

Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee

09 October 2018

External Board/Outside Body

External Board/Outside Body	Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Councillor(s) represented on the Outside Body/External Board	Patrik Garten
Report Author	Patrik Garten & Nick Johansen (AONB Unit)
Date of External Board/Outside Body Meeting Attended	The ASH Project opening 14 th of 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.

Its 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:

The work of the Kent Downs AONB Unit continues at both a strategic scale, for instance seeking to influence the national opportunities around new Agri Environment Schemes and the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes as well as at a local level by investing in landscape, access and support to the Local Authority with regards to the AONB, examples include:

In mid-September, 'Ash to Ash' a major new sculptural commission in response to Ash Dieback was installed and opened at White Horse Wood near Detling, the opening was well attended and the sculptures will form a new cultural destination in the area. The launch received a wide variety of favourable press mentions. At the same time we have run a series of walks and talks promoting the place of trees in the landscape and a new book has been published in partnership with the Woodland Trust. We await the outcome of our recent £900K bid to the Heritage Lottery fund to support tree planting in response to the loss of Ash trees in the landscape.

The Kent Downs AONB Unit has been taking forward the review of the Landscape Character Assessment across the AONB including detailed work in the Maidstone area this month. A draft assessment will be published along with the Draft Statutory AONB Management Plan.

The work to influence the post Brexit Agri-environment funding arrangements has continued with meetings with other AONBs and National Parks in the South east to develop a joint input to Government proposals. The AONB Unit will continue to provide advice to MBC with regards to the Designated Landscapes review and alert Maidstone when the call for evidence is made.

The AONB Unit hosts and supports the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership which operates in the Maidstone Borough Council area – a part of the work programme is to develop a new Heritage Lottery Fund bid to support pond conservation and community volunteering in the area. The Partnership has also supported Harrietsham Parish Council in developing a Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a local conservation scheme. Financial support by MBC for the partnership stopped in 2016.

Finally the AONB Unit has confirmed with partners that they will take forward a new Interreg (EU funded) bid to promote rural tourism across the Kent Downs – this will support the Maidstone Tourism Strategy which recognises the importance of rural tourism. The Kent Downs AONB Unit was invited to bid and will work closely with Visit Kent on developing the project which will have a focus on rural itineraries and 'shoulder season' sustainable rural tourism. The bid will be submitted in January.

If Members would like to know more about the Kent Downs AONB Unit they are very welcome to get in touch directly with Nick Johannsen, the Director.

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