

Future development of AONB-related organisations

Issue for consideration

The AONB team business plan set out targets for 2011/12, to "*investigate alternative forms of governance to assist in fund-raising (Friends of, Trusts etc)*" and also to hold "*discussions with neighbouring protected landscape areas*" about such developments. This report summarises the progress made so far and seeks approval from the AONB Joint Advisory Committee for this development work to continue in 2012/13.

Background

Given the planned reductions in central government funding from Defra for AONBs and the increasing pressures on local authority budgets over the current CSR period up to 2014/15, consideration of existing, or alternative, organisational structures for AONBs is on-going across England within individual AONBs, local authorities, the National Association of AONBs and Defra.

These discussions are largely as a result of AONB Partnerships, in the past, having been limited in the funding sources to which they can apply due to most Partnership's lead body or applicant being a local authority. In the case of the Forest of Bowland AONB, Lancashire County Council is the host authority. Development of AONB-related organisations could allow the AONB Partnership to benefit from funding which was previously "off-limits" to a local authority-led partnership.

Progress Update

During 2011/12, the Principal AONB Officer and AONB Development and Funding Officer have carried out scoping work on the following:

Review of existing AONB-related organisations

This work involved reviewing the current operations of existing AONB-related organisations, namely the charitable company '*Bowland Tourism Environment Fund*' (BTEF) and the trading subsidiary of BTEF, '*Bowland Experience Ltd* (BEx), and investigating the scope for increased fund-raising operations within these organisations. BTEF trustees and BEx board members have been made aware of this review, but detailed discussions have yet to take place.

The Development and Funding Officer has also talked with the emerging 'Friends of Bowland' which is a group offering volunteering opportunities in the AONB, to see how they may fit in with this review.

Other Protected Landscapes

Discussions have been held with Nidderdale AONB, Shropshire Hills AONB and Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust regarding alternative governance arrangements and operations.

Nidderdale and Shropshire Hills both have an established 'Friends of' group and were able to offer invaluable advice on both the potential and the limitations of such a group, particularly in relation to fund-raising.

Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust provided useful advice on how they attract funding from a range of sources including charitable trusts, corporate sponsorship, donations and legacies.

The Principal AONB Officer has also been investigating possible joint working with Arnside and Silverdale AONB where this may be of future benefit in bidding jointly for funds, dealing with corporate sponsorship, income generation etc

NAAONB Discussions

The AONB team has been involved in national discussions, co-ordinated by the National Association of AONBs, on a potential role for Community Foundations in raising funds for AONBs in the future, and in developing both charitable and social enterprise models for AONB activity. This national debate will inform the developments at AONB level.

Conclusions

- Any AONB-related organisations should run alongside and complement existing governance structures (e.g. Joint Advisory Committee).
- The AONB Unit currently provides secretariat for BTEF and BEx, therefore there is a need to carefully consider the formation of any new AONB-related organisation to avoid significantly increasing any bureaucratic burden on the AONB Unit and/or any duplication with existing structures.
- A 'Friends of' group could easily form as a simple unincorporated association and usefully provide a focal point for community support and voluntary activities within the AONB. This could be largely self-managed and not rely too heavily on the AONB Unit. Small-scale fund-raising activities, or low level membership fees could become part of the group's remit, but the group is not likely to be appropriate as an applicant for funding for larger AONB Partnership projects.
- BTEF has the objects and powers within its Memorandum of Association to operate as body to raise funds and to channel grants for community, AONB Unit and partnership projects. An expansion of the current operation of BTEF (as a body to receive contributions from visitors via tourism businesses, and to disburse them as small scale grants) would need to be agreed with BTEF's trustees if they felt it to be appropriate. There may also be a need to increase the number and expertise of trustees to deal with this expansion of roles.

Proposed next steps

- a) Commence discussions with trustees of Bowland Tourism Environment Fund to consider options for expanding its present focus on visitor contributions to become a more generic fund-raising body for the AONB. Also to consider renaming the organisation as something more recognisable, such as Bowland Landscape Trust or Foundation, for example.
- b) Development and formal establishment of a 'Friends of Bowland' to help co-ordinate community support for- and volunteering activities in the AONB.
- c) Development of a comprehensive funding-raising strategy for the AONB Partnership, involving all AONB-related organisations. This would identify how the various organisations could operate together effectively, and also identify potential sources of funds for them each to apply for.

Decision to be taken

The committee is asked to note and agree:

1. to the continuation of the development of AONB-related organisations detailed above, leading to a comprehensive fund-raising strategy being produced for the AONB Partnership.