

Blackdown Hills
 Parish Network
 Steering Group

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28th November 2013 at 09.30 am
 Culm Pyne Barton, Hemyock

Present:	Heather Stallard	HS
	Catherine Bass	CB
	Bruce Payne	BP
	Geoffrey Sworder	GS
	Cathy Gardner	CG
	Ken Pearson	KP
Apologies:	Lisa Turner	LT

Item	Minutes	Action
1.	Minutes of the BHPN General Meeting held on November 13 2013 were reviewed and agreed. These to be circulated to all attendees and invitees.	CB
2.	<p>Single item on this agenda was discussion and development of a response to the Draft Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan, open for consultation until Dec 3 2013.</p> <p>Note: As an employee of the AONB Lisa Turner chose not to attend, although indicated her willingness to discuss following this meeting. BP and HS are elected members of the AONB Management Board.</p>	
3.	<p>Response to Consultation Draft:</p> <p>Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014-2019</p> <p>There were two topics in which the BHPN was cited as the sole organisation associated with suggested actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theme 2.3 Transport and Highways: 'Ensure that the area is not unfairly disadvantaged by cutbacks to local authority highways budgets.' <p>The BHPN TTH Action Group had already met to discuss this on November 20th; draft minutes of that meeting were circulated to parishes in order that other potential respondents in the area could make their views known. The minutes were approved, comments on the AONB draft Plan will be conveyed through the online survey portal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theme 2.5 Community and Culture: 'Encouraging a culture of self-help and collaboration among local communities.' <p>The Steering Group decided to convey its views through a commentary rather than using the web portal. It was felt that this would result in somewhat superficial and uncohesive points rather than offering what is intended to be a constructive response to the whole Plan.</p> <p>One small specific point that needs to be rectified is the omission of the definition of BHPN in the glossary.</p> <p>Structure and Layout:</p> <p>The whole document is perceived as formulaic in design with little clear cross referencing of themes and associated responsibilities.</p> <p>Page 5 -13 of Introduction could very usefully be put into an appendix – this is essentially background reading to support the plan; where it is now, it assumes more importance than is needed, putting more time and space between the reader and the actual plan.</p>	KP

The statement of Aims within each topic is really a vision statement, many appear to be unrealistic in view of the current financial climate and the level of engagement of some partners.

Stg Gp would prefer to see a management summary with recommendations clearly associated with lead partners, the proposed actions and a timescale for achieving outcomes together with a monitoring strategy - there are few succinct criteria described by which to measure progress.

A table collating Theme, Objectives/Targets, Partners, Actions, and Anticipated Outcomes could provide a simple, clear and quick focus on the Plan's direction and intent for any reader.

The Implementation and Review section is buried at the back of the document and could be brought forward to sit directly after a management summary

By simplifying the layout, partners and associated organisations will have a clearer understanding of objectives and this can only assist the AONB to maintain a clear focus on agreed outputs.

The theme order could be usefully revised to indicate that focus: if, as is stated on p15 that Communication and Management are the 'core functions of AONB management', then they need to be prioritised as such and moved to Theme 1. The Stg Gp agrees that the Communication and Awareness raising topic is key, associated with clear Partnership and Management guidelines. In raising the priority of this Theme from 3 to 1, and generating a set of guidelines and anticipated outcomes in discussion with relevant partners, then the outcomes for re-ordered Themes 2 Landscape and 3 Sustainable Development, will be more achievable. This will also help to impress on partners / stakeholders what they need to do to achieve their own statutory outputs, and by association, the AONB's.

Content:

In general terms, monitoring criteria need to be applied across the board to as many objectives as possible - which will require a clearer definition of AONB priorities. Much of the text can be thinned out to reduce repetition and vagueness. Partners seem to have a great deal of 'wiggle room' in the current lay out without any direct responsibility for feeding back / monitoring progress and little sense of who should be complying with what particular statutory requirements. This of course may be clarified through the Delivery Plan which we have yet to see.

List suggested actions against monitoring criteria to define activity against a timetable over the course of the five year plan. Tabulate more, measure actions against milestones.

There is no acknowledgement of any threats to the success of the plan, which seems very risky in itself - surely there needs to be acknowledgment of the severe financial constraint under which all of this is being put together and an assessment of the threats that this imposes – it will surely impact more and more on the management of statutory obligations across the board.

Suggestions:

Pull out actions and review with each lead partner, identify and involve sub/additional partners from the specialist working groups/event organisers/ projects/ volunteers

The sheer number of bodies listed as partners is almost unmanageable – perhaps the BHPN could be elevated to a partner organisation and remove individual PCs from the list. This would create a greater focus toward the BHPN for the PCs and also encourage and develop a better communication strategy between PCs, BHPN and AONB.

The schematic which describes the AONB partnership structure (p.58) is unidirectional with no visible feedback mechanisms. Where in the document is the obligation of the

	<p>Partnership and management group members to play their part in actively supporting the outputs for the AONB, and signing up to support measures that may conflict with Planning & Highways for example?</p> <p>There are many notable absentees at meetings of both AONB Management group and other organisations dedicated to supporting the objectives of the AONB team.</p> <p>More accountability must be asked from the partner organisations to validate the project as a whole.</p> <p>Given the statutory obligations of the AONB, and those of the partners in supporting the AONB, the follow-through of not only the AONB but also the partners needs to be demonstrable and transparent through a system of mutual accountability.</p> <p>Is there a way to build in performance measures for the partners, officers and politicians?</p> <p>How does the Management Group relate to the rest of the partnership?</p> <p>In the regular Management group progress meetings, how do the reports relate to the plan, targets etc? In the current financial climate of constraint, need to focus on essential actions and include feedback from all partners to ensure that the partnership itself is fit for purpose – how can the AONB team be expected to function effectively when there is no accountability laid on the partners to perform their function in line with this Management Plan? The AONB team cannot do this on its own, they are more than aware of their statutory responsibilities, the partners need to be reminded in endorsing the Plan they too are responsible in their own decision making to take heed of the status of the AONB and to work together with other partners across boundaries to ensure that the essential characteristics of the area are not eroded.</p> <p>Is there a way to divide the Partnership into interest groups, to identify which parts they are contributing to as lead or subsidiary partners? Nominate leads for each theme/topic, with a suitable group of relevant partners and then encourage a culture of mutually accountable delivery. Perhaps hold progress review meetings by theme, and encourage full attendance by all of that theme's related partners.</p> <p>Suggest that simplifying and reducing the size of the document could ease the problem of quantifying targets and outcomes, use a traffic light system to monitor progress, including lead partners and action leaders.</p> <p>The structure needs to collate the small on-the-ground projects toward the key strategic aims; identifying tactical outcomes can feed into achieving the overall vision.</p>	
4.	<p>Date of next Stg Gp mtg: TBA</p> <p>Meeting closed at 12 noon, HS was thanked for her hospitality.</p>	