

North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty PARTNERSHIP

Friday 8th October 2021

In-person at Caddsdwn, Bideford and online: 10.00 - 12.40

MINUTES

Meeting Attendees

Steve Mulberry (Chair)
Dr Eirene Williams (Community – Vice Chair)
Martin Batt (Community – Vice Chair)
Paul Green (Community Rep.)
Hugh Bone (Torrige Parishes Rep)
Brian Butler (NFU)
Richard Prowse (Tarka Country Trust)
Cllr Malcolm Wilkinson (N Devon Council)

Online Attendees

Dominic Elson (ENPA) {DEI}
Rob Joules (National Trust)
Pete Burgess (DWT)
Claire Moodie (Community Rep.)
Andy Bell (ND Biosphere)
Ian Crawford (TTEF)
Penny Mills (CPRE)
Brett Grosvenor (EA)
Kirstie Pritchard (DCC)
(17 voting members)

Officers

Jenny Carey-Wood (AONB Manager)
Dave Edgcombe (Projects Officer) {DE}
Laura Carolan (Communications Officer)

Apologies

Chris Preece (Voluntary Sector – NDAS)
John Rous (CLA)
Lewis Andrews (Community Rep.)
Rose Roberts (Community Rep.)
Richard Berridge (Community Rep.)
Shaun Harrington (Torrige District Council)
Charlotte Russell (Historic England)
Christine Goodall (NE)
Mel Austen (Biosphere Partnership)
Paula Ferris (Coastwise ND)
Sarah Jennings (DCC)
Andrew Austen (NDC)

Guests

Justin Seedhouse (Nat Trust)
Mike Day (NBCP/TDC)
Jane Young
Kevin Cook

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

- **Chair Steve Mulberry** welcomed Partnership members to the in-person and Zoom meeting, including guests Jane Young and Kevin Cook attending as observers. **JCW** reported apologies.
- Steve reflected on his time with the Partnership having joined in 2004, he was Vice-Chair for four years and has done four years as Chair, having worked mostly in North Devon for 40 years. He enjoyed his time on the Partnership and credited the quality of the website, projects, the team and the vice-chairs. On a less positive note he was disappointed that the requested extension to the AONB had not been progressed nor the production of a Design Guide despite challenges with planning in North Devon, particularly around Croyde. The undergrounding of powerlines had made a considerable difference to the landscape quality but pandemic constraints in the last 18 months had curtailed AONB activity. Several challenges remain for the Partnership, firstly the anticipated response to the Glover Review with possible changes to governance, resources and name, and secondly balancing beauty and wildlife around the beaches with ongoing traffic congestion and large numbers of visitors. A final success was the refresh of the Partnership to bring new skills and knowledge.

2. Minutes of the last meeting on 25th June 2021 and matters arising. Minutes agreed.

Matters arising not on the agenda:

- **Rockham Steps** – new PROW manager at DCC is Richard Walton and awaiting comments from him. **MW** requested sharing of scoping report with parish, **Action: KP**.
- **Saving Devon's Treescapes** – DWT still welcoming reporting of notable trees through simple form on website.

3. Governance

- **Election of new Community Representatives** – 2 candidates standing. Steve Mulberry proposed and Richard Prowse seconded the nominations of Jane Young and Kevin Cook. This was unanimously supported by those present and online.
- **Community Representatives stepping down** – Rose Day, Mike Kelly, James Szymankievich and after today Steve Mulberry – leaving four vacancies. Steve thanked all of them for their time and contributions to the work of the Partnership. Method of recruiting further representatives was raised, and JCW reported that people were usually proposed or approached to bring key skills and knowledge to the Partnership and not generally advertised.
- **Election of Partnership Chair** – 1 nomination received for Eirene Williams, proposed by Steve Mulberry and seconded by Martin Batt. This was unanimously supported by those present and online. **EW** thanked the Partnership, agreed to take up the two-year term and started chairing the meeting.
- **Thanks to outgoing Chair Steve Mulberry** – were expressed by **EW and DE**, with a gift presentation from the Partnership in recognition of Steve's longstanding, varied and important contributions to the work of the Partnership.

4. AONB Manager's Report – additional points:

- a) **Team Update** - **JCW** brought to the Partnership's attention the fact that the full team has been very involved with setting up and delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and this has had some consequences for other work, especially a delay to developing and submitting the NLHF project. In addition, **LC** has been offered a secondment to Natural England that started in mid-September but continues to provide 1 day a week to the AONB, and we are still to backfill the rest of her role.
- b) **Presentation on National Lottery Heritage Fund project in development – Finding Nature's Footprints**
 - **PB** asked if DBRC would be a partner on the project to ensure new survey data retained for future use? **JCW** replied that they would be, alongside other partners to be confirmed.
 - **IC** highlighted opportunity to link with National Trust, and potential of their volunteers
 - **Mike Day** reported that NBCP are delivering practical work and surveys twice a month with volunteers
 - **AB** clarified that the Biosphere were planning a Lottery bid more focussed on marine and inland areas to deliver the Nature Recovery Plan, but this project could also be complemented by the forthcoming CRITTER project focussed on the estuary.
 - General support to continue with the bid

- c) **Sustainable Development Fund** – small amount of funding remaining, please publicise. **BB** noted limited projects in Torrridge side and requested more promotion there.
- d) **Communications Reports** – **LC** advised partners to check Junk/Spam folders for the AONB’s E-news as with revised format this is now happening to some recipients. The difference between our audiences on Facebook and Instagram is very clear with older people on former and younger audience on latter.
 - **NAAONB - National Conference hosted online by Devon** – 173 people attended the Nature and Climate focussed event with keynote presentations from the Met Office, Natural England and Clinton Devon Estates. The virtual fieldtrips to the five AONBs were successful with 52 attending the North Devon one showcasing work on heritage and arts engagement. Good feedback received but a strong desire for an in-person event next time.

5. **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** – presentation by **DE (slides attached)**

- **DEI** reported he lives on boundary of AONB and Exmoor and is on the FiPL Panel for Exmoor. Appreciated the pro-active approach of the AONB with the practical and informative farm reports. Suggested we liaise with Alex Raeder at ENPA. Supported projects using the GPS collars for conservation grazing. **JCW** advised of possible animal welfare concerns from Defra to GPS collar projects.
- **MB** welcomed the opportunity the programme provides to support farmers in this period of transition. **HB** asked if programme publicised to parish councils and **JCW** reported that flyers had gone to partner agencies and councils.
- **DEI** welcomed the potential to support Nature Recovery Plans but most early bidders to Exmoor were from agents for larger farms rather than reaching smaller farms. Important to get message out widely and build relationships to encourage bids for Years 2&3.

6. **Landscape Report and Planning Update**

- Report noted. **DE** added that ongoing pressure in North Devon and particularly in Croyde, with in some cases priority being given to economic recovery rather than landscape conservation. Use of sustainable development arguments to over-ride local policy but in fact NPPF prioritises designation protections (AONB, National Park and SSSI) above local housing supply. **Action: Team** to brief planning teams.

7. **Tourism Pressures and Changes – 2020 and 2021 seasons**

- **National Trust** – **JS** reported that after constraints in 2020 (furloughed staff, redundancies, financial impact, limited practical work) this season had performed on a par or better commercially alongside resumption of practical work despite recruitment challenges. Seen visitor numbers up, longer season, full capacity and more pop-up activity but less anti-social behaviour although some footpath repairs still outstanding with higher footfalls. The Trust has had excellent volunteers again this year, built better working relationships with parish councils and seen new visitors to their sites. The areas within the AONB continue to be much busier than NT areas out the AONB. Despite lots more use of paths and sites by local people in the lockdowns, this has not been sustained. **DE** suspected this was because local people avoid tourist areas to avoid potential contact with Covid.

- **Clovelly Estates (John Rous sent in the following notes)** – Like many West Country tourism business, Clovelly has experienced famine (end March – July 2020) feast (July 4th – October 2020) famine (November 2020, and January-March 2021), and then a further mini feast as the Lockdown ended after Easter 2021. The lockdowns in 2020 were so severe that visitor numbers were not made up in the post lockdown period and were significantly lower than 2019. Nonetheless the Chancellor did offer significant financial support to the hospitality industry, and we are grateful for that and realise it will need to be repaid with interest! Opportunities - We have observed there seemed to be a much greater interest in enjoying the countryside – typically walking the SW Coast Path, or internal bridlepaths (such as Brownsham to Clovelly via Court Farm). Also, the Clovelly Court gardens have been enjoyed by significantly more visitors than in previous years; perhaps because the lockdown had prompted greater horticultural activity. The AONB Partnership could perhaps capitalise on this interest in our beautiful countryside. Visitor Mix - We have felt that the restrictions on overseas travel have meant more families have spent their main holidays in the UK and have discovered the beauty of their own backyard. We feel this is an opportunity to capitalise on this sector of the market and encourage more Staycations.
- **Northam Burrows Country Park – Mike Day, lead-ranger:** given challenges and experiences in 2020, lots of preparations made in 2021 to receive visitors but Easter was relatively quiet but the full season has been busy with twice the number of visitors through the gates compared to 2019 – so the biggest season ever. Minimal anti-social behaviour once the pubs re-opened. Over the May bank holiday vehicle entry had to be restricted due to high numbers and heavy rain causing high water at Sandymere reducing parking area. New visitor centre completed and opened on 1st July with around 100 visitors a day. Café has been successful and increased use of activity space by schools and local groups (PFND, Appledore Book Festival). Activities restarted such as walks, talks, beach events with high numbers of participants. Creating new trails to guide visitors away from sensitive nature sites and conflict with other users (golfers), building small bridges over streams etc. Thanks to all partners for support and input to changes.
- **Nature Tourism Officer - Phoebe Russell** appointed by Torridge District Council is working with local businesses to understand and use the natural capital assets in Torridge to boost their businesses. She is producing a baseline study, developing a sustainable tourism toolkit and running workshops. Contact her at Phoebe.Russell@torridge.gov.uk. **BB** welcomed TDCs recruitment of the new officer. **DE** asked about relationships between different user groups (visitors, golfers, graziers) as historically there had been difficulties? **MD** replied that he had built good working relationships over the last few years, with good cooperation from golf course to support new trails. **KC** asked about erosion around the waste tip. **MD** replied that there had been tidal breaches near the southern end of the go-kart track with some repairs carried out.
- **Health of Coastal Communities – MW** reported on Local Government Association work with Professor Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer very relevant as some areas in North Devon and Torridge have very poor health indicators.
- **Government Consultation** on impact of jet skis on nature and people, **MW** raised this as it is an increasing issue across the area [Strengthening enforcement of the dangerous use of recreational and personal watercraft - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-enforcement-of-the-dangerous-use-of-recreational-and-personal-watercraft) (deadline 1 November).

Action: JCW to check if the Biosphere team are responding following their work locally with marine code, tourism boats and other users.

8. Updates from Partners: –

- **Tarka Country Trust – RP** shared information on the Community Biodiversity Awards now available from the Trust, with awards of £500 or £1,000 and mentoring support for wildlife projects focussed on localised biodiversity, restoring primroses and loss of ash trees. Deadline is 30 November 2021 see details at [Biodiversity Awards - Tarka Country Trust](#)
- **Devon Wildlife Trust – PB** advised that the first iteration of a **Devon Nature Recovery Plan** was due to be completed for November. The Wildlife Trust through Mark Elliot’s work are providing advice to support responses to government [Consultation on approach to beaver reintroduction and management in England - Defra - Citizen Space](#) (deadline 17 November), there are also webinar Q&As.
- **Exmoor National Park – DEI** reported he is a climate change ambassador for ENPA and with reference to issues around the Design Guide, could be some useful learning/resources as ENPA commissioned updating work from Mike Kelly to cover retrofits, renewables and design challenges.
- **Devon Local Nature Partnership – KP** reminded members of Saving Devon’s Treescapes Project and the Devon Dark Skies week 22-30 October to share events for website.
- **National Trust/Rivers Trust/Woodland Trust – Riverscapes Project - RJ** presented slides on this Defra funded national ‘Woodlands for Water’ project running until 2030 to create a Riparian Nature Recovery Network through wildlife and woodland buffer areas for 6 catchments in England, including the Taw/Torridge through an advice officer (hosted by NT and recruiting now) working with landowners and farmers to access available grants. N.B. Coastal streams in AONB not included.
- **BG** reported that this approach is the basis of the Biosphere/EA’s ‘**Woods4Water**’ project (in North Devon, East Devon and Camel Estuary) with Phase 1 producing heat mapping of water quality and flood risk, and Phase 2 focussed on advice and grant support working with a range of partners to address local issues identified. (Note: This work has covered the UMBER catchment around Combe Martin in the AONB).
- **CPRE – PM** detailed key areas of work currently are environmental impact of solar farms, provision of affordable housing, focus on Yelland developments, working with a Devon landscape artist and art competition.
- **PFND – CM** said **Ocean Explorers** work has been successfully used inland and on coast to engage over 3000 people with marine nature using virtual reality film of Lundy seals (2 further films in final edits). Beach cleans ongoing, working with **NDC litter strategy** and events. Another successful **Visitor Campaign** with over 150 business members sharing information and messaging on nature, conservation and behaviour.

9. Date of Next Meeting - Friday 28 January 2022, 10-12.30 (format TBC)