

Item 5 – Review of AONB Family communications and a strategy to strengthen them

Report to: The National Association for AONBs' Board of Trustees

Subject: Review of AONB Family Communications and a strategy to strengthen them

Date: 14th March 2017

Report by: Jill Smith

Purpose: To align the strategic direction of AONB Family (including NAAONB) communications for the duration of the NAAONB Strategic Plan 2016-2020

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that The Board note the background to this paper

Considers the Communications Strategy set out as Appendix 1 to this paper.

Gives a mandate to the Communications Sub Group to work up a Toolkit and Action Plan to achieve the aspirations of the Strategy.

Background

In May 2014, as a result of the Future Landscapes Lead Officer work, a Communications ALS (Action Learning Set) made up of Lead Officers with a particular interest in communications, produced a [Communications Strategy](#) for the NAAONB. As part of the Strategy, core messages were created to promote the value of i. AONBs, ii. AONB partnerships¹, and iii. the NAAONB and an overview of proposed audiences was detailed.

The Strategy gave its objectives as

1. Commitment to collaborate and communicate as an AONB Family

Goal

Adoption of this Communications Strategy and the AONB Family brand

2. Understanding and support for what the AONB Family does

Goals

- i) Use of AONB Family core messages across the AONB Family through being used in AONB Management Plans / Annual Reviews / notes to editors, etc.
- ii) Key national partners, especially those that signed Accords, formally recognise AONB Family work

3. Understanding and recognition of the value of AONB partnerships leading to continued support and resourcing

Goals

- i) Use of AONB partnership core messages by AONB partnerships and their individual partners
- ii) AONB partnerships continue to receive appropriate support and resourcing from partners

¹ Generic term used for AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards in the Strategy.

4. Understanding and recognition of the value of the NAAONB leading to continued support and resourcing

Goals

- i) Use of NAAONB core messages by partners and members
- ii) NAAONB continue to receive appropriate support and resourcing

The NAAONB Communications Manager designed an Action Plan based on the Business Plan communications tasks, and led on taking the Strategy forward, facilitating the work required.

In May 2015, as a result of an NAAONB audit on AONB Family engagement with the Strategy, its name was changed to AONB Family Communications Strategy, and the Action Plan, and its updating, became a regular feature of the bi-monthly online Comms Drop In sessions. The Strategy was reviewed between April-May 2016 with very little update being considered necessary by the Communications Officers apart from the use of stronger language needed to ensure the whole of the AONB Family engaged with national campaigns. This was to ensure the campaigns/actions reaped the most benefit from the work undertaken.

Over the past couple of years as collaboration within the AONB Family has increased, engagement with national communications has increased but can still be patchy.

How we are changing

Becoming a Charity has given us impetus to review how we communicate. A new [Brand Strategy](#) was approved by the Board at their last meeting and launched with the [Annual Report](#) at the Chairmen's Conference. As a core team we have discussed changes and improvement of communications methods. We have also met with the AONB Communications Officers and Lead Officers in separate meetings (notes can be read in Appendices 2 and 3) where we worked with them to assess communications priorities using the Future Landscapes' methodology of Importance, Acceptability and Possibility.

The results of the meetings were similar. Both the Communications Officers and Lead Officers confirmed that our aim should be to continue raising the AONB profile nationally. In addition the Lead Officers felt strongly that we should concentrate our efforts on a political audience.

The top priorities to communicate over the next four years coming out of both meetings are

- The value of AONBs in terms of Natural Capital/ecosystem services
- The value of AONBs to the UK's health and wellbeing
- Inspiring people to feel ownership and sense of place
- The importance of AONB Management Plans, as planning is key to conservation
- The AONB Family offer post Brexit

There was strong agreement from both groups that working collaboratively and speaking collectively with one voice would strengthen our messages and as a Family they should commit more time to doing this.

The Communications Officers also considered in depth (and have set up a sub group to take this work forward)

- What do we want to say?

- How do we want to say it?
- To whom do we want to say it?
- Who will say it?

The attached paper looks at the strategic direction we should take our communications. When the sub group's work is complete, it will be complemented by a Toolkit which will include messages, audiences, actions, responsibilities – who will do what - and a calendar of campaigns/actions so the communications officers are able to build it into their individual work programmes.