

Minutes of the Fourth Natural England Board meeting – 18 April 2007

18 April 2007 - 10.55am – 8.00pm

Members attending

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

Officers

Ian Fugler
Val Cooper
Brian Banks
Ben Fraser
Roger Key
Sue Rees
Anna Wetherell

Secretariat

Becky Rooley

Apologies

Poul Christensen (part)
David Macdonald
Guy Thompson

Executives

Adrian Belton
Tom Tew
David Webster
Andrew Wood
David Young

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:

- Future of farming;
- Corporate plan 2007/08;
- Legal update on SSSI designation process.

1) Welcome from the Chair

- a) Apologies from David Macdonald, Guy Thompson and Poul Christensen (part).
- b) Changes to the Register of Interests or particular interests were as follows:

- i) Pam Warhurst - for the SSSI case, Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, a non-pecuniary interest as Advisory Member of the Defence Estates Committee.
- ii) David Hill - previously was a Director of RPS who are representing an objector's case this afternoon but had no previous involvement in, or knowledge of, this case.

2) Stakeholder Engagement

The Board:

- a) Noted the framework for relationship management with our top 100 stakeholders;
- b) Was asked to record existing contacts Board Members have with stakeholders, and to add to the list of stakeholders as appropriate.

Action: Board Members

- c) Discussed the paper and emphasised the importance of our stakeholder management system for its contribution to organisational capacity. Board Members also requested some minor amendments to the list of stakeholders.

Action: Executive Board

3) Chief Executive Report

The Board:

- a) Was updated on the following strategic issues:
 - i) Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2007 to 2013
 - Our efforts to secure a reasonable settlement for agri-environment funding through the RDPE were effective;
 - The settlement is as good as it could have been given Defra's financial position. However, it still falls short of what is needed to fully deliver the objectives of the scheme. Board Members will be provided with a position to advocate the announcement.

Action: Executive Board

- We continue to emphasise the need for better targeting of the RDPE to deliver the maximum outcomes for the environment and value for money for taxpayer funds.
- ii) Update on Ministerial meetings
 - RDPE has been a key topic of discussions with Ministers;
 - We met John Healey, the Treasury Secretary, and some of his Treasury colleagues to discuss a paper on the use of economic instruments to deliver environmental outcomes. The meeting was also attended by the Environment Agency and the Energy Savings Trust. It was agreed that we will invite a wider range of environmental organisations to a future meeting to consider further the scope of this work.

Action: Executive Board

- iii) Strategic Risk
 - The Executive continue to monitor Natural England's Strategic Risks on a regular basis;
 - The strategic risk register was reviewed by the Audit Committee at its last meeting;

- The Chair of the Audit Committee has recommended that the Board periodically review the risk register;
- It was agreed that the Board will have a full discussion on the risk register at a future meeting.

Action: Executive Board

- b) Reviewed and discussed delivery against our Strategic Direction:
- i) It was agreed that information on our work with deprived communities will be circulated to Board members.

Action: Executive Board

- a) It was noted that further work is planned to engage the private sector on sustainable travel for leisure;
- b) It was agreed that our work with County Councils on access should also include Highway Authorities.

Action: Executive Board

- It was agreed that Chair will write to the Secretary of State to commend him on the RDPE settlement.

Action: Chair

- It was agreed that the £12m accruals in the draft financial statements would require a detailed review for accuracy and completeness to ensure the accounts were correctly stated prior to the National Audit Office external audit review due to commence on 21 May.

- c) The Board agreed to:
- Note the summary of the current strategic issues;
 - Note our performance of delivery against our Strategic Direction;
 - Note the financial position for Natural England as at the end of February and forecast for 2006/07;
 - Note that there are no items requiring Board approval to comply with the Financial Memorandum and Scheme of Delegation.

4) Corporate Plan 07/08

The Board:

- a) Noted positive feedback from stakeholders, including Defra, on the process for consultation on the Corporate Plan;
- b) Noted the collaboration between Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission on our respective plans;
- c) Noted the budget challenge for 2006/07;
- d) Noted that one of the goals of the Plan is to increase the external funding beyond current levels;
- e) Noted that our work to develop strategies in a range of areas this financial year will create the need for flexibility in funding in future years to implement these strategies;
- f) Provided detailed feedback on a range of issues in the Plan including:
- The need to ensure that resources follow the priorities within the Corporate Plan;
 - The need to recognise the contribution of our current work as well as our new areas of activity;
 - The need to describe the interrelationship between individual targets;
 - The need to ensure that that our contribution to society through the people agenda is adequately reflected as well as our protection of the natural environment;
 - The need to ensure that we adequately reflect our role in geodiversity;

- The need to ensure that the plan reflects all of our work on National Park designations;
- The need to ensure that the climate change pilots include upland areas;
- The need to develop our evidence on the contribution of volunteers in protecting and enhancing the natural environment;
- The need to understand more clearly why visitor numbers to the countryside are falling;
- Ensure that strategy is developed for expiring Classic schemes to secure the environmental benefits already achieved;
- That the benefits of good land management for marine and freshwater ecosystems is recognised;
- Supporting the use of our own staff and expertise rather than external consultants wherever possible.

The Board:

- Agreed the proposed budget for the outcomes and objectives, as derived from our Strategic Direction;
- Agreed that Board Member's comments would be addressed in finalising the Corporate Plan;
- Delegated to the Chair the authority to approve and send the final version of the Corporate Plan to the Minister.

5) Board Appraisal

The Board:

- Discussed the paper. It was agreed that:
 - Feedback could be sought from colleagues on the Audit Committee and Science Advisory Committee, in addition to the Board Outcome Groups;
 - Feedback from the Executive would include the Chief Executive and could include Regional Directors.

The Board:

- Endorsed the purpose and approach to Board appraisal;
- Approved the process for assessing Board performance;
- Endorsed the framework for assessing Board member performance objectives for 2007/08.

6) Notification of Bury Farm SSSI

The Board:

- Discussed the notification. A full transcript is available on request from Board Services;
- Confirmed the notification without modification;
- Agreed that Chair will write a letter to the owner occupiers.

Action: Chair

7) Notification of Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SSSI

The Board:

- Discussed the notification. A full transcript is available on request from Board Services;
- Agreed the officers' recommendations, both written and tabled on the day, to confirm the notification with modifications to the boundary and citation, with the following exceptions:

- i) The reservoir owned by RJ & MP Finn Kelcey & Son was to be excluded. This was due to the reservoir having been comparatively recently constructed, and the three years of bird data was considered insufficient to confirm the scientific interest;
- ii) The proposed inclusion of land owned by Rastrum Ltd was to be excluded. This was due to the special interest on the site having been lost. Officers were asked to consider denotification of land owned by Rastrum Ltd, which remains designated under a previous SSSI.

Action: Executive Board

Poul Christensen joined the meeting.

8) Report from the Audit Committee

The Board:

- a) Noted the report from the Audit Committee meeting of 27 March 2007;
- b) Agreed that a future item on risk and contingency measures will be brought to the Board.

Action: Executive Board

9) Report on the Science Advisory Committee

The Board:

- a) Noted the report from the Natural England Science Advisory Committee (SAC);
- b) Noted that the following external members have joined the SAC;
 - i) Professor Gareth Edward Jones, rural economics specialist with agriculture ecosystems;
 - ii) Professor Alistair Fitter, botanist;
 - iii) Steve Hawkins, marine biologist;
 - iv) Alan Hildrew, freshwater biologist;
 - v) Jim Rose, geologist;
 - vi) Philip Lowe, Rural Economic and Land Use Group;
 - vii) Professor Jules Pretty, agricultural ecosystems health and social issues;
 - viii) Bill Sutherland, ecologist;
 - ix) Professor Geoff Wild, entomologist and involved in emergent diseases.

ACTIONS FROM BOARD MEETING

Item No	Action	Owner	Status
2	Board Members to input to stakeholder table	Board Members	Ongoing
3	Advocacy brief for Board Members on RDPE settlement	David Young	Complete
3	Programme for deprived communities to be circulated to Board Members	David Young	This will be provided with the Board Round Up 6 July
3	Letter to commend SoS on RDPE settlement	Chair	Complete
7	Consider denotification of land owned by Rastrum Ltd. currently under designation, at a future meeting.	Adrian Belton	Underway
8	Future item on risk to Board	Dave Webster	Complete
10	Amend minutes from February Board	Board Services	Complete
11	The Board requested the options for how the Board discharges its duties relating to SSSI designations be brought to a future meeting	Board Services	Ongoing