

83rd MEETING OF THE NAAONB MANAGEMENT BOARD MINUTES

Wednesday 10th June 2020 11 am till 2.30pm. Meeting held by teleconference

Invitees - Board Members Philip Hygate, Chris Woodley-Stewart,
Nick Holliday, Paul Walton, Lucy Barron, Denise Hewlett, James Williamson

Invitees - Staff Howard Davies - Chief Executive, Richard Clarke - Policy & Development Manager, Ian Rappel – Welsh Development Manager, Clare Elbourne – Administrative Officer, Marie Micol – Future Landscapes Project Assistant, Anna Trant – consultant working on L4L conference

Invitees – Observers Carole Rothwell NRW, Stuart Pasley - NE, Saliya Jayaweera - Defra

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes and matters arising (PH) for agreement** 10 mins
4. **COVID-19 update – (HD)** 5 mins
5. **Sustainability and Governance – planning workshop (RC)** 5 mins
6. **Collaborative Working Programme – (MM)** 10 mins
7. **Glover Review and National Landscape Service Update (HD)** 10 mins
8. **Arrangements for AGM (PH)** 10 mins
9. **Management Accounts (CE)**
10. **Strategic Risk (HD) for information & agreement** 5 mins
11. **Staff Activity Report (Staff)** 10 mins
12. **Defra Report - verbal (SJ) for information** 10 mins
13. **Natural England Report - verbal (SP) for information** 10 mins
14. **Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru - Natural Resources Wales Report – written update (CR) for information**
10 mins

The meeting started at 11.06.

- 1) Apologies.

Apologies have been received from Defra and from the NAAONB Chairman Philip Hygate who was unable to join the call due to technical issues. The meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chair Chris Woodley-Stewart.

- 2) Declarations of Interest – none stated.

- 3) Minutes and matters arising

The minutes of the 82nd NAAONB Board Meeting were accepted. Matters arising were:

Item 5 – Membership Categories. Following Rose Day’s request for life membership, this was agreed at the last board meeting. The rate for this category has been discussed and will need to be agreed

and accepted at the next AGM. Rose Day has been offered the benefits of membership in the meantime.

Item 14: Post-Brexit legislative framework. The Agriculture Bill has passed its final reading in the House of Commons and the landscape amendments proposed by the NAAONB and the Uplands Alliance has been retained and there is no reason to think it will now be removed. This is cause for celebration as most other amendments were not accepted.

The tests and trials oversight group has met. Thanks to James Williamson for his participation. Paul Jackson has been included in the group as an independent Lead Officer.

4) COVID-19 update

HD updated the board on the operations of the NAAONB following the national lockdown due to COVID-19 and invited comments from board members on their thoughts on how the situation has affected their ability to carry out their duties as trustees.

As NAAONB staff were already working from home, the direct impact has been limited. Staff have been given extra flexibility in terms of when they can work and despite the more relaxed nature of time-keeping all staff have worked hard. Staff are invited to talk about non-work issues during weekly team meetings in order for everyone to have space to discuss how they are feeling.

The National Association has attempted to create a sense of unity for the network and is now chairing a weekly communications meeting for comms staff from across the network. At the start of lockdown the use of Basecamp increased dramatically and a space for sharing thoughts around the pandemic was created. The National Association has been supporting the network to work differently throughout this time. Conversely AONB staff have stepped forward and become more involved in the work of the National Association.

The National Association has also been working with the University of Birmingham on how to delivery rural recovery after the pandemic.

Trustees then offered their thoughts on the impact of COVID-19 on the work of the NAAONB and their roles as trustees. Several trustees commented that they had been concerned after the discussion on the working time directive at the last meeting particularly in terms of the time taken up with travelling. The lockdown has, by necessity, cut down completely on travelling and this was seen as a good thing. The lockdown has proved that work can continue effectively without travel and indeed many trustees reported that because of the increased use of online platforms, 'face to face' meetings had become easier to arrange and communication had been enhanced. The only concern was that time spent working at home should not just increase to fill the time that was otherwise taken up with travelling. It is still important that working hours are controlled. Also the danger of spending too much time working online was raised and the importance of taking a break between conference calls which can be very tiring. Praise was given to the core team that the well-being of staff (both National Association and across the network) had been treated as important throughout the lockdown.

There was a discussion about how trustees could keep up to date with the work of the National Association and there was a suggestion from Howard Davies that an open invitation could be offered to trustees to join the weekly team call meeting.

Action: HD to send trustees details of the weekly team call.

5) Sustainability and Governance

Richard Clarke led a discussion on the proposals which were agreed at the last board meeting for a trustee workshop on strategic planning and the formation of a sub-group to look at the skills required from future trustees. Following the doodle poll that was sent to trustees looking at dates for the workshop, Philip Hygate has suggested that it would be better to wait to assess the fallout from COVID-19 particularly in terms of the indication that there could be a statement in mid-July from the Chancellor on future funding.

There was agreement from trustees that it was important for the National Association to be proactive even in the light of ongoing uncertainty, both in terms of the wider context and the discussions around the creation of a National Landscape Service. The strategic plan is, in effect, a bidding document and it was felt that it's imperative that the National Association sets its own narrative rather than waiting for government decisions. Howard Davies confirmed that Defra has indicated that there is no reason why the National Association would not need its own strategic plan.

Action: Richard Clarke will reissue a doodle poll for a strategic planning trustee workshop to be held in mid-July. He will invite a sub-group of trustees to look at trustee recruitment after this meeting.

6) Collaborative Working Programme

Marie Micol reported that the Future Landscapes Programme has now closed. The final report has been submitted and the final payment has been received. It is important to maintain the momentum of the project as there is much to build on so that the achievements of the Taking the Lead programme can be taken back to teams and further developed. The National Association is mindful that not all staff will want to participate and there is no intention of imposing collaboration from above. Individuals will have different ways in which they prefer to engage and this will be built into the programme.

At the lead Officer meeting in February pledges to supporting continued collaboration were made and a total of £16,000 were raised from a total of 32 AONBs. This money will be used to continue to embed collaboration across the network. The objective is to achieve self-sustaining interaction which does not depend on input from the National Association. The idea is to create a synergy and innovation group made up of 6/7 members from across the network which will meet quarterly to look at which activities to encourage further and which can be dropped. Marie will be conducting a survey to assess interest and from this feedback she will further develop the programme.

It was suggested that the Taking the lead programme could look at the recommendations of the Glover Review and that groups could be 'challenged' to listen to voices that are not normally heard very often, such as young people and ethnic minorities.

The meeting broke for lunch at 12.20.

The meeting reconvened at 12.50.

7) Glover Review and National Landscape Service Update

Howard Davies reported on the continued discussions around the implementation of the Glover Review recommendations, in particular the creation of a national Landscape Service (NLS). Government will respond to the review towards the end of the year. Defra created two contact groups - one formed of National Association, AONB and National Park staff and another, wider group which contains other organisations such as the RSPB. In addition, CNP has created a coalition of NGOs to develop common ground around the Review. There has been a lot of discussion and agreement on the wider principles, but opinions have started to differ on the details. There is general support for some form of NLS. What form this would take is still open to question. It could be a new stand-alone quango or it could be created within an existing organization, with Natural England as the forerunner. Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, has written to the Secretary of State outlining a proposed structure for the NLS. Stuart Pasley agreed that this letter could be shared in confidence with board members.

Howard Davies presented a series of slides looking at the existing tripartite agreement between the NAAONB, Defra and Natural England which was formulated 7 years ago. The slides showed the demarcation of relevant tasks between the three organisations. Howard showed how these roles had modified over time and how they could be affected by the proposed NLS. (The slides are available on request.)

There was a discussion amongst board members of the best approach for the National Association to follow and there was agreement that it should support the Natural England proposal. The importance of focusing on outcomes rather than consequences for an individual organization was emphasized. Howard stressed that the National Association is open to discussions with other relevant parties.

It was agreed a letter should be sent by Philip Hygate – this should be at ministerial level. Howard Davies said this should be sent to Lord Gardiner and also to relevant civil service staff, such as Jess Hodgson.

Action: Letter to be sent by Philip Hygate to Lord Gardiner

8) Arrangements for AGM

The AGM was scheduled to take place in November but clearly this is now not a viable option. The Charity Commission has agreed that AGMs can be held online if a charity's governing documents allow it. Article 7.2 of the NAAONB's Memorandum and Articles of Association states "Members are entitled to attend meetings either personally, (in the case of a Member organisation) by an authorised representative, by proxy or by suitable means agreed by the Trustees. in which all participants may communicate with all the other participants."

Trustees agreed that 'suitable means' in this instance includes holding the meeting electronically, and the AGM should, therefore, be held by electronic means. Howard Davies proposed that the AGM be decoupled from the Chairman's Conference. The AGM would be held in November as planned and then chairs could be invited to take part in an online event which would be held in early 2021.

Anna Trant then gave a presentation on the possible consequences of COVID-19 on future NAAONB events. She outlined that many of the factors which enable the spread of the virus (enclosed spaces,

lack of ventilation, large groups together for a long time, and shared public toilets) are hard to avoid at conferences and other events. It would also be near impossible to get insurance for events if they had to be cancelled. It appears inadvisable to press on with face to face events and this is likely to remain the case for some considerable time. Anna has been looking into holding conferences and other events online. There has been an explosion in technology which can enable multiple concurrent streams to take place; chat facilities that would allow for moderated Q + A sessions; live polls and breakout rooms. The content can be recorded which could enable people to buy sessions to listen to at later dates. Pricing could be pitched to enable new audiences to join conference who might normally be priced out.

There was agreement that this was the right way to progress with the caveat that this approach is unlikely to generate much income. However, the environmental impact would be much reduced. There was an idea that site visits could be co-ordinated at a local level.

9) Management Accounts

Howard Davies reported that some of the expected losses caused by the postponement of conference have been mitigated by savings on salary, expenses (due to lack of traveling) and board expenditure.

Howard set out a proposal to spend £5000 from reserves on a new contract with Anna Trant to further explore holding conference online. In addition, Chris Woodley-Stewart and Tim Youngs (Blackdown Hills) have been working with Natural England to secure £25,000 for a part-time year long post for the National Association working on nature recovery. Howard asked the board to support the use of a further £5000 from reserves to support this post.

There was a concern from the Treasurer about the importance of putting money into reserves rather than taking it out during uncertain times. Equally it was felt that this was the right time to take a risk.

Proposal: support the use of £10,000 from reserves for funding a nature recovery post and work to explore holding conference online.

Proposer: Nick Holliday

Seconder: Paul Walton

Agreed: nem.com

10) Strategic Risk

The paper's recommendations were accepted.

Proposer: Nick Holliday

Seconder: Paul Walton

Agreed: nem.com

11) Staff Activity Report

There were no comments on this, other than to say the board applauded the National Association for its work.

12) Defra Report – no report submitted

13) Natural England Report

Stuart Pasley gave this report. Work is currently going on across the breadth of the Glover recommendations not just the proposed NLS. A proposal on Natural England's response to the review will be going to their board in July.

Also work has been underway on local nature recovery strategies and they are expecting pilots to be announced any time now. Depending on location, AONB could be involved with these.

There was an intention to update the tripartite agreement six months ago. This has not yet happened but it is now the right time to do this.

Natural England recognize that their credibility on landscape issues has been eroded over the past few years but there is now clear commitment from the top of the organisation to improve this.

Chris Woodley-Stewart reported that there had been significant collaboration with Natural England around the Colchester Declaration.

14) Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru - Natural Resources Wales Report

Carole Rothwell gave this report. The six terrestrial and marine area statements are now available on the NRW website. These were developed through a collaborative approach which included AONBs. These provide a thematic framework and have been developed using an ongoing, iterative process for partners to collaborate over issues and action. Outcomes from the process are being monitored. Howard Davies encouraged board members to look at the area statements – the process that developed them was very good.

Carole also reported on work NRW has been asked to do by the Welsh Government looking at access reforms. There are ideas of widening activities on rights of way and open access land and these proposals could have radical and wide-ranging implications for AONBs and National Parks.

Ian Rappel reported that work on the National Landscape Partnership has been paused due to COVID-19 but there are a couple of meetings coming up and then work will press on with recruitment. Ian is having regular meetings with AONBs on this.

The meeting finished at 14.32