

# North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022

In-person at Caddstown, Bideford and online: 10.00 – 12.40

## MINUTES

### Meeting Attendees

Dr Eirene Williams (Chair)  
Paul Green (Community Rep.)  
Helen Smith (Torrige District Council)  
Brian Butler (NFU)  
Lewis Andrews (Community Rep.)  
Martin Batt (Community – Vice Chair)  
John Rous (CLA)  
Jane Young (Community Rep.)  
Andy Bell (North Devon Biosphere)  
Sarah Chappell (TDC Conservation Officer)

### Online Attendees

Claire Moodie (Community Rep.)  
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (North Devon Council)  
Cllr Jeffrey Wilton-Love (Devon CC)  
Paula Ferris (Coastwise ND)  
Rob Joules (National Trust)  
Ian Crawford (TTEF)  
Penny Mills (CPRE)

**(17 voting members)**

### Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (AONB Manager)  
Dave Edgcombe (Projects Officer)  
Joe Newberry (FNF Project Coordinator)  
Kate Hind (Devon CC)

### Apologies

Pete Burgess (DWT)  
Chris Preece (Voluntary Sector – NDAS)  
Christine Goodall (NE)  
Rose Roberts (Community Rep.)  
Hugh Bone (Torrige Parishes Rep.)  
Brett Grosvenor (Environment Agency)  
Dominic Elson (Exmoor NPA)  
Richard Prowse (Tarka Country Trust)  
Mel Austen (Biosphere Partnership)  
Sarah Jennings (DCC)  
Kevin Cook (Community Rep.)  
Laura Carolan (Communications Officer)

- 1. Welcome and apologies - Chair Dr Eirene Williams** welcomed Partnership members to the in-person and Zoom meeting and reported apologies.
- 2. Minutes of the meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and matters arising. Minutes agreed.**  
**Matters arising not on the agenda:**
  - **Management Plan Review** – Partnership had voted to defer the management plan review, and this has been agreed by all three planning authorities. This has been supported by a letter from Defra Minister Lord Benyon in July, suggesting that to meet statutory requirements, a one-page light touch review process be carried out in 2023 to go to the planning authorities and maintain validity of the Management Plan. Natural England will be bringing out new guidance in March 2023 on plan format and new outcomes for AONBs and a full Review will be conducted for 2025.
  - **Website review** - LC will start work on this over the Winter and accommodate a required change in the hosting platform. Please continue to pass any comments on to LC on current website.

### 3. Presentations

- **Braunton Burrows – Dunescapes project**

**Dave Edgcombe**

There are significant management works being carried out on a small area of the southern dunes by the Dunescapes Project (Natural England, Plantlife, LIFE). Since 2014 there has been 36 hectares of scrub clearance and 10 hectares returned to bare sand. This winter 12 hectares of scrapes will be created (planning permission was applied for in August) and nine sand notches along the beach edge which will allow the wind to move sand. It is important to keep in context that Braunton Burrows is 1300 hectares in size. The 12 hectares to be cleared this winter is not largescale and the system is large enough to accommodate this. Scrape works also to be undertaken at Doughnut slack.

#### **Justification for works:**

- Proposals by Professor Ken Pye – leading geomorphologist
- Traditionally approach was to stabilise dunes, now realise we need to destabilise as too static and not enough bare sand for key species
- Lots of rare species rely on bare sand (39 rare species – 32 of which need bare sand)
- Bare sand dropped from 50% to 5% since WW2
- Plantlife ran trials in 2014 – proved to have good results hence the project
- Bare sand quite localised – MOD activity not concentrated or widespread; high areas of visitor use at Flagpole Dune and around Saunton car park have created bare sand areas but not under formal management

**Planning application for Notches** - NE broadly supportive but want more detail, County archaeologist wants a written scheme of investigation due to World War 2 remains and AONB Partnership yet to comment but in principle we support the application. Details of the works are on the planning portal.

#### **Questions**

Q: Is it a continuous process? A: It is funding driven. Braunton Burrows can support a range of different habitats and ages, but it depends on funding. Dunescapes Project finishes in 2023.

Q: What is the cost of the works? A: We don't have that costing information

Q: Will there be a vegetation survey? A: Yes there will be

Q: If it scrubs up so quickly isn't that against nature and the latest thinking? A: Braunton Burrows is floristically one of the most diverse sand dunes in the country – with a mosaic of habitats supporting the diversity of specialist species. If left to scrub up it will become a homogenous habitat and we will lose the rare species dependant on bare sand.

Q: Will cattle grazing help? A: To some extent, however it is a huge site and is quite challenging. Cattle also have a taste for some of the rare plants. There could be an opportunity to roll out the GPS cattle grazing collars to Braunton Burrows.

Q: Will public access get better due to the work being done? A: Yes to some extent. The FiPL funded project to assist with access to the Burrows by replacing the ladder style access points with kissing gates to key routes will help more visitors to explore.

Q: Will there be communication to the public about what is going on? Local people aren't being included and need to know why it is happening. A: As part of the project, it is doing ongoing public engagement on the Burrows. **RJ:** In early days the plan was capital works at Braunton and engagement at Woolacombe. The project ends in March 2023.

- **Pill Box Restoration by Friends of the Assault Training Centre with an SDF grant**

Two pill boxes have been exposed and restored, both near Saunton Sands hotel. They are dummy pill boxes used by American forces to train for D-Day. New interpretation has been erected, in the same style to complement other interpretation boards.

- **Finding Nature's Footprints – introducing Project Coordinator Joe Newberry**

Reminder of the 4 core areas of work: Connecting people with nature, Filling gaps in communities' knowledge, Survey and map local wildlife, Actions for nature. Connecting people with nature has already started. Red Herring (a local outdoor-theatre company) have been working with East-the-Water primary school on Northam Burrows to create images, poetry and soundscapes (a short extract played to meeting). It was presented in Northam Burrows visitor centre over the summer. Further work with schools planned next year. Project partner the National Trust is working on meadow restoration and are currently harvesting and seeding donor sites with plans to involve the public in a range of supporting activities. The team are recruiting a one-year paid internship.

### Questions

Q: Have you thought of contacting WINGS? - will get contact

Q: What is the Plan for schools – primary/secondary. A: Target end of secondary school years

**CM** reported on PFND's work with secondary schools in Ilfracombe, Braunton and Pilton on pathways into careers and potential joint working with the project. **EW** mentioned role of Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management to support environmental careers.

**Actions:** **JN** to convene wildlife recorders and monitors from across the area, with possible Biodiversity Symposium in New Year and meet with PFND.

- **North Devon Biosphere update**

**Andy Bell**

**CRITTER – Coastal re-alignment in the Taw Torridge Estuary.** WEIF funding for next 6 years. Modelling change - salt marsh and freshwater marsh creation and loss, plus erosion at estuary mouth. Follow on work to reduce faecal organisms in shellfish beds in estuary – working with farms around the estuary on water quality issues.

**Community Recovery Fund** - £1.4m in 2022 for ten blue/green projects. Those in the AONB include:

- Natural Capital Investment Fund – testing potential to change land-use to benefit nature and ecosystem services using private finance and Net Gain.
- Natural Capital Marketplace - [Natural Capital Marketplace - Home](#) – 100 farms signed up and projects coming forward for investment and revenue
- Smart Biosphere – trials using soil and water sensors in the Umber catchment in Combe Martin, to monitor water flow and quality and ultimately warn of pollution or flood events, plus natural flood management work funded by the Environment Agency and work with South West Water to reduce faecal indicator organisms affecting the bathing beach. Supported by Siemens and next part will focus on similar approach in estuary tidal area
- Green prescriptions – working with NHS in Combe Martin/Braunton and Barnstaple to create 100 outdoor opportunities working with local partners (and second project with the DWP providing soft skills to get people into employment or employment ready).
- Schools engagement and opportunities with Plastic Free North Devon
- Carbon in soils – work with Rothamsted Research (North Wyke) working across 25 areas using a colour scanning technique to give farms advice to improve soil carbon and speed up the assessment process

- **Action: AB** requested to share reports on these programmes and projects when completed, and to share more information with the public on the work being done by the Biosphere.

**EW** thanked all the speakers for their interesting presentations.

#### 4. AONB Manager's Report – additional points:

- a) New reporting format using table from Annual Business Plan – agreed this was useful
- b) Highlighted points – carbon evidence and mapping forthcoming for whole AONB; accord with Historic England and NAAONB delayed due to national mourning period.
- c) **Memorandum of Understanding** between National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) and Arts Council England – signed last week by Sir Nicholas Serota and Philip Hygate to strengthen link between arts, culture and landscape, encourage collaboration and encourage AONBs to work with the arts and access ACE funding. North Devon and Torridge are part of the ACE Priority Places approach – they have funded an area strategy:
- d) **'Flourishing Culture - Cultural Strategy for North Devon and Torridge'** being launched on 4 October - AONB team provided input and consultations with public and artists, and showed the importance of the natural environment and heritage for cultural inspiration; see <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/culture-strategy>
- e) **NAAONBs national conference** Lancaster on theme of 'engagement' – it occurred during the national week of mourning therefore all the main speakers from government and NGOs were unable to attend - a key message was for AONBs to do more engagement and diversify audience – targeting young people and diversity groups. (ND AONB has commissioned new photographs of the AONB to reflect a wider audience in publications and website and important element of the new Finding Nature's Footprints project). Interesting field visit to Solway Coast AONB to see conservation grazing, flat peat bog in restoration, Natterjack Toad species enhancement and meet farmers working with NGOs and NE for nature recovery. Take-away from networking is that all AONBs seen a significant rise in planning pressures and work that is ignored by Defra and NAAONB; the sheer multiplicity of topics AONBs are now working on which is very hard for the small AONB teams like ours; and new partnership working being developed to address and deliver new priorities in relation to people engagement, nature recovery, climate emergency and agricultural transition.
- f) **National Parks UK Conference** – September held on Exmoor and the three neighbouring AONB managers were invited. Theme – 'What does the nation need from National Parks?' Helpful to hear from national speakers but conference rather overshadowed by breaking news of government plans to reduce environmental burdens, review the ELM scheme, deregulate planning laws etc. Key conclusions on the theme were: lead and represent rural communities, power to convene, understand and take action, collaborate wider, innovate and better support career development in the sector.
- g) **Sustainable Development Fund** – 5 projects funded with £13k from £21k pot, four in pipeline for October panel. Full list to January meeting.
- h) **Communications Report** – LC and team have continued to raise social media following and website views although seasonal fluctuations; higher level of direct engagement with summer shows and activities; press coverage related to National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.

**BREAK**

#### 5. Landscape Report and Planning Update

- AONB Planning Report noted. In summary the trend is for large scale housing on borders of AONB, and small scale in AONB. Applications for modest residences to be converted to large residences and conversion of modern agricultural buildings to residence. Designs include

more glazing and less brick which increases lighting, as well as taking agricultural buildings out of use.

- Landscape report noted. Power line removals stalled – Morteheo stuck in legal issues at present and Chapel Hill not likely to be resolved this financial year which will mean we have to resubmit a bid for funds.

## 6. Farming in Protected Landscapes

- **Report noted.** FiPL panel on 18<sup>th</sup> October to allocate the remainder of funding. There is still a North Devon bias to applications and none received from the Hartland peninsula, however DWT have the North Devon Natural Solutions project working in the Abbey stream and Bursdon Moor areas and some enquiries were referred to them as they have small grants and project capacity.
- **Selaine Saxby MP** for North Devon visited the AONB on 26 September to learn about the FiPL programme, seeing the GPS cattle grazing collars at Morte Point and the habitat management work being carried out on the clifftops and coast.

## 7. Updates from Partners: –

- **Braunton Countryside Centre – MB** reported a successful bid to the NL Heritage Fund for £160k over two years for project co-ordinator to develop nature-based events in Braunton parish, new interpretation, better online presence, develop commercial elements including a café, engage with disadvantaged local people and ensure knowledge transfer to a younger generation. To ensure liaison with the new AONB project, Joe Newberry will join the steering group.
- **Devon County Council – KH** reported that following a financial review the County would be restricting spend, including staff travel to meetings if can be done online unless attendance in person essential, which might impact on next Partnership meeting. Work on the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy started with appointment of Robert Deane from Rural Focus and communications by Bella Birch-Hurst. The Local Nature Partnership is carrying out a review of the Naturally Healthy Forum and may bid for funding to deliver directly. The [Devon Carbon Plan – Quick Reads – Devon Climate Emergency](#) has been published and includes parish level data.
- **National Trust – RJ** hoped the Partnership members could take their postponed visit from today in May next year to see the Meadow Restoration work in progress.
- **Plastic Free North Devon – CM** explained the intention to deliver more work with schools and seeking to recruit an education officer shortly, funds allowing. This would include sustainability audits of schools working with the AONB, Biosphere and Energy 361.
- **Taw Torridge Estuary Forum – IC** reported that the Forum would meet in late 2022 with Ian taking on secretariat duties and Tony retaining the Chair.
- **Coastwise North Devon – PF** reported that a recently held night-time rockpool ramble had been well attended and resulted in 50 applications to join the group. **Action: PF** to liaise with **LC** to obtain support and training through the new Lottery project.

## 9. Date of Next Meeting - Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023, 10-12.30 (location TBC and online)