

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Friday 26th February 2021
Teleconference 10.00 - 13.00

MINUTES

Meeting Attendees

Steve Mulberry (Chairman)
Dr Eirene Williams (Community – Vice Chair)
Martin Batt (Community – Vice Chair)
Rob Joules (National Trust)
John Rous (CLA)
Mel Austen (Biosphere Partnership)
Brian Butler (NFU)
Paula Ferris (Coastwise ND)
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (N Devon Council)
Cllr Tony Inch (Devon County Council)
Shaun Harrington (Torrige District Council)
Richard Prowse (Tarka Country Trust)
Paul Green (Community Rep.)
Rose Roberts (Community Rep.)
Richard Berridge (Community Rep.)
Claire Moodie (Community Rep.)
Penny Mills (CPRE)
Brett Grosvenor (EA)
Christine Goodall (NE)

Apologies

Rose Day (Community Rep.)
Hugh Bone (Torrige Parishes Rep)
Mike Kelly (Community Rep.)
Chris Preece (Voluntary Sector – NDAS)
Pete Burgess (DWT)
Lewis Andrews (Community Rep.)
Sarah Jennings (DCC)

Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (Manager)
Dave Edgcombe (Projects Officer)
Laura Carolan (Communications Officer)
Andrew Austen (NDC)
Kirstie Pritchard (DCC)

Speakers

Sue Black (Parkin Estates)
Mike Day (Northam Burrows Country Park)
Justin Seedhouse (National Trust)

1. **Welcome, introductions and apologies - Chairman Steve Mulberry** welcomed Partnership members to the Zoom meeting including invited speakers and Shaun Harrington for Torrige District Council and reported apologies.

2. **Minutes of the last meeting on 6th November 2020 and matters arising. Minutes agreed**
Matters arising:

- **AONB letters to NDC concerning planning issues** sent last March and this January received a response yesterday, reiterating importance of AONB advice but need to balance landscape and economic issues in decisions.
- **SDF Panel** - Richard Berridge has been recruited to the Panel
- **Rockham Steps – KP** reported that DCC have commissioned engineers to visit site and produce options report due at the end of February.
- **Planning Support – PM** from CPRE suggested the AONB team pro-actively contact them as doing a lot of planning work in North Devon and asked for their newsletter to be shared with Partnership members (attached) or subscribe at [CPRE Devon - Campaign to Protect Rural England](https://www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk)
- **EA Project Updates – BG** clarified that the Combe Martin Forest project in the first year plans to plant 3-4 ha of woodland on riparian sites along streams to better manage water

flows, with a target of 30ha over three years. The CRITTER project led by the Biosphere is a priority for funding but awaiting national approval of EA match funds – it is focussed on the Taw catchments related to Barnstaple flood management. **BG** asked if AONB would get involved, but **JCW** replied that due to small scale of team, there was not current capacity.

3. Governance

- **Planning Panel Member** – no-one had approached the chair or Manager to join, so members were asked to reflect on this and contact them if they may be interested. Training is available and planning expertise is not essential as a range of views are helpful.

4. AONB Manager's Report – additional points:

- **Coastal Heritage** – final grant claimed from Lottery and good feedback from them.
- **Nature's Tonic** – at Mel Austen's suggestion, we are exploring engagement with the universities of Exeter, Plymouth and PLM's SWEEP research programme in their work on Blue/Green natural capital for health and wellbeing
- **NAAONB - Environmental Land Management/CS Advocacy project** – good engagement so far with farmers responding to online survey and at least ten agreed to 1-2-1 interviews with contractors. Project to finish and report by end of March.
- **Extension to the AONB designated area** – initial letter to all on Natural England list, awaiting prioritisation process late Spring.
- **Green Recovery Challenge Fund** – **SM** invited any members of the Partnership planning to submit a bid including the AONB, to contact the AONB team at an early stage to provide input to bids and avoid duplication. **Action: All.**
- **Sustainable Development Fund** – update from **LC** noted, all funds allocated and anticipate full spend by end of March with only one possible extension into next year.
- **Communications Reports** – 500 followers on Instagram having revived the 'What's that Wednesday?' feature and lots of species photos. Facebook followers has declined slightly but Twitter followers still growing. Ongoing engagement with other AONB communications officers and collaborative working through the NAAONB regular online meetings. 'Then and Now' Booklet progressing working with Beaford. 'Naturally Healthy May' led by Devon LNP is happening this year, please log any activities on website [Naturally Healthy Month | Natural Devon – Devon's Local Nature Partnership](#). Landscapes for Life week is on 18-26th September and theme being developed. Unlocking from restrictions is a big issue for all AONBs with imminent launch of new Countryside Code and coordinated messaging pre-Easter with Defra. **BB** requested any advice and assistance to farmers to manage increased pressures? **Action** – **LC** to follow up with national colleagues and team.
- **NAAONB** – ongoing informal discussions about future National Landscape Service between AONBs, National Parks and Defra. Challenge of providing a balance between national and local, plus very diverse views across the AONB family. Chairs and managers have been surveyed about their views on current AONB governance to report back to Defra.
- **Business Plan 2021/2** – awaiting confirmation of FIPL resourcing to understand implications for team capacity to deliver the programme as Dave is interested in supporting this work so possible need to backfill planning work, and no confirmation yet of Defra budget. We only have about £10k of funding to play with outside core costs and SDF grants, and this is usually

used to match fund external projects like Coastal Heritage. However, hope to maintain focus on three priorities of nature recovery, farming and Health & Wellbeing. **Action: JCW** to circulate Business Plan once complete.

5. Nature Recovery – additional points:

- **AONB Plan – there has been an adjustment to the proposals presented to the Partnership in November** - the ‘state of nature in the AONB’ report will be as agreed and the team have been collating data to inform the report which will be produced by April once all data has been received. Both **MB** and **AONB team** members have been actively involved in three of the five working groups for the **Biosphere Nature Plan** and recognised the need to avoid duplication of work and stakeholder engagement as this plan covers the whole AONB. The proposal therefore is to produce an AONB action plan that is more local, specific and aimed at community and farmer engagement that will be ‘nested’ within the more strategic Nature Plan for the Biosphere, and the future Nature Recovery Strategy that will be developed at a County level. The nature recovery opportunity mapping being produced by Devon Local Nature Partnership (with DWT and Devon Biodiversity Record Centre) by May will help to guide future actions too. **JCW** has also been attending nature recovery workshops organised through the NAAONB, including working with other coastal AONBs to share approaches and learning.
- **Biosphere Nature Plan – MB** recommended members watch David Attenborough’s ‘A life on our Planet’ to understand why nature recovery work is essential. This work also contributes to the AONB’s Colchester Declaration targets, the recommendations of the Glover Protected Landscapes Review and recent announcement by the Prime Minister to protect 30% of land to support nature recovery, which is in a poor state and still declining. Mike Moser is leading the Biosphere Nature Plan work with five working groups: Coast, Wetlands and Waterbodies; Grassland, Pasture and Arable; Woodland and Towns, villages gardens and brownfield sites.
- **The AONB/Biosphere Coast working group, chaired by MB** has had strong partner input particularly from RSPB, National Trust and Coastwise and includes intertidal and estuary alongside much of the AONB cliffs, dunes and coastal habitats. It has drawn up seven actions for habitats (including for example a 500m rollback of farming along the coastal strip) and seven for species (including focus on yellowhammer, reed bunting etc.). There will be a public consultation on the draft Plan in April and publication of the final report in mid-May.

6. Landscape Report and Planning Update – additional points as follows: -

- **Key challenges** – permanency of tourism use changes, increasing development up hillsides (e.g. at Croyde), development of isolated often modern farm buildings, and proposals for new housing estates within and adjacent to the AONB – all with a long-term impact on the AONB landscape and the need for the team and planning authorities to hold the line. **BB** asked if conditions could be put on developments to be affordable housing or for local people/local need, but **SH** advised this is not possible under current legislation, but review of local plan could lead to change. **AA** – supported this view that the National Planning Policy Framework did not allow these conditions.
- **Power Line Removal** – work at Morteohoe may be delayed to Autumn due to tourism pressure. Successful work to support residents with line-removal at Chapel Hill in Morteohoe.

MW commended Dave's work with line-removal, (bringing in a total of £1.5m over the last few years to improve the landscape). However annoyed that Broadband infrastructure can be installed with no local permission. **DE** reported he is working closely with Airband to share ducts/poles where possible and not erect infrastructure in areas where lines removed.

- **PM** mentioned the annual housing delivery test that now showed Devon had over delivered on housing starts, with an excess of 1000 houses in Torridge and North Devon. A proposal for 59 units at Chivenor had been refused now LPA realised that the Inspectors report overturning a decision at Torrington, did not mean that the lack of a 5 year housing supply plan could be used to force through other new housing applications (see attached CPRE newsletter).
- **EW** reported that the Georgeham Parish draft Neighbourhood Plan is now open for public consultations until 5 April 2021 - [Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2031 - Georgeham Parish Council](#)

8. Presentations and Discussion on impacts of higher visitor numbers and new visitors to the AONB in 2020

- **Sue Black, Parkin Estates, Woolacombe** – annual figures for car park were down 18% but numbers in September and October were double the normal figures. Adjusted car park slightly for more social distancing, didn't need more staff on beach but useful having advisers in the village. Worked closely with parish council and police who were brilliant, hence kept village closed until 20 May prioritising health over wealth. Looking forward, bookings for 70 beach huts are 93% up on previous years, and local campsite owners saying bookings up over 70% – suggesting it will be busier in 2021.
- **Justin Seedhouse, National Trust, Brownsham** – In response to lockdown, NT placed staff on furlough so just a skeleton crew to oversee sites. Many sites experienced anti-social behaviour including litter, human waste, damage to paths and wild camping. Problem of sites not having large car parks or camping facilities. E.g. one evening there were 25 tents pitched at Peppercombe plus parties/drinking but no toilet facilities. Good side was seeing a different demographic using NT spaces, reaching new audiences, and building stronger relationships with parish councils to manage issues eg Hartland and Welcombe. Major issue of camper vans – with NT sites being promoted online and on social media despite not being camping sites. This was exacerbated by Dartmoor banning wild camping (only legal wild camping site in Devon). Work to liaise with websites and social media to remove sites, so problem reduced. There has been a lot more beach cleaning but mainly leaving litter for collection by Trust but have also recruited more volunteers to support this. They have changed signage to offer a welcome but also to stress respect for places, with some new access restrictions to protect tenants. An opportunity might be to work better across boundaries to share messages and resources.
- **Mike Day, Northam Burrows Country Park** – key anti-social behaviour was drinking and associated incidents whilst pubs were shut but Park was freely open, with more involvement of police to address this. Significantly higher numbers of people using the Park put pressure on staff, particularly monitoring the beach for litter, open fires, dogs in exclusion zone and overnight camping. Only charged entry for 2 months instead of 5 but received about same income

- **MW** explained that Woolacombe PC/NDC and DCC councillors were holding weekly meetings to share information and address issues. Major problem was the 50/60 campervans along the esplanade with accompanying human waste, litter and noise but people just ignored parking fines as quite affordable for a night's stay.
- **PF** reported on the challenges faced by the Sandy Lane car park on Braunton Burrows which was inundated by camper vans last year and powerless to force them to leave due to overnight camping ban. Is it parish council or police to contact on these issues?
- **PM** advised members of a forthcoming county wide collaboration being planned '**Clean Devon**' to support messaging and action to address littering and anti-social behaviour.
- **LC** mentioned the national coordination through NAAONB and Defra on challenges from opening lockdown. Discussions on a PR campaign to reach new demographic who are visiting coast and countryside without knowing about Countryside Code etc.
- **MW** said they are exploring some people and traffic management orders but expensive and may not solve problems with 'Clearways' where people don't understand that parking is forbidden.
- **SB** commented on litter in Woolacombe, in fact spent less on waste last year than normal but did use more bins and trailers around beach. Dog waste not more of an issue – helps having dog waste bins on the beach, and there is more bagged waste in the winter than summer suggesting it is more local people with dogs than visitors.
- **JCW** had approached two district councils to explore whether any plans to respond to these issues but no response so far. Will follow up and share with members.
- **SM** summarised the situation saying if authorities or others were doing preparatory planning for the season and saw the AONB as the forum for this, to contact JCW sooner rather than later. **The AONB team** would share national discussions on messaging materials and explore potential to provide information on farmland to advise visitors on key issues.

9. Updates from Partners: –

- **North Devon Council PSPO Dog Control** – **AA** reported that 3000 responses were received to the consultation and the final orders were confirmed two weeks ago. Press coverage will start shortly, and signage being installed on NDC sites. They will be approaching other landowners to discuss signage and delegated enforcement. See [Public Spaces Protection Orders - PSPOs \(northdevon.gov.uk\)](https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/public-spaces-protection-orders) and NDC E-News bulletin on 3 March.
- **Northam Burrows Visitor Centre redevelopment** – **Mike Day** the £1.6m renovation and expansion of the Centre is currently on site, with works due to complete end of April, followed by internal fitting out and planned opening in June 2021. New features include a café, terrace with view out to sea, education room and full accessibility to whole site with sculptured dunes to screen centre. Interpretation will focus on the Burrows but also provide a gateway to the wider area including the AONB and Biosphere. Plans include a visitor access management plan with new waymarked paths, proposed dog ban on Skern mudflats and 3 new orientation boards. **RB** asked if dog ban will cover the route across the foreshore to the lifeboat station at Appledore? This was confirmed.
- **Plastic Free North Devon** – **CM** reported that information campaign with accommodation providers for visitors was continuing online this year, with resources offered for businesses to use with PFND or their own branding as easy downloads -

<https://www.plasticfreenorthdevon.org/visitor-campaign-enrolment-for-north-devon-businesses> . The local campaign to ban the sale of the very cheap polystyrene bodyboards has had success in Westward Ho! and Saunton, as well as local Tesco stores. PFND is offering wooden bodyboards to accommodation providers for their visitors to borrow instead.

- **RP** to update on new wildlife funding for Tarka Country Trust at next meeting
- **Cllr Tony Inch** said in view of imminent CC elections, he wanted to thank Partnership for the opportunity to participate and the increased insight he had gained to the range of work of the AONB team and Partnership.

Additional Notes from Partners: -

Devon County Council Environment Team

- **The North Devon and Torridge landscape character assessments** are being updated- firstly 'Landscape Character Types' and then 'Devon Character Areas'. The idea is to make sure these two layers of information dovetail better together and are up to date and fit for purpose- especially in response to current forces for change driven by the climate and biodiversity emergencies. The LCA update is being jointly funded between DCC and the districts and we hope the consultants will start work in March (Mel Croll).
- Bill Horner is giving a talk to the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee AGM about the **North Devon Coast National Mapping Project** (from 2013) and linking to **TIDE INTERREG project**. On the TIDE front a shared Devon, Donegal, Derry 3D Virtual Reality pilot is being developed with possible links to RAF Chivenor and the Putsborough Bombing Range. Bill to talk more with Dave Edgcombe about this.
- **[Devon Climate Emergency – Creating a resilient, net-zero carbon Devon – where people and nature thrive](#)**. Progress report (attached) from Doug Eltham.
- **Naturally Healthy May** – put online any event running in May or can help share messages across the area, with reminder that 'Activation funding' is available through Active Devon to deliver taster sessions / events during May.

10. REVISED Dates of Future Meetings: dependent on Covid-19 restrictions at time as to whether in person or online.

Friday 25 June 2021, 10.00am – 12.30

Friday 8 October 2021, 10-12.30