

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Friday 6th November 2020
Teleconference 10.00 - 13.00

MINUTES

Meeting Attendees

Steve Mulberry (Chairman)
Dr Eirene Williams (Community – Vice Chair)
Martin Batt (Community – Vice Chair)
Brian Butler (NFU)
Hugh Bone (Torridge Parishes Rep)
Chris Preece (Voluntary Sector – NDAS)
Paula Ferris (Coastwise ND)
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (N Devon Council)
Cllr Tony Inch (Devon County Council)
Cllr Andrea Davis (ENPA)
Cllr Ian Crawford (TTEF)
Jonathan Fairhurst (NT)
Paul Green (Community Rep.)
Pete Burgess (DWT)
Lewis Andrews (Community Rep.)
Brett Grosvenor (EA)

Speaker – Mike Symes (DWT)

Apologies

Christine Goodall (NE)
Rob Joules (National Trust)
Rose Day (Community Rep.)
Kate Tobin (FC)
Sean Kearney (TDC)

Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (Manager)
Dave Edgcombe (Projects Officer)
Laura Carolan (Communications Officer)
Sarah Jennings (DCC)
Andrew Austen (NDC)
Chris Willson (TDC)
Mike Day (TDC)

Observers From 10.30am

Richard Berridge (Community)
Claire Moodie (Community)

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies - Chairman Steve Mulberry welcomed Partnership members to the Zoom meeting, including officers Andrew Austen, Jonathan Fairhurst, Chris Willson and Mike Day and reported apologies.

2. Minutes of the last meeting on 20 July 2020 and matters arising. Minutes agreed

Matters arising:

- Briefings on Colchester Declaration and Glover Review sent to local MPs awaiting response
- NDC consultation on PSPO on Dog Control received 3000 responses, report going to committee this month, majority of responses in support of dog controls but many objected to beach and Tarka Trail ban proposals. Asked about likely actions that may be taken AA suggested fines for those not following rules, information boards but awaiting new signage for England Coast Path and agreed cooperation needed between NE, AONB and NDC to avoid proliferation of signs. PF reported on signs placed to protect breeding oystercatchers at Braunton which most people take account of, with at least 3 chicks fledged this year. **Item for next meeting agenda.**
- AONB letter to NDC head of place still not formally responded to. **Action – A Austen.**

3. Governance

- **Community Representatives** – 3 applications had been received for the two vacancies. **MW** proposed accepting all three due to range of skills and knowledge from all of them. **MB**

nominated all three, seconded by **PF and IC**. **Decision:** Rose Roberts, Richard Berridge and Claire Moodie appointed. They may join the meeting after 10.30 as observers.

- **SDF Panel** – no candidates from the floor. **Action** – **EW** to contact new Community representatives.
- **Planning Panel Terms of Reference** – revised version adopted by the Partnership with amendment from **DE** under ‘Scheme of Delegation’, to include statement that the Panel may be consulted where an application is submitted by a member of the Partnership or where a member of the Partnership is involved with an application either commercially or has declared an interest. **(Final version attached)**

4. **AONB Manager’s Report – additional points:**

- Quieter period due to end of main AONB project (Coastal Heritage – final claims this month), and restrictions on public engagement work, but planning has remained busy.
- **Nature’s Tonic** – due to be relaunched this month seeking a contractor to deliver
- **Clovelly Dykes** – this scheduled monument has been removed from the Heritage at Risk register due to the significant conservation work carried out by the volunteers on the Coastal Heritage Project over several task days and a contractor funded through the AONB hosted North Devon MMS funded by Historic England. It is hoped it will receive ongoing management through an environmental stewardship scheme.
- **Devon Monument Management Scheme** – first half of scheme completed with Joe Penfold contracted to support this work, conservation volunteers work now on hold until New Year
- **NAAONB - Environmental Land Management Advocacy project** – **IC and BB** expressed interest in this work
- **Environment Agency Updates - Green-Blue Fish Access to Nature project** with Westcountry Rivers Trust – **BG** recommended alignment of this new EA (WE) funded project and Nature’s Tonic, which will be improving access to angling and a geocache trail linked to green prescribing. **Green Recovery Challenge Fund** – **BG** highlighted DWT ‘Natural Solutions’ bid that includes parts of Hartland (Abbey Streams), upper Torridge catchment and South Devon. **MW** asked about bathing water quality given problems along north coast – **BG** reported on **Natural Flood Management** work (see detailed Environment Agency update at end of minutes)
- **Sustainable Development Fund** – update from **LC** noted, with just £900 remaining to be allocated, prioritising biodiversity projects.
- **Communications Reports** – Landscapes for Life week included the MCS’s Great British Beach Clean with reports of 30% of beaches surveyed having PPE litter, with bottles and cans still the majority of litter found. Team surveyed Welcombe beach. Having completed the AONB Marathon in September to finish our 60th anniversary celebrations, **LC** thanked the volunteers for this event and the safety processes in place. New AONB Instagram account – northdevoncoastaonb – to engage with new audiences. Container spill – fantastic response by volunteers and beach clean organisations (SAS, 2minutebeachclean and PFND). AONB team will support TDC to remove and dispose of any collected items still above tideline next week. Thanks to rangers at NBCP for working with team to deliver Devon Dark Skies walks.

5. Nature Recovery Plan – additional points:

- **PB** reported that Devon LNP's commissioned nature recovery map for the whole county working with DWT and Devon Biodiversity Record Centre, will produce first iteration in March 2021. DWTs 'Conservation Communities' project in Torrridge is piloting community engagement activities for nature recovery. DBRCs data on County Wildlife Sites provides a consistent methodological approach on data which complements protected sites.
- **BB** asked whether the team had sufficient resources to meet this ambitious plan within a tight timetable? **SM** replied that Executive had agreed additional resources to assist this work with LC working additional hours to collate available data and commission work.
- **MB** requested close working with Biosphere who are producing a Nature Manifesto and Plan but no-one from Biosphere at meeting to respond. Team are in touch with BR team.
- **PB** asked who was covering marine areas in North Devon – AONB or Biosphere? **JCW** responded that AONB would cover inter-tidal but not wider marine. **Action – JCW** to raise with BR team.
- **MB** emphasised importance of working with landowners to deliver nature recovery, as they are making decisions that affect biodiversity. This needs to involve the NFU and farmers already working on issues, for example through the Devon GHB project.
- **EW** expressed concern that very challenging to make nature better, it is easier to stop making things worse and therefore concentrate on issues such as planning and land-use.
- **SM** summarised discussion that supported taking forward Plan with proposed approach, taking into account comments and suggestions made at meeting.

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

- **Reporting** – activity table showed **pre-application advice increased by 300%**, this may have beneficial advice if resulting in developments that are more sensitive to the AONB special qualities but is time consuming for team. Trends seen this year include proposals to: extending camping areas and season to adapt to Covid-19 (e.g. requesting full year occupancy – so greater landscape impact), conversion of holiday accommodation to permanent dwellings, modernisation of older dwellings into much larger houses.
- **Planning White Paper** – response submitted by AONB (informed by draft responses from NAAONB and DALC) as considerable concern about how far and whether suggested exemptions and protections of AONBs will be maintained or not. **MW** echoed his concerns with the PWP proposals for the area citing the proposal for 100+ dwellings in the AONB at Morteheo following public consultations. Concern that more proposals may be coming forward before new legislation introduced in case there are further restrictions.
- **Line Removal at Morteheo:** awaiting commencement date
- **SM** expressed thanks to team and Panel members for all their hard work at such a busy time
- **Comments/Questions:** **BB** (requested red highlighting be lightened as too hard to read) and asked if £20 could be added to planning fees to provide more resource for AONB. **AA** replied that fees are set nationally. **HB** said parish councils were very frustrated with planning officers not taking into account the AONB. And the trend for sites that started with a barn or stable, transformed into a holiday cottage and then into a permanent dwelling.

- **IC** gave thanks to team for responding to PWP and asked for update on Yelland development site. **AA** responded that it was being pursued but was a complicated site, with several amendments requiring re-consideration and consultation but likely to progress in 2021.
- **MB** expressed concern that the AONB has no teeth and disgraceful that North Devon Council had not responded to a letter from the AONB chairman for 6 months. **EW** asked if CPRE who are on the Partnership but not in attendance, could provide more support and be more involved with their planning expertise, to help address damaging activity? **PF** suggested maybe the AONB should issue policy statements to the public and press to raise awareness of damaging activities or planning issues.
- **LA** asked about design guides for the area, given issues at Croyde and more training for the local planning officers and councillors. **EW** reported that the Neighbourhood Plan for her community in North Devon had been stalled for four years as they cannot get over the last hurdle. **TI** suggested officers just look at policy and not the full picture of the AONB. For example, the revised submission of the Hartland treehouses was approved despite AONB recommendation of refusal. **DE** suggested design guides are expensive to produce and need to be formally adopted by the local planning authority (the Hartland Design Guide produced by the AONB was never adopted). **IC** suggested the AONB might like to approach the parishes for a small contribution towards cost of doing design guides if this work proceeded.
- **Action – ALL** to contact the Chairman (Steve Mulberry) if they have any suggestions to address these issues.

8. Presentation on Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project and Braunton Facilitation Fund by Mike Symes from Devon Wildlife Trust (slides available from JCW – 9MB)

- The GHB project finishes in January 2021 and the Facilitation Fund at the end of 2021.
- Mike expressed the project team's thanks to Dave and colleagues for their strong input to the project. **MB** stated that there is a commitment in the AONB to continue with the legacy of the project, especially as the GHB is one of the target species for the NR Plan work.

9. Updates from Partners: –

- **North Devon Archaeological Society – Chris Preece:** the report on the two years of work on Clovelly Dykes has been published by the Society and copies still available. They have had a good response from academics particularly to the pottery find which supports other pottery finds indicating a northern coastal trading route during the Iron Age. Carbon 14 dating suggests the site was occupied from late iron age to the middle iron age. The geophysical survey of the inner site indicates four roundhouses which are larger than usual, perhaps indicating higher status settlements, plus a central oblong which could be a Romano-British temple – the first found in the South West. The site was possibly occupied up until 400AD. Looking to the future, the site could benefit from a long term, large scale excavation and research – requiring a major university input. The evidence produced by NDAS through their excavation of the southern section could support scheduling of this part of the site in future.
- **Northam Burrows Coastal Erosion – Chris Willson (TDC):** Following Spring storms this year, minor repairs have been carried out at the slipway end and pebble ridge by golf course, despite some accretion of pebbles the overall trend is for losses. **MW** asked about pollution. Acknowledged there has been leaching from the tip over many years but it is being

monitored. TDC have maintained rock revetments at East and West of the site. TDC/DCC cannot afford to move the tip but there is a national group looking at historic land tips through the LGB Coastal SIG. The Shoreline Management Plan commits to holding the line at this site, hence work to recycle pebbles but coastal processes changed this year and resulted in changed movement of materials around slipway. Actions are constrained by Natural England due to site designations too.

- **Rockham Steps – Sarah Jennings:** Public Rights of Way team at DCC have commissioned a quote to salvage the upper steps and doing a feasibility study on the options for the site. **JF** reported that access is hazardous, particularly difficult to get back up the cliff once climbed down. Others emphasised it is an important beach for both visitors and its heritage. Requested report to next Partnership.

Additional updates sent in after meeting:

- **Northam Burrows Visitor Centre redevelopment – Mike Day:** We have just submitted a response to the comments from the AONB: essentially all the issues will be addressed - Blinds have been added to the skylights; car parking at the centre will be restricted to delivery vehicles, country park work vehicles and a disabled parking bay; the prefabricated modular cafe has ‘brise soleil’ above the glazing to provide shade and reduce glare; the cafe will not be operated late into the evening and shuttering will cover the glazing outside opening hours. We hope to get planning permission and consent to work on common land in December, beginning construction in January. Hope to be up and running next summer.

Devon Wildlife Trust – Pete Burgess

- DWT was successful in our expression of interest for a £750k **Green Recovery Challenge Fund** bid and have submitted a second-round application. Support will enable DWT to build on its 30+ years of award-winning services for farmers and land managers through partnership projects and inspire rural communities to connect with their natural environments. We will target two strategic project areas extending to over 150,000 hectares: the upper Torridge catchment and Hartland Streams, together with the South Devon SAC and its wider greater horseshoe bat connectivity zone.
- **Ancient Woodland Inventory** – DBRC are leading the update of the AWI in partnership with the Woodland Trust, DWT, Natural England and the Devon LNP. In the first phase DBRC have recorded 45,438 hectares of long-established woodland (woodland present on the OS 1st edition County Series map of Devon surveyed in the 1880). As this first filter aims to capture ‘all potential’ candidate sites, this figure will be distilled down by project end. However, to get to that end point, Phases 2 & 3 and ground-truthing surveys will be needed over the next two years, to further filter the sites and create the robust evidence base for the revised AWI.
- **Planning White Paper** - DWT have campaigned alongside our National body ‘The Wildlife Trusts’ against the proposed planning reforms. This has gained a great deal of traction – there has been a groundswell of opposition from communities nationwide. We hope this strength of opinion will have the desired effect in strongly influencing these planned reforms.

Environment Agency / Biosphere – Brett Grosvenor:

- **Barnstaple Flood Alleviation Scheme** - This project is at an early planning stage. We are modelling impacts with climate change and considering the most sustainable options. We are talking to our Flood Risk Management partners including the Local Authority. When we have greater clarity on options, we will consult widely inviting ideas. Carbon capture, biodiversity, and health and wellbeing benefits are also important priorities for the flood risk programme and will maximise outcomes by working in partnership. See CRITTER example below. The Barnstaple project could be delivered from 2024.
- **CRITTER – Co-ordinated response for Intertidal Taw Torridge Estuary restoration** - A partnership project to improve water quality for the shellfish waters and recreational waters in the Taw Torridge, deliver SSSI measures, Water Framework Directive objectives, Shoreline Management Plan objectives and address climate change impacts from sea-level rise on habitats and property. The project will improve the water quality in the Bideford Yeo as a major source of bacterial pollutants into the shellfish waters and create new sites for managed re-alignment to maintain and enhance ecosystem services from the estuary. It will also provide a Green Infrastructure masterplan for investment that is linked to planned development and flood mitigation of Barnstaple and Bideford. The project will work hand in glove with University of Plymouth, Plymouth Marine Aquarium and Swansea University to test methods of establishing intertidal sea grass. This project could start in 2021.
- **Combe Martin and Ilfracombe Flood alleviation Schemes** - These flood alleviation projects are to be designed with multiple benefits such as bacterial load reduction for bathing water improvement and biodiversity gain. Alongside civil engineering in the towns we will work with natural solutions such as tree planting in the catchment. This project will integrate with other Biosphere Woods and the Combe Martin Forest Project. Could Start in 2023.
- **Combe Martin Forest project** - The partnership project will design and deliver tree planting at strategic locations across the River UMBER catchment over a 3-year period to reduce bacterial loading of the designated bathing water and reduce flood risk at Combe Martin. This project is led by North Devon Biosphere Foundation, with contributions from SWW, Natural England and the EA. This project will start in 2020.
- **Biosphere Woods** - This partnership project is helping to rapidly bridge the funding and confidence shortfall among landowners to plant trees strategically to improve water quality in the North Devon catchments, across the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Starts in 2020.

10. **Date of Next Meeting:** **Friday 5th February 2021, 10.00am – 12.30.**