

**Minutes of the Third Natural England Board meeting – 21 February 2007**

21 February 2007, 13.00 – 15.45

Members attending

Peter Allen  
Melinda Appleby  
Sarah Burton  
Roger Clarke  
Lynn Crowe  
Merrick Denton-Thompson  
Michael Depledge  
Martin Doughty (Chair)  
Tony Hams  
David Hill  
Doug Hulyer  
David Macdonald  
Christopher Pennell  
Helen Phillips (CEO)  
Pam Warhurst

Executives

Adrian Belton  
Guy Thompson  
David Webster  
Andrew Wood  
David Young

Secretariat

Becky Rooley  
Liz Newton

Prior to the Board meeting, a Board briefing session was held at which Board Members were updated on Natural England's work in the following areas:

- Board Outcome Groups
- Natural England's Transition Programme
- Executive Board priorities
- Governance Task Group
- Budgets
- Coastal access
- Statutory Guidance

1. Welcome from the Chair

- a) Declarations of interests were as noted in the Board Register of Interests. Roger Clarke declared an interest in item 4, as CEO of the Youth Hostel Association. Christopher Pennell declared an interest in item 4, with his previous employment with the National Trust.

2. Board Engagements

The Board:

- a) Noted the:
- engagements attended by Chair since the last Board meeting,
  - engagements attended by Deputy Chair since the last Board meeting,

- forward look for Chair and Deputy Chair,
- key engagements attended by Board members since the last Board meeting.

b) Pointed out that on page 5 it should read South Downs 'Joint Committee'.

### 3. CEO Report

a) The Board noted:

i) The summary of the current strategic issues, provided as a verbal update.

Key points were:

- Meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss land use policy  
This was a very positive event which was attended by organisations across the supply chain of land use, including planners, house builders, Environment Agency, RSPB. Discussions focussed on different land use scenarios, including climate change impacts, and different responses to this. The EA are developing four scenarios, and we are discussing working with them on this.

- Progress on the development of the MOU with the EA and FC  
The MOU will be brought to the Board for sign off. The EA are planning for the MOU to be signed off by the CEO. This could be a topic for discussion at the NE / EA Board meeting.

- Progress on Campaigns  
Board members have attended tele-conference discussions with each campaign manager. The campaign concepts will continue to be refined in light of this, particularly the health campaign.

Negotiations with the BBC regarding the co-production of a web portal to support the delivery of the Breathing Places campaign and wider public participation in nature conservation are progressing well.

- Employee Relations  
We continue to have a positive and constructive relationship with the unions having finalised a partnership agreement between Natural England and the three unions, PCS, Prospect and FDA. Informal and formal meetings are being held on a range of topics including pay, harmonisation of terms and conditions, and our overall approach to individual performance management.

In January the PCS held a National Strike across the Civil Service, and out of 736 PCS members, 276 employees participated in the day, and our service delivery was not interrupted. Further 'work to rule' strike action will be held by PCS on Friday 23 February.

- Implementation of Natural England H&S Policy  
The national H&S committee is now fully established. Risks and issues will be brought to future Board meetings.

- Risk framework  
The risks within the current framework were identified by the Executive Board. Work is progressing on establishing the process for risks being identified, reported, and managed across the organisation.

ii) Our performance in delivery against the Strategic Direction. Key points were:

- That the SSSI target has been missed this year by 3%, the gap is significantly attributable to the Environment Agency's failure to deliver to timetable.
- That there will be new PSA targets relating to climate change, and to natural resource protection. Other PSAs (eg SSSI) will become 'departmental indicators'. The Board would like to continue with the SSSI awards established by English Nature.

**Action: Executive Board**

- That the balanced scorecard is being trialled, this will come to the Board with developed measures and metrics.
- That a group of Board members work with the Executive on the corporate plan.

**Action: Executive Board**

iii) Our assessment of the current financial position for Natural England and proposals for the management of the 2006/07 budget. Key points were:

- That a very small underspend for 06/07 has been achieved, by the end of January only 3% of the programme budget is uncommitted.
- That the service level agreement with Shared Services is yet to be completed.

iv) That there will be a Board workshop on agri-environment targeting in April.

b) The Board agreed the recommendations.

#### 4. Coastal Access

The Board:

- a) Noted that the recommendations in the paper were based on the Minister's request for advice on how coastal access could be best implemented.
- b) Noted the comprehensive stakeholder engagement over the last few months.
- c) Emphasised the importance of local flexibility in implementing coastal access, and of using local expertise in finding solutions.
- d) Emphasised the public benefits of increasing coastal access, including both economic and health benefits.
- e) Suggested that the Marine Bill could be the legislative instrument for accomplishing the proposals. Any statutory power should be future proofed so that it can adapt with a changing coast line as a result of climate change.
- f) Emphasised the need for corporate government to endorse the proposals. Spatial planning should reflect the importance of access to water.
- g) Stated that there is a need for further work on compensation issues, and a need to be realistic regarding the likely cost.
- h) Requested that simple clear language is used, and that the term 'alignment' in particular needs greater definition.
- i) Discussed the vision of a coastal corridor which is focussed on nature conservation, likened to a necklace, which could ultimately be an island coastal nature reserve. It will be important that we are alert to nature conservation interests and any adverse impacts of increased coastal access. Agri-environment schemes can be used to enhance nature conservation and landscape features.

- j) Highlighted the opportunity for intellectual access and learning hubs, eg the Jurassic coast. This could be supported through the use of technology eg information messages to mobile phones to explain the features of interest to visitors.
- k) Requested that geology be mentioned within the paper, because of the importance of the active faces exposed on the coast.
- l) Requested that greater emphasis be placed on coastal safety, and consider what advice can be given to people with regard to mudflats, sandbanks, cliff falls etc.
- m) Agreed the recommendations in 2.1, given the amendments above.
- n) The Board emphasised “the importance of local flexibility in implementing coastal access and of using local expertise in finding solutions, but recognised this may be challenging in some circumstances

## 5. Communications strategy

The Board:

- a) Discussed the presentation from COI. Key points were:
  - i) The strategy should not attempt to finalise activities at this stage, as there is further work to be done on segmentation prior to this.
  - ii) The strategy should be written in clear and simple English, avoiding jargon.
  - iii) Suggested that the word ‘campaigner’ should be replaced within the brand proposition, to better reflect the breadth of the roles we play. Further work is needed on the brand proposition.
  - iv) Some Board members did not like the proposal of membership, cautioning against the administrative burden, and the high standard of competition.

### **Action: Executive Board**

- b) Noted that the proposed communications function within Natural England will have a central unit and a presence in the regions to respond to local circumstances.
- c) Noted that further work is being done on segmentation and market, following this work on tools, channels, and activities will be progressed.
- d) Agreed that the immediate activities to be taken forward are:
  - i) Media and press desk
  - ii) Stakeholder management
  - iii) Suitable management arrangements for the communications function.

### **Action: Executive Board**

## 6. Governance

The Board:

- a) Agreed the Standing Orders, with the following amendments:
  - i) 11.4 has a typing error.
  - ii) 13.1 ‘exclusion’ should say ‘execution’
  - iii) 1.2 should read: “Board should have no less than eight”
  - iv) 7.1 should be written in a simpler way
  - v) 3.1 needs to be written so that it does not imply, wrongly, that the Chair is likely to be absent.
  - vi) The Board approved not only the standing orders but also the Board Code of Conduct, and noted updates on the Schemes of Delegation.

## 7. Audit Committee

The Board:

- a) Noted the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting of 4 December 2006.

#### 8. Science Advisory Committee

The Board noted progress on the SAC:

- a) The SAC will:
  - i) Draw respected external scientific advice.
  - ii) Share the developing science strategy.
  - iii) Review the delivery of Natural England's science programme.
- b) A stakeholders event is being planned for the 28 March 2007, involving representatives from NGO's, government bodies, at which Natural England's emerging science strategy will be presented and delegates asked to contribute. SAC members will attend, as will our Chair and Chief Executive.
- c) The SAC will meet 2-4 times a year. A decision will need to be made as to whether Board members are reimbursed for this time.

#### **ACTIONS FROM BOARD MEETING**

<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Action Owner</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Status</b>
3	Exec Board (AB)	Continue with the SSSI achievement awards with land owners		
3	Exec Board (DY)	Group of Board members to input to the corporate plan		
5	Exec Board (GT)	Review the communications strategy in light of Board comments		
5	Exec Board (GT)	Progress media and press desk		
5	Exec Board (GT)	Progress stakeholder management		
5	Exec Board (GT)	Progress suitable management arrangements for communications function		
9	Board Services (BJ)	Actions within minutes and table		