

Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee

11 January 2022

Outside Body Report

Outside Body	Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Councillor(s) represented on the Outside Body	Patrik Garten
Report Author	Patrik Garten
Date of Outside Body Meeting Attended	JAC Meeting of 09 November 2021

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

JAC Meeting of 09 November 2021

Farmers siting caravans to house workers in the AONB, with no controls on the placement, number and colour of the caravans. was raised. A member has written to Secretary of State regarding this, response from the government stated that it has no plans to restrict Permitted Development rights on farms.

The AONB Unit responds to government consultations on changes to Permitted Development and other planning controls, with varying success. Requirements for Prior Notification applications within AONBs has been secured for some agricultural and telecommunications developments, which allows influence over siting and design.

AONB Unit & Visit Kent led on **Kent's Heritage Coast** being listed as the 4th best Region in the World to visit in 2022. The accolade focuses particularly on sustainable tourism, recognising the work of the EXPERIENCE project and the potential of the UNESCO (USAC) project, as well as the past work of the AONB Unit and JAC partners in the sustainable tourism sector.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) provides grants for projects and programmes, it is not an agri-environment scheme. A significant amount of work was completed by the AONB Unit to get FiPL underway. First grants have been awarded – including vineyard hedge planting, soil inoculation in a regenerative system, and a natural capital project for a farm cluster. 60 projects in the pipeline.

Planning

The AONB Unit provided 121 responses to 280 planning application consultations
Two significant planning applications were highlighted - Cuxton Winery and a proposed new garden community to the south and east of Sittingbourne.

Highways –

- M2 Junction 5 – possible additional funding in landscape enhancements from Highways England/ National Highways
- Lower Thames Crossing –potential funding for projects in this area.
- M20 Moveable Barrier Scheme – secured the removal of gantries from the scheme, using temporary lights instead which will have a much lower landscape impact

The **Landscape Design Handbook** had been reviewed and is in draft – I sent copies to SPI and Planning committee members, prior to wider consultation.

The issue was raised where hundreds of **trees with TPOs** have been felled in areas with tree felling licenses. Cases have gone to Magistrate instead of Crown Court. It was proposed that the AONB Unit draws attention to this issue and seeks to obtain a list of tree-felling license areas.

Litter around M2 Junction 5: help was requested to put pressure on the government and Highways England. District and borough councils have responsibility for this but there is an issue around gaining permission to safely litter-pick on the roadside at the right time of the year. In order to coordinate efforts on this KCC Highways will be requested to explain their policy in writing to the JAC.

All councils were urged to lobby **Southern Water** regarding the water nutrient pollution issue. At the next JAC members will be updated on the planning application relating to River Stour water treatment.

North Downs Way An alternative route is being looked at outside Dover to divert away from a proposed Inland Border Facility, additional funding for this including funding from Natural England

EXPERIENCE Project overview of the work the EXPERIENCE project has undertaken and is upcoming. Lonely Planet highlights the success of this project. 50 North Downs Way Ambassadors have been recruited.

Two Overhead Electricity Cables have been undergrounded through the National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) project. There is a bid for further LEI projects.

Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme overview was provided. Highlights include the Samuel Palmer Trail, culminating in 2023 with the Samuel Palmer Returns exhibition in Dartford

The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan has now been adopted. The 5-year review date falls on 16.11.2026. It is proposed to move to a web-based Management Plan. This would remain printable, but preference is to develop an accessible, web-based Plan as default.

JAC members noted a detailed report and supported the proposal to proceed to secure international **Global Geopark status** to include the Kent Downs AONB, Strait of Dover and the Parc Natural Regional des Cap et Marais d'Opale.

It has been a long run policy to seek support for **securing appropriate UNESCO status** for all or part of the Kent Downs. There was a discussion around the Lonely Planet and how this could link with the USAC/Geopark project. The USAC project was one of the last Interreg funding opportunities available. This would be the first international Global Geopark to include a Marine extent.

Kent Downs AONB activity in 2021/22 and headline budget 2021-22 – including brief update on the Glover or Landscape Review.

- The matched funding and Local Authority security that the AONB Unit has allows them to go out and seek much of their external funding. Support from the Local Authorities and KCC is vital to lever in funds from Defra.
- Much of the external funding the AONB Unit currently has is entering the final year, so there is a substantial delivery budget for 22/23
- The government response to the Glover Landscape Review is still awaited, over two years overdue. The expected best-case scenario would be doubling of DEFRA contribution over the course of this parliament. Even with this, funding will be reduced as EU funding ends in 2023.
- The Unit has an intention to make a special case for additional funding for the Kent Downs, due to the specific pressures on this landscape, as well as the loss of EU funding which has previously been a significant portion of the Unit's budget.
- Invoice for this year's financial contribution from Districts will be submitted soon.
- A very busy year ahead, but the following year could be challenging.
- All members agreed that they are happy with the current budget arrangements for the next financial year.