

Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee

21 September 2021

Outside Body

Outside Body	Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Councillor(s) represented on the Outside Body	Councillor Patrik Garten
Report Author	Councillor Patrik Garten
Date of Outside Body Meeting Attended	JAC Meeting of 22nd June 2021

Purpose of the 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 22nd June 2021

The **adoption of the Management Plan** is going through due process with the local authorities. There have been no issues with adoption of the Management Plan by the local authorities so far, but not all authorities have yet formally adopted it.

Long awaited and overdue updates on **Farming in Protected Landscapes** (FiPL) from DEFRA had been received:

<https://www.kentdowns.org.uk/our-projects/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>

The scheme is to be a 3-year funding programme, with the most money to be provided in the first year. The identified priorities are People, Place, Climate and Nature, which will help towards Nature Recovery ambitions and dovetail well with the priorities of the Kent Downs AONB partnership, as set out in the new Management Plan.

Outcomes that DEFRA wish to achieve include:

- People – more diverse audiences and greater public engagement
- Place – enhanced or reinforced landscapes, a thriving local economy
- Climate – more sequestered or stored carbon, reduced flood risk and a landscape that is more resilient to climate change.
- Nature - managing natural habitat and increasing biodiversity in farmed habitats.

JAC members were asked, that once the scheme is in the public domain, that they promote it through their networks and organisations (slowly to start with) and consider if their organisations have projects to put forward.

An update was given on recent activity, including planning application and local plan consultations: Involvement with the M2 Junction 5: any compensation coming forward from the M2 J5 scheme would be applied in the local area, with a focus on the Stockbury Valley

Update on the Lower Thames Crossing highway schemes was received. Discussions with the Department of Transport on Inland Border Facilities affecting the Kent Downs were held and it is now proposed at a site originally considered in an old warehouse near the Tesco roundabout. It was confirmed that the AONB Unit had been in discussion with KCC regarding the revised Kent Design Guide.

In response to a query from Patrik Garten on inappropriate lighting on domestic properties in the Kent Downs, it was confirmed that this was outside of any planning control being permitted development. The AONB Unit is supportive of Cllr Garten's suggestion for attaching conditions removing permitted development rights for external lighting on any new planning permissions granted. Detailed guidance on lighting is included in the recently reviewed Landscape Design Handbook.

The JAC was advised that Ashford had not been consulted on the Sevington Inland Border Facility and were also pursuing the lighting here as it is not considered compatible with their Dark Night Skies policy.

The Experience project was introduced to members and set out some of the achievements and highlights of the project to date, including North Downs Way route enhancements, people counters and Art Installations, website investments and digital access improvements, NDW walking ambassador training, Gravesham Blue Guide guided walk training and nature access provision for the profoundly disabled.

Update of undergrounding Overhead Electricity Cables & National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative. There were nine schemes in Kent Downs, with the total value of the work in the region of £4.7m which has secured the removal of 41km of overhead cable from the Kent Downs landscape. A new landscape enhancement initiative application is to be submitted next month for a scheme in the Boxley/Bredhurst area.

An overview of the **ELM Viticulture Test and Trial scheme** was given, advising that ELM rewards farming or viticulture for environmental actions. The scheme is running from 2020 to 2021. It is intended that payments will replace the current Basic Payment and Countryside Stewardship scheme. It is hoped the proposed interventions will be accepted by DEFRA as an appropriate way forward as viticulture is not currently covered by these schemes.

Fourteen actions for viticulture have been identified including land management plans, farm cluster groups, on site research, soil regeneration, capital grants to support technological advances, ground cover, restoration and management of species rich grass sward, establishment of native species windbreak, trees and hedgerows, biodiversity features, interpretation, permissive access, educational access, health activities and organic conversion and management.

Two further ELMs Tests and Trials that the Unit has been running were also explained: The Natural Flood Management ELM Test and Trial which has recognised the importance in mitigating flood *and* enhancing landscape quality and recommend best practice, modelling on a catchment basis. The Enhancing Access ELM Test and Trial has identified significant barriers to some new audiences as well as some farmers and land managers, however found there to be a strong appetite from many farmers and beneficiaries. Conclusions have included that facilitation and advice will be important along with long term investment, provision of transformational experiences and a need to respond to farmers' concerns.

AONB engagement within local authorities and other partners: The AONB Unit is working with different sections within Local Authorities and would like to explore how to build relationships more widely across the local authorities and help JAC members promote AONB activity and the Management Plan priorities more widely across their organisations.