

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Wednesday 24th January 2024
At Braunton Countryside Centre and online from 10am

MINUTES

Meeting Attendees

Dr Eirene Williams (Chair)
Richard Prowse (Vice-Chair)
Paul Green (Community Rep.)
Lewis Andrews (Community Rep.)
Cllr Steve Harding (Torridge District Council)
Dominic Elson (Exmoor NPA)
Rose Roberts (Community Rep.)
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (North Devon Council)
Tom Humphreys (Tourism/Community Rep.)
Liesje Birchenough (Coastwise ND)
Jonathan Fairhurst (National Trust)
Kevin Cook (Community Rep – WSR)
Kate Hind (Devon CC)
Ian Crawford (TTEF)
Jane Young (Community Rep.)

(15 voting members)

Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (NL Manager)
Laura Carolan (Communications Officer)
Joe Newberry (NL Officer)
Evie Giblett (FNF Assistant)

Apologies

Pete Burgess (DWT)
Christine Goodall (NE)
Mel Austen (Biosphere Partnership)
Rob Joules (National Trust)
Claire Moodie (Community Rep.)
Chris Preece (Voluntary Sector – NDAS)
John Rous (CLA)
Brian Butler (NFU)

Guest Speakers

Andrew Woollacott (Savills/Christie Estates)
Rupert Hawley (Plantlife)
Jess Giblett (Braunton C. Centre)

- 1. Welcome and apologies - Chair Dr Eirene Williams** welcomed Partnership members to the hybrid meeting including new member Liesje Birchenough from Coastwise North Devon and Evie Giblett as the FNF Project Assistant. Plus the guest speakers.
- 2. Minutes of the meeting on 29th September 2023 and matters arising.** Minutes agreed as accurate with addition of Kevin Cook in attendance.
Matters arising not on the agenda:
 - JCW thanked members who had provided feedback on the website, do keep checking it.
 - Action to share monitoring of Riverlands data is a long-term commitment.
- 3. Presentations**
 - A. Christie Estates Update – Andrew Woollacott** – 3500 acres within the designated AONB which brings constraints and opportunities. Estate has renewed the Countryside Stewardship agreement from January 2023 providing revenue funding for scrub and bramble management to protect flora and fauna, plus use of grazing cattle across the three fenced zones. There is no funding for Access costs apart from official rights of way, but new England Coast Path will bring some changes, and plan to provide bike racks at key points. The area remains primarily one of permissive access only. Potential consultation on use of GPS no-fence cattle collars to manage more customised grazing of key sites, and support

better husbandry of the cattle as their locations will be known. Plans to support more eco-tourism in the area using redundant buildings. Ongoing issues with coastal erosion and need to inform the public. White Cross offshore windfarm – estate opposes the proposed route in part due to commercial impact. Audit of signage on the Burrows identified 86 signs which are being rationalised down to just 30 with more consistent messaging. The AONB FiPL programme has contributed to this cost alongside installation of kissing gates replacing some of the ladder stiles.

- B. **Dynamic Dunescapes at Braunton Burrows – Rupert Hawley** – 54 ha of scrub cleared, and 80 ha of unexploded ordinance surveys completed with this programme funded by the EU’s LIFE programme and National Lottery Heritage Fund. 23 ha of bare successional sand has been created to encourage successional habitat for dune plants and species. 6 notches in the foreshore assist in moving sand but already grassing up so working with MOD to keep clear. They have also created a new 2m high sand dune on the seaward side which was not anticipated. Issues include the lowering of the water table this year and consequent strength of bramble growth on cleared sites; issues of air quality affecting the vegetation – higher nitrogen encouraging plant growth so air monitors in place with first results due in 6 months; lack of rabbits due to recent disease outbreaks – in consequence bare sand has changed from 60% pre-war to just 3% now. Awaiting latest Natural England monitoring report in June 2023 to show the 10-year trends.

EW thanked Andrew and Rupert for their presentations as they left the meeting.

- C. **Braunton Countryside Centre - Jess Giblett** presented the Centre and the 2-year National Lottery funded project Connect 2 Nature investing in the centre, providing staff and activities to reach a wider audience and income generating opportunities, including a new Field Studies Council sheet about Braunton Burrows.

4. AONB Manager’s Report – additional points:

- a) **Joe Newberry** in new role as NL Officer – main focus on nature recovery, climate and land management (including FiPL) and overseeing Finding Nature’s Footprints project.
- b) **Landscape**
- New Landscape Character Areas can be seen on following link <https://maps.torridge.gov.uk/wm9/Map.aspx?MapName=PlanningPolicy>;
 - Power line removal – Morteheo Phase 2, Pickwell scheme and Shaftsborough Farm, Lee due to complete this Spring; additional funding still available and members invited to propose other sites. Bucks Mills had been mentioned as a possibility but complexities with multiple landowners. Hartland Quay was suggested. **Action: JCW** to follow up on this liaising with **SH**.
- c) **Biodiversity**
- Nature Recovery Plan - 2-year monitoring reports coming out from the 5 working groups. See: [Nature Recovery Plan \(northdevonbiosphere.org.uk\)](https://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk)
 - Finding Nature’s Footprints – delighted to announce that Jamie Buxton-Gould currently working on Westcountry Buzz with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, will take on the role of Coordinator from mid-March with JN providing coverage until then.

- 30by30 – Defra has issued a map showing actual contribution from SSSI and potential contribution to targets from all protected landscapes including AONBs and National Parks. See [Delivering 30by30 on land in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/delivering-30-by-30-on-land-in-england)

d) Heritage

- Historic Building Restoration Grant provided through the FiPL framework and application process with £5m available in a national pot to spend in 2024-25 primarily on historic farmsteads. First EOI bid from North Devon submitted successfully to national panel for East Titchberry Malthouse owned by the National Trust, now completing their full bid. Two others in pipeline. Limited promotion due to time constraints, mainly to eligible historic farmstead building owners. Thanks were given for advice from the two District Council's Conservation Officers on heritage scoring.
- **DE** mentioned experiences at Exmoor NP with the new grant programme and some of the challenges in terms of the Panel's knowledge, concern that people may use scheme to fund future holiday accommodation or to gain the planning system. **MW** asked if it could be used for converting barns to holiday accommodation, but this is not a priority so scores less and would get less grant rate. Up to Panel to decide.

e) Environmental Quality

- An update on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act legislation (LURA) will be provided to members as soon as statutory instruments developed, to better understand the impact of 'seek to further the purpose' of protected landscapes and which relevant authorities it applies to.

f) Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)

- 2 further projects approved at Local Assessment Panel in January taking up nearly all the remaining funding for this financial year. Thank you to Panel members and contractors for ongoing progress and success of the programme. **DE** asked if interest in 'sharing' FiPL Panel members to exchange knowledge and experience. **Action: JCW** to raise with Panel.

g) Management Plan Review

- Awaiting new Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes due out this month – ([Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-landscapes-targets-and-outcomes-framework) published on 31 January).

h) Communications

- Rebrand has been applied to everything except where need to use AONB to refer to legally designated geography. Final elements of the website being completed and branded clothing and equipment ordered.
- E-News has not been sent out due to changes within DCC stopping use of external mailing systems for security purposes. Awaiting new options.

i) Planning

- Correction – wrong table submitted in Report, see updated version below:

North Devon Cost AONB Planning Statistics At 16 Jan 2024 compared to 18 Jan 2023			
Type	North Devon	Torrige	Total
No. Applications submitted	178 (down 53)	45 (down 14)	223 (down 67)
No. Comments submitted	36 (down 7)	18 (same)	54 (down 7)
No. Decisions against our advice	2	3	5
Good Outcomes in line with our advice	14	4	18
Pre-Application Requests	37	5	42
Pre-Application advice given	10 (down 11)	3 (down 1)	13 (down 12)
Appeals Submissions	3 (down 3)	2 (down 2)	5 (down 5)

- Trends – reduction in number of applications submitted in the AONB and we comment on about a quarter compared to just a fifth in the last few years. Good outcomes following our advice continue to increase with only occasional disappointments. There has been an ongoing decline in the number of pre-applications submitted but we continue to comment on about a third. Fewer appeals so far this year.
- Changes – **JCW** is coordinating planning responses with input from two planning contractors, and of necessity there has been a more targeted approach due to reduced capacity following Dave Edgcombe’s departure and delays to appointing a shared AONB planning officer. The 5-year housing land supply has stopped some of the proposed housing units outside development areas. Planning officers have continued to be helpful in providing ongoing referrals.
- **JY** mentioned the 5 houses at Langsfield, Croyde where an Appeal was refused under Paragraph 11d of National Planning Policy Framework and **LA** mentioned recent refusal on AONB grounds of small boatshed.
- **Action: Agreed for team and contractors** to carry out more training with planning officers, particularly with Torrige due to staff changes.

j) Sustainable Development Fund

- **LC** presented a comparative picture over the previous five years to show the type and range of projects funded, the leverage of funding into the AONB with every £1 in grant leveraging a further £4 in match funding or time donated. **DE** suggested referring some applications into FiPL. **JCW** reported that following a discussion at Executive it was decided to retain the SDF grant scheme because of the benefits of the grants in terms of engagement, delivering Management Plan priorities and funding leverage.
- **ACTION: All - New Panel members required** – see attached Terms of Reference and Flyer – contact **LC** if interested.

5. Finding Nature’s Footprints Interim Evaluation – **Evie Giblett** presented the content and recommendations of the report and highlighted the planned actions to address the recommendations.

6. Draft Business Plan – this was presented by **JCW** and approved by the members.

7. Management Plan Delivery - Updates from Partners:

- **Devon County Council Environment Team** – KH reported that the Manager of the Environment team Peter Chamberlain would be leaving DCC in late March and there would be a team restructure.
- **World Surf Reserve** – KC reported the WSR had obtained funds to support testing for water quality at Combesgate working with citizen science volunteers and National Trust
- **Exmoor National Park** – DE reported on the success of Landscape Recovery bids for the Heart of Exmoor and for Tattiscombe near Arlington, including areas along the coast. Increasing issue on Exmoor with pressures from dog walkers – focus of Forum meeting.
- **Northam Burrows Country Park** – RR reported plan to purchase a tractor for habitat management on the Burrows, particularly the SSSI and other TDC sites. Taking school groups to salt marshes to learn more about them.
- **Taw Torridge Estuary Forum** – IC reported on presentation from Westcountry Rivers Trust on their water quality monitoring work; plan to fund signage on estuary to raise awareness of roosting birds; relaunch of TTEF website; new members joined – Freshsprings and Maritime Heritage Trust; plan to engage with young people to raise ecological awareness.
Action: JN to contact IC.
- **Plastic Free North Devon 30-1-24** (attached document sent by email)

8. Any Other Business

- **EW** reported disappointment at slow progress on recruiting a new manager to replace JCW due to recruitment freeze at Devon County Council. **Action: Agreed the Partnership Chair EW to contact the DCC councillor representative on the Partnership for advice on progressing the situation due to ongoing uncertainty for the team and Partnership.**
- **RP** proposed recording the thanks of the Partnership to Jenny Carey-Wood as this would be her last Partnership meeting. She had brought a professional, organised and partnership approach to the role which had raised the credibility and reputation of the AONB across the area and would be missed. Jenny thanked the partners for their support and actions to benefit the area.

9. Date of Next Meeting - WEDNESDAY 15th May 2024, 10-12.30