothelstone Hill, rhododendron removal and GPS mapping, stone bank repair (Staple Plain), weekend/Bank Holiday and evening patrols with Rangers, Long Eared Owl Survey & nest basket installation, tree maintenance, litter picks, track and access work, assisting with events, etc.

Volunteers assisted the Rangers planting trees at Cothelstone Hill during National Tree Week. Native trees were planted in the car park area and pony corral. Trees were chosen for their potential size, autumn colours and bird food source at this popular site.

Volunteer Rangers from across the region attended the annual SW Ranger Forum training day. This year the event was hosted by the Dartmoor National Park Rangers and the Field Visit looked at the careful management being carried out on the blanket bogs on the moor which are of global importance, not only as an increasingly rare habitat but also as a vital carbon sink.

The Hawk & Owl Trust (including volunteers) carried out the second round of surveys to follow up on work carried out at beginning of the year to see if there were any chicks on nests. One location at northern end of hills had young. Volunteers also assisted with the installation of nesting baskets for the Long Eared Owls and four barn owl boxes.

Chris Sperring and Andy Harris recorded an interview on the day for local media (this can be seen on Chris's own blog).

5.0 Rangers

Both Rangers have had a particularly busy work schedule through most of this report period as Andrew Davis (previous AONB/FC Ranger) left his post in early September to emigrate to New Zealand. Andy D developed the Recreation Ranger role and he will be missed as a valued part of both the AONB and Forestry Commission teams.

Andy Harris took over this role (but the fulltime AONB Ranger post was not replaced). This has meant serious prioritising of the Rangers' work program.

Sunny conditions for much of the autumn and over the Christmas/New Year holiday period attracted high numbers of visitors to the hills.

School holiday period, Bank Holiday, weekend and evening patrols carried out by the Rangers ensured that the hills had cover in respect of visitor management. Issues typically requiring Ranger involvement included:

Illegal motorbike/quad use, search & rescue, assisting Emergency Services, sheep worrying, etc.

Meetings/Visits:

MP visit to AONB Team

Bridgwater MP Ian Liddel-Granger paid a visit to the AONB Team in early November and was taken out onto the hills to look at various issues. The diplomatic way in which the Team deal with often complex and sensitive issues and the positive feedback he receives regarding the AONB Service work was commented on.

JAC visit to Hills

Members of the JAC attended a day organised by the Rangers to look at access and interpretation issues. A particularly useful element of the day focussed on 'down hill' mountain biking in the forest. It was felt that formalising this popular activity would be beneficial to all concerned, as well as ensure that health & safety implications were properly considered.

Senior Ranger attended a one day seminar in Bristol hosted by the National Association of AONBs looking at the implications of climate change on coastal environments. This is a serious issue for Somerset as much of the county lies below sea level.

Other meetings have included:

Natural England, A&S Police Authority, Forestry Commission Peninsula District, National Trust (re Fyne Court Management Plan), Commoners, Regional Climate Change meeting, etc.

5.1 Notable incidents:

Rangers have been instrumental in alerting and assisting the authorities in two rural crime incidents.

Fly-tipping

A successful prosecution was achieved by TDBC as a result of information being reported by the AONB Service. The tipped material had useful information relating to its source and this allowed the culprit to eventually be tracked down.

Bird of Prey poisoning

A dead buzzard and pheasant (next to pheasant rearing/release pen) were both found to contain the illegal (and very toxic) pesticide Carbofluron. Natural England's Wildlife Crime Investigation Unit were alerted and both carcasses were taken away for tests. The tests proved positive for illegal poisoning. The WCIU and Police Authority then followed this up with a farm visit.

(Both of these incidents received media coverage in local and regional papers).

Unexploded Ordnance

An unexploded smoke grenade was discovered at the top of Stert Combe. The Police were alerted and the area was sealed off. The Bomb Disposal Unit were called in to safely explode the device.