

# Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee

11/09/18

## External Board/Outside Body

<b>External Board/Outside Body</b>	Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee
<b>Councillor(s) represented on the Outside Body/External Board</b>	Patrik Garten
<b>Report Author</b>	Patrik Garten & Nick Johannsen (AONB Unit)
<b>Date of External Board/Outside Body Meeting Attended</b>	Joint Advisory Committee Meeting - 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2018 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Kent Downs AONB - 20 <sup>th</sup> July 2018 The ASH Project opening - 14 <sup>th</sup> September 2018

### Purpose of the External Board/Outside Body:

#### Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

The Kent Downs relies on many stakeholders who have a role in managing the landscape, supporting local business and communities and enabling quiet recreation. The Joint Advisory Committee plays a pivotal role in helping realise the strategic vision for the Kent Downs AONB and oversee the Management Plan.

It's purpose is to provide advice to its members with statutory responsibilities for the effective management of the Kent Downs AONB. An Executive of representatives from the JAC, with some outside advisors, advises the work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit.

The Kent Downs AONB Unit is employed by Kent County Council and works on behalf of the JAC to carry out the preparation and review of the Management Plan, to advocate its policies and work in partnership to deliver a range of actions described in the Action Plan.

#### Funding partners & Members

Defra, Ashford Borough Council, Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council, Gravesham Borough Council, London Borough of Bromley, Medway Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Folkestone & Hythe District Council, Swale Borough Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Country Land and Business Association, Environment Agency, Kent Association of Local Councils, Action with Communities in Rural Kent, National Farmers Union, English Heritage

**Update:**

This update provides to the Committee a brief background to the work of the AONB JAC to set the context for future reports.

A key current priority for the Kent Downs Joint Advisory Committee (in which Maidstone are key partners) is the statutory review of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan. The legal requirement to prepare and review a plan for the AONB is placed on all of the Local Authorities (by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) and the AONB Unit takes forward the bulk of the work for the 12 Local Authorities with responsibility in the Kent Downs AONB.

At the moment the Unit is taking forward evidence gathering for the statutory review which includes strategic assessments required and a review of the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) of the Kent Downs. A revised Management Plan is not only a statutory requirement it also provides all Councils with helpful up to date information which will assist in plan and decision making, enhance the local economy and to take forward positive activity to improve the health and wellbeing of the communities of Maidstone.

At a national level there is currently a review of Designated Landscapes and the JAC notes that Maidstone Borough Council is interested in considering new or extended designations. In support of this the ANOB Unit has provided initial information to Officers about the review and will continue to provide professional advice as the nature and timetable of the review becomes clearer. The JAC are seeking to influence the review for the benefit of Kent and the Kent Downs AONB and when the review programme is clearer the JAC will engage Maidstone Borough Council closely when developing our response.

At the same time Government is reviewing the Agri-environment payments (which nationally is a £3.5bn budget). The ANOB Unit have fed into the national consultation on how this funding should be allocated after the UK leaves the EU, again to benefit Kent and the Kent Downs AONB.

A current strategic priority in the Kent Downs is to develop a response to the impact of Ash Dieback on our much valued landscapes. The Kent Downs AONB Unit has just submitted a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for (iro £900K) to work with public bodies, landowners and land managers to develop a landscape recovery plan in Maidstone and other parts of Kent (not confined to the AONB).

As a part of the JAC's local response to Ash Dieback, the ANOB Unit have secured Arts and Heritage Lottery funding to run the Ash Project (<https://www.theashproject.org.uk>) which generates a cultural response to Ash Dieback in Kent. The project has developed and run a series of events and activities, including arts activities. A key part of the project is the commissioning of a major new landscape art work from the internationally renowned practice, Ackroyd and Harvey. We are delighted to say that this will be opened in September and is located at White Horse Wood, which will provide a new important cultural destination in Maidstone Borough Council area. The sculpture will be in place for 2 years.

The ANOB Unit provides planning support to the Council. In the past this work has included working in support of the Council at Public Inquiries. They have recently provided support and advice to Officers on three planning applications and are about to respond to the statement of community involvement as requested by the Council.

The AONB Unit hosts and supports a number of projects which operate in Maidstone Borough Council and supports the Council's strategic objectives, these include:

- The **Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership** which operates in the Maidstone area supporting community landscape projects for instance in Bredhurst, Boxley, Horish Wood, Harrietsham and developing funding bids for the Hollingbourne Vale (pending the HLF review);
- The **Kent Orchards for Everyone Project** supports orchards groups and invests in the conservation and enhancement of traditional orchards in Stockbury, Weaving, Hucking, Hunton, Yalding and Lenham;
- The **North Downs Way National Trail Partnership** manages the Trail in the Maidstone area and has secured funding from the UK Discover England Fund to promote tourism development and delivery along and around the trail – this will support local business and continue to enhance the experience of the Trail for local people.

Finally, this year is the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the Kent Downs AONB and the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The AONB Unit have used this opportunity to secure funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to run a series of events and activities across the Kent Downs – these have engaged many people who have enjoyed a visit to the AONB at the same time they have contributed to the statutory review of the AONB Management Plan.