

Annual Review

The North Wessex Downs Annual Review looks back over the past year on the achievements of the North Wessex Downs team and partnership, whose purpose is to encourage coordinated action by all organisations, agencies and individuals to protect and enhance the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

If you are interested to find out more about what the North Wessex Downs team and partnership have been involved in over the past year as well as key issues affecting the area and financial information, click on the links below;

[Annual Review 2010-2011](#) (link to new section below)

[Annual Review 2009-2010](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD%20Ann%20Rev%202010_for%20web.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/NWD%20Ann%20Rev%202010_for%20web.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD%20Ann%20Rev%202010_for%20web.pdf?OpenElement))

[Annual Review 2008-2009](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD_ReviewA4.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/NWD_ReviewA4.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD_ReviewA4.pdf?OpenElement))

[Annual Review 2007-2008](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/39951075.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/39951075.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/39951075.pdf?OpenElement))

[Annual Review 2006-2007](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD%20Annual%20Review%202006-2007%20for%20web.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/NWD%20Annual%20Review%202006-2007%20for%20web.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD%20Annual%20Review%202006-2007%20for%20web.pdf?OpenElement))

[Annual Review 2005-2006](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/Annual%20Review%202005-2006%20web%20version.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/Annual%20Review%202005-2006%20web%20version.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/Annual%20Review%202005-2006%20web%20version.pdf?OpenElement))

[Annual Review 2004-2005](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD_review%20final.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/NWD_review%20final.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/NWD_review%20final.pdf?OpenElement))

[Annual Review 2002-2004](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/AONB%20review1.pdf?OpenElement) (link to PDF - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/7.0/\\$FILE/AONB%20review1.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/7.0/$FILE/AONB%20review1.pdf?OpenElement))

North Wessex Downs Annual Review 2010-2011

Highlights of the year

- Distributed a record £58,365.41 to support 26 projects from our Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) which levered £157,604.09 of match funding. That's an injection of £215, 969.50 to AONB communities.
- Allocated £329,641.40 in LEADER funding to 14 projects – also the most successful year to date since the programme's launch in 2008.
- With RSPB, Natural England and other partners, launched the south east half of the North Wessex Downs Farmland Birds Project.
- Worked in partnership to initiate the £7.5 million 1SW cycling project which is making participating South West Protected Landscapes world class off-road cycling destinations.
- In partnership with South East Protected Landscapes, secured £990,000 from DEFRA for Stage 2 of our collaborative project, Our Land, to promote sustainable tourism.
- Responded with comments on 311 planning application consultations.
- Involved with and responded to eight planning appeals, all of which were decided in line with our comments.
- Contributed to 11 parish and town plans, including funding publication of two of them.
- Helped develop a template for walks leaflets in the North Wessex Downs, and funded production of 12 new community-led walks leaflets with information on local landscape and geology.
- Sponsored the revival of the Wiltshire County Show on the Marlborough Downs, in partnership with the National Farmers' Union, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Barbury Castle Estate.

Sections

- **Chairman's Foreword Statement from the Chairman of the Management Working Group**
- **Enhancing Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Management**
- **Conserving Natural Resources and Protecting the Historic Environment**
- **Encouraging Appropriate Development Supporting Communities**
- **Promoting Leisure and Tourism Opportunities**
- **National and Regional Partnerships**
- **Who's Who**
- **Financial Summary**

From Byron Carron, Chairman of the Council of Partners

Welcome to the annual review of the year from April 2010 to March 2011. It has been a year of transition in some important ways.

At the national level, the new Government decided to move sponsorship of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty from Natural England to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Accordingly our bid for grant support was made to Natural England for the last time in January 2011. Thanks in no small part to the enthusiastic support of the responsible Minister, Richard Benyon MP, the cut in AONBs' core funding announced during the year was lower than that for DEFRA as a whole. The North Wessex Downs played its part in securing this funding settlement through our Director's involvement in the National Association for AONBs' funding sub-group during the year. We continue to maintain and develop cordial relations with our friends at Natural England, indeed the smaller capacity of DEFRA means that Natural England staff are still the first point of contact. We are pleased that Natural England also continues to be a valued member of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners and the Management Working Group.

Although it could have been higher, the cut to our core central Government funding is still 21.6 per cent in cash terms between 2011 and 2015. The corresponding reduction in requested contributions from our local authority partners will do a little to ease the budgetary pressures they themselves are facing, and I am confident that the AONB's partnership structure stands it in good stead to weather the continuing financial storm.

Our Annual Forum was again a great success. About 120 people gathered at Hungerford Town Hall in October to hear Richard Benyon MP speak about his enthusiasm for AONBs. Howard Davies, Chief Executive of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), gave a perspective from the wider family of AONBs.

Special mention must go to the achievements of our Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) over the past year. I am delighted that the SDF, managed by Oliver Cripps, supported a record 26 projects. The £58,365.44 allocated in grants attracted £84,933.47 in cash match funding and voluntary and other contributions in kind worth a further £72,670.62. So every pound in grant yielded £2.70 in matching contributions. In 2011 we have celebrated five years since the SDF began. In those five years it has gone from strength to strength, and secured more than a million pounds' worth of benefits for the area. Oliver and the volunteer SDF Panel have worked hard to ensure that all projects clearly support the objectives of the AONB Management Plan, and we have helped build community fundraising capacity by working with applicants to secure as much additional funding as possible. I urge you read the SDF section of this report to see the sheer variety of projects supported over the year.

The year has seen some big changes to the AONB team and the partnership. My predecessor as Chairman, Sir Charles Nunneley, stepped down in the summer of 2010, and I would like to pay tribute to his unstinting efforts in support of the North Wessex Downs AONB for the past six years. We wish him well with his other interests. He is a hard act to follow. I was elected Chairman at the November Council of Partners meeting and formally took up the post in December.

Henry Oliver, who had been acting Director since his arrival with us in September 2009, was formally appointed Director in December 2010. In November we also welcomed Katie Wilson to the Team as our Communications Officer. I would like to thank the core team of Oliver Cripps, Liz Duquenoy, Caroline Kaneen, Andrew Lord, Henry Oliver and Katie Wilson. In addition my thanks go to LEADER Programme Manager Corinna Woodall and Diane Nicolle, who is employed by the RSPB as North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor for the Berks, Hants and Oxon parts of the AONB (complementing Sarah Blyth's work in Wiltshire under the Natural England-led South West Farmland Bird Initiative). I would also like to thank all those others who have contributed to the work of the AONB, whether as members of the Management Working Group, the Council of Partners, the Sustainable Development Fund Panel, the wider partnership or, although not technically part of the AONB, the LEADER Local Action Group. It would be invidious to mention individuals, but we are deeply grateful to you and hope you will long remain involved with the AONB.

It can be all too easy, in the midst of everything else, to lose sight of why we are here. The purpose of AONBs is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. We should never forget that we are entrusted with one of the finest landscapes in the country, nationally and internationally recognised as such. We have some of the best chalk grassland in Europe. In Savernake, we have a forest that was old when the New Forest was new. Our part of the Stonehenge/Avebury World Heritage Site is a place where 5,000 years of human history is clearly visible in the landscape. Lambourn and its environs are a centre of the racing industry second only to Newmarket. In addition, we also have sparkling chalk streams, sweeping views, rolling farmland under vast skies, beautiful villages, thriving towns, heaths, hedges, woods and lanes - all of these are the envy of the world. Conserving and enhancing all this means being interested in virtually every aspect of life: farming, nature conservation, tourism, planning, transport, water abstraction and use, industry, affordable housing, shops, local food, dark skies, highway clutter – you name it, it is our concern.

The AONB team have worked hard over the year to forge a realistic work plan from the wealth of strategies and other documents we have inherited. They have been quietly but steadily building the foundations for further work - not least looking at alternative sources of funding as our core resources shrink. We look to the future with a degree of trepidation, of course, but also with a determination and an enthusiasm founded on working to protect such a wonderful part of the world.

From Duncan Coe, Chairman of the Management Working Group

The North Wessex Downs is beyond doubt a spectacular landscape with much that appeals to our emotions. The gently rolling hills, the steep scarp slopes, the shallow chalk streams, the extensive wooded hilltops all add to the sentimental response that most of us experience in this landscape. However, as an archaeologist it has been my pleasure to look below the surface of the landscape, to think about what that landscape is and why it looks the way it does. Whilst rocks, soils and topography all contribute to how the landscape looks it is the human impact that we see most readily, even if we are unaware of that. There is no part of the North Wessex Downs that have not been affected by the hand of human kind.

Of course the North Wessex Downs has its fair share of the spectacular, the Avebury Henge and stone settings, the largest prehistoric man made mound at Silbury Hill, West Kennet and Waylands Smithy long barrows with their massive stone chambers, the now securely dated Bronze Age white horse at Uffington, the superb mosaics at the villa at Littlecote, the Wansdyke representing enormous human effort at a time of great change, the planned medieval market towns at Hungerford and Marlborough, the engineering achievement that is the Kennet and Avon canal, the grand country houses and their associated parklands at Tottenham House and Basildon Park. But these are only the tip of the iceberg. Out there in the landscape are many sites, monuments, features and artefacts that tell us about normal life and the everyday, each forming a small piece of the jigsaw that allows us to piece together how humans lived in the past and how they worked within and impacted upon the landscape.

What this evidence tells us more than anything is that change is part of the human story. Even in a landscape like the North Wessex Downs, where a feeling of permanence comes through much of what we see and experience, archaeology shows us that much of the current landscape is the product of events seen in the second half of the twentieth century. But that is just the most recent episode in a history of change that we can trace back over several thousand years. However, there is something new about the modern world that we need to acknowledge. Thanks to the growth of science, especially the natural and environmental sciences (including archaeology) we now understand our world better than any previous generation of human society. We know what the consequences are of our actions in ways that could not have been dreamt of by our ancestors. In the past change occurred with little or no thought as to its consequences, the main drivers being short term economic, social or religious considerations. Despite the common myths of ancient human societies being more in touch with the land and their environment there are many examples in the archaeological and historic record of how ill informed decisions have tipped the environmental balance and led to major catastrophes. These are lessons we need to understand more fully and that we forget at our peril.

So we have no excuse for failing to understand what sustainability really means. It means that we all, collectively or as individuals, should appreciate the consequences of the decisions we take every day. Whilst economic activity continues to be part of the sustainability equation we should not lose sight of the potential consequences of unfettered growth. The North Wessex Downs is a special place and our understanding of this landscape continues to evolve, but in thinking about the future, whether it is changing

agricultural practices, adapting to climate change, encouraging more business activity or debating the need for housing growth, we need the tools to understand the long term impact of those decisions. Perhaps more importantly we need to ensure those tools and the information they produce are used appropriately, ensuring a truly sustainable future for the landscape and for the communities that treasure it.

Enhancing Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Management

Chalk grassland, ancient woodland, chalk streams and rivers, rare flora and fauna, and arable farmland managed for conservation are just some of the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs. Ensuring that these characteristic habitats and species are conserved and enhanced, whilst supporting and developing land-based enterprises that deliver a wide of public benefits, is fundamental for the AONB.

North Wessex Farmland Birds Project

The aim is to encourage farmers and land managers in the AONB to sign up to Environmental Stewardship schemes to boost key populations of nationally declining farmland bird species. The project is divided into two, one operating in the south east and the other in the south west. There is a Farmland Bird Advisor for each project, both being employed by RSPB with other funding coming from partner organisations. Those involved in funding or supporting the projects include Natural England, RSPB, North Wessex AONB, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

The south west update

The south west half of the North Wessex Farmland Bird Project is one of four similar projects operating across the South West region of England, under the umbrella of the South West Farmland Bird initiative. This collaborative partnership began in November 2008 and operates across the Cotswolds AONB, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and the western (Wiltshire) side of the North Wessex Downs. A carefully researched package of options within Environmental Stewardship is promoted to farmers as the Farmland Bird Package, with advice available to help farmers put these options into practice with the aim of stopping the decline of farmland birds. The initiative has been replicated in several other parts of the country including the south east part of the North Wessex Downs.

Sarah Blyth is the Farmland Bird Advisor for the south west half of the North Wessex Farmland Bird project and, since its inception, Sarah has advised on over 12,000ha of farmland in the Wiltshire part of the North Wessex Downs. There are now approximately 400ha of arable options under Environmental Stewardship specifically targeted for farmland birds and 25 live Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements that have had input from the project. The project has dealt with around 200 farmers and has made 65 individual site visits.

Contact: Sarah Blyth on 07818 807480 or sarah.blythe@rspb.org.uk

The south east update

Diane Nicolle is the North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor for the south east half of the project, based at the AONB offices in Hungerford. The project began in April 2010, with a formal launch at an event for advisors, farmers and their agents in October 2010 in Compton, Berkshire. This had a good turnout from farmers in the area as well as representatives from farming and conservation groups including the National Farmers' Union (NFU) and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

During the first year of the project, Diane visited over 20 farms giving advice on the Farmland Bird Package of options in Environmental Stewardship. These included farms already in Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and considering renewal, those thinking about Higher Level Stewardship and farms not in any environmental stewardship scheme at all, with several visits a direct result of the launch event. A newsletter was produced and sent to all local farmers and the provision of advice and further events continued during 2011.

Contact: Diane Nicolle on 07540 013152 or Diane.Nicolle@rspb.org.uk

Downland special project

Funded by Natural England and Hampshire County Council under the Downland Heritage Initiative, we commissioned Hampshire FWAG to encourage farming operations in the North Hampshire Downs to sign up to Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreements. Farms were visited throughout the year and grants were provided for fencing to encourage grazing management of grassland.

Comments on forestry/woodland management plans

Comments were made following consultation on new woodland planting through the Forestry Commission. We seek to ensure that new planting occurs in places and in a manner than complements or restores existing landscape character and avoids unsuitable locations, for example on the tops of open downland.

Forestry and woodland management

Aware of the difficulty that the public have in finding suppliers of good quality firewood, the Seasoned Timber Company received a LEADER grant to acquire forestry processing equipment that enabled it to offer high quality, dry wood for open fires and wood burning stoves. As well as growing the business, the project also encourages more active woodland management since timber is sourced from local estates, farms and woods.

Tom Owen Woodland Management is being helped to expand into forestry work from arboriculture. A new forestry tractor, trailer crane and chipper funded through LEADER have equipped the business to tackle management of woods in Hampshire.

EJM Tree Services was finding its services much in demand so a LEADER grant enabled the business to purchase a bespoke forestry trailer to help them work and manage more woods in the AONB.

Nutrient management

Ensuring nutrients are only spread where they are required saves money and helps protect the environment. RN Edwards received LEADER funding towards the purchase and installation of two Greenstar SF2 Global Positioning Systems for two tractors to enable more precise nutrient management.

An environmental solution to an industrial problem

In the words of West Berkshire Brewery owner Dave Maggs, a grant from LEADER enabled the brewery to provide an 'environmental solution to an industrial problem.' With technical advice from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, a reedbed was created to filter brewery effluent, allowing clean water to be returned to the catchment. Topsoil was removed and

local wildflower grower Charles Flower of Flower Farms advised on seeding the bare chalk banks to create new chalk grassland habitat.

Reducing barriers to effective environmental education

Understanding the human impact on ecosystems is difficult without access to the natural world and to the local environment. The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust therefore led an application to provide funding for a mobile Environmental Education Officer. An SDF grant helped to purchase equipment, field guides and maps that will be used to deliver events for adults and young people in the North Wessex Downs. More on [Wildlife Trust Education Officer](#) (link).

Hampshire Country Learning also received an SDF grant to enable several hundred Key Stage Two children from the North Wessex Downs to visit local working farms. They were able to experience how and where their food is grown and how the countryside is managed to ensure that it is sustainable. More on [Countryside Education Project](#) (link).

Help for barn owls

An SDF grant helped Hampshire FWAG build 20 barn owl nest boxes and train volunteers to install, check and maintain them. The boxes are to be located on agricultural land in the Bourne Valley, to encourage existing populations to spread along the River Test. More on [Barn Owl Project](#) (link).

Arable plant conservation

According to the Wiltshire Botanical Society, arable plants represent the most critically endangered of our country's flora and are possibly the least studied. An SDF grant helped them to record cornfield annuals at important sites identified in the AONB so that effective conservation measures could be implemented. Among other excitements they found what could be the only native population of cornflowers in Wiltshire. More on [Arable Plant Surveys](#) (link).

Improving public access and enjoyment of an SSSI

A public events programme including river dipping, wildflower walks and an evening of bat-detecting were all on the agenda at a popular wildlife site owned by the Town and Manor of Hungerford. The events took place at Freeman's Marsh, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) near Hungerford, thanks to a grant from our SDF which enabled the provision of site information points and the training of volunteer wardens aimed at educating local dog-walkers to protect vulnerable ground-nesting birds from disturbance. More on [Freeman's Marsh Access Project](#) (link).

Conserving Natural Resources and Protecting the Historic Environment

A community's health and well-being is closely linked to the quality of our air, water, soils and biological resources. Understanding how they interact and work as a whole involves taking into account social, economic and environmental objectives but it is also important to remember that the North Wessex Downs has been shaped for centuries by the changing patterns of land use and settlement. We must work to protect, manage and promote both the vital natural features and the ancient man-made landscapes that characterise the North Wessex Downs.

Kennet Energy Project and micro hydropower

We are keen to identify and support forms of renewable energy generation that are compatible with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape. We have resisted a series of proposed large wind turbines within and affecting the setting of the AONB, but micro-hydroelectric generation is a more promising option.

Following the support we have given the Goring and Streatley Sustainability Group's work on a proposed turbine on the River Thames, we have built close links to an enterprise with local connections, the Archimedes Screw Company (TASC). We convened a meeting of Natural England, the Environment Agency, Action for the River Kennet and TASC to explore the acceptability of a series of small turbines along the River Kennet. Key requirements arising from the River Kennet Water Level Management Plan were identified and discussed and TASC has now drafted its Kennet Energy Plan and is continuing work to secure Environment Agency approval for its turbines.

Axford borehole abstraction licence response

Over-abstraction of water from chalk streams is a serious environmental problem in the North Wessex Downs. One important factor is the continued abstraction of more water than is environmentally acceptable from a borehole at Axford in the Kennet Valley, largely to supply households in Swindon. This water is not then returned to the river.

The River Kennet is one of England's most important and valuable chalk streams and much of the river's length is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). SSSI condition was assessed as "unfavourable" by Natural England in both 2002 and 2008. In both cases water abstraction was cited as one of the reasons. The Environment Agency stated that flow in the Kennet between Marlborough and Hungerford "does not support good ecological potential". The Kennet is also designated by WWF as one of its Rivers on the Edge, threatened by over-abstraction and the effects of climate change.

In 2008 Thames Water was granted a temporary additional abstraction licence for three years on the understanding that it would secure an alternative supply to reduce overall abstraction. However, having made no progress on securing the alternative, Thames Water applied for renewal of its licence for additional abstraction during the year. The AONB objected to the application and urged that, if renewed, the licence should not be for a further three years. Regrettably, the Environment Agency renewed the licence until 2014.

Water companies are not currently permitted to raise the necessary funding to address over-abstraction from a levy on water users and the Environment Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Fund is too small to address the competing demands. Our partners Action for the River Kennet (ARK) are pressing for this impasse to be addressed in the forthcoming Water White Paper.

Avebury World Heritage Site Steering Committee

We attended meetings of the Avebury World Heritage Site Steering Group alongside English Nature, the National Trust, Wiltshire Council, parish councillors and other stakeholders in this amazing place. We also assisted with work on the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Woodland Strategy. We continue to work closely with the World Heritage Site Officer in discussing particular planning applications both inside and within the setting of the Avebury World Heritage Site.

Church restoration

As part of an extensive and ongoing programme of works, the Parochial Church Council received a small LEADER grant to help restore precious 13th century and Victorian windows in the listed St Michael and All Angels' Church at Letcombe Basset. Specialist glass and leadwork was required to conserve these windows for future generations to enjoy.

Ugly Victorian cement render was choking Boxford Church, a listed building, until a LEADER grant helped remove it and restore the external wall with breathable lime mortar. The grant also helped to refurbish and reorganise the internal space to provide adaptable space in the north aisle as well as a new kitchen, toilets and vestry. An unexpected bonus was the discovery of an extremely rare Saxon window which a swiftly approve grant from our SDF then helped to preserve. More on [Saxon Window at Boxford](#) (link).

Improving access to a chalk stream

Access to a chalk stream restoration site in Marlborough was made possible thanks to help from our SDF fund. Together with match funding from Biffaward and some funding of their own, Action for the River Kennet were also able to build a boardwalk and seating for local people to enjoy the Kennet chalk stream at Stonebridge Lane.

New bus service linking Avebury and Stonehenge

Wiltshire Heritage Museum was awarded an SDF grant to run a pilot bus service, the Henge Hopper, linking the Museum with Stonehenge, Avebury and the associated archaeological locations that lie between the two parts of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is hoped that this service will encourage the significant number of international visitors to explore the wider countryside of the North Wessex Downs AONB without a car and reduce the pressure on these two iconic sites. The bus will also benefit local businesses and provide a link for rural residents.

Website and art workshops to celebrate Paul Nash and the Wittenham Clumps

Renowned English artist Paul Nash (1889-1946) wrote of his discovery of the Wittenham Clumps in 1911, calling it a "beautiful English country". The Clumps, part of the Sinodun Hills in Oxfordshire at the north-eastern tip of the North Wessex Downs, became a major inspiration for him and he returned to paint them many times during his life. Our SDF supported local artists Christopher Baines and Anna Dillon in creating a new website and running Nash-inspired art workshops for adults and children to celebrate the centenary of

Paul Nash's connection with the Wittenham Clumps. The workshops were held as part of the celebrations around the change of name by the Northmoor Trust, that cares for the Clumps, to the Earth Trust. More on [Paul Nash and the Wittenham Clumps](#) (link).

Encouraging Appropriate Development

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a sparsely populated landscape with open, uninhabited uplands retaining a strong sense of remoteness and tranquillity. Attractive villages nestle in river valleys and low-lying land. Meeting the local economic and housing needs of AONB communities is vital to the long-term sustainability of the landscape but there is a need to manage development pressures with great sensitivity both within and in the setting of the AONB. The aim, never easy, is to reconcile long-term economic and social viability with conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the North Wessex Downs.

Pre-application consultations

We regularly met with developers at the pre-application stage and commented on draft Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment work to ensure the AONB Management Plan, Position Statements and local and national AONB guidance were implemented wherever possible.

Planning application consultations

We responded with comments on 311 planning application consultations and in the majority of cases decisions were made in accordance with established AONB guidance. This is supported by a lack of applications that were challenged on appeal based on AONB grounds.

Planning appeals

We have responded to and been involved with eight planning appeals, all of which were decided in our favour. Most Inspectors have given very supportive consideration to the statutory protection of AONBs and our Management Plan. Involvement in appeals has variously involved written submissions, to attendance at Hearings and supporting Planning Officers in assembling their evidence for Public Inquiries.

Parish and community planning

From attending meetings to detailed discussions to consultation responses, we have contributed in variety of ways to the following parish and community plans: Aldbourne Community Plan, Bucklebury Parish Plan, East Garston Parish Plan, Fyfield and West Overton Parish Landscape Plan, Hungerford Plan, Lambourn Parish Plan, Marlborough and Pewsey Community Area Plans, and Yattendon Parish Plan.

Via our SDF we also helped with the production of both the [Beedon Parish Plan](#) (link to SDF project) and the [Firilsham Parish Plan](#) (link to SDF project).

Position statements

We started to develop a series of documents that state the position of the AONB regarding planning and development. They are intended to guide policy makers in the decision making process and to assist in the preparation of planning applications.

Published in January 2011, the [Position Statement on Setting](#) (link to statement on web) informs local planning authorities, landowners, applicants, local communities and other

interested parties regarding proposals for development outside the boundary but within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Draft Position Statements on Housing and Renewable Energy have been prepared and are about to be released subject to a final round of consultation, with more planned.

Statutory Authority Consultations

Statutory bodies from energy, drainage and highway authorities have a statutory duty to consult the North Wessex Downs AONB on any future work. This is the case whether or not they need planning permission or the work can be carried out under permitted development within the AONB. We commented accordingly on power line and sewage pipe replacements and works to the M4 and A34, two main roads running through the AONB.

Core Strategies, Minerals and Waste Consultations, and Local Transport Plans

A significant amount of time was spent during the year engaging with emerging Core Strategies, including those of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, Swindon and Wiltshire. Overall, although there are often many references to AONB designation there is little real appreciation that by law and in the eyes of the Government AONBs carry the highest level of landscape protection and accordingly the approach to development within them should be different (otherwise AONBs would just be the same as all land outside them).

At a time when the Government is in the process of making changes to the planning system, a robust approach to the protection of the AONB is vital and this should be reflected in our associated Core Strategies. Poor decisions made now on Core Strategies could result in damage to the landscape of the AONB that may never be repaired.

We also commented in response to Minerals and Waste Consultations and Local Transport Plans in Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire.

Affordable housing

We provided an SDF grant and worked with the Community Council for Berkshire to host a seminar to explore possibilities for providing rural affordable housing to meet local need in the AONB. Arlene Kersley of CCB reported, "It encouraged real dialogue between landowners, housing providers and local authorities' housing and planning officers". More on [Affordable Housing Event](#) (link).

Supporting Communities

Enabling communities to develop sustainably by stimulating economic prosperity and local culture whilst at the same time nurturing respect for the landscape is one of our most important roles. The AONB's own Sustainable Development Fund and the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme have been particularly active in this area and have both had their most successful year to date.

Hampstead Norreys Community Shop

The village of Hampstead Norreys had been without a shop for 11 years before local residents took matters into their own hands. A LEADER grant was awarded last year to help construct a village community shop out of the existing farmyard and buildings. This year, a further grant supported the extensive fit-out of the shop. The community shop now provides a social hub for villagers and the opportunity to buy good local food without needing a car, and acts as an additional outlet for local Berkshire farmers and producers, helping support their businesses.

Morrell Room Restoration

The Morrell Room Committee received a LEADER grant for the modernisation and conservation of their listed community building in Streatley. An old stage area was removed and more flexible space created, as well as improving the disabled access and facilities in the hall.

Blacksmith's craft

LEADER helped blacksmith Nick Peppitt of the Hollington Forge near Highclere to mechanise some of his labour intensive processes. Purchase of a power hammer and a roller mill has not only helped to speed up production but also enabled him to create and design new products for sale at country shows and garden centres. The new machinery has also helped in the restoration of the Anne Boleyn Gate at Hampton Court Palace.

New facilities for Yattendon Butchers

Rare breeds producer and butcher Mark Dyer needed new facilities to upgrade and modernise the traditional village butchery in Yattendon. The LEADER grant helped to fund the insertion of a coldroom & meat preparation area in a traditional building, as well as providing some new equipment to help add value to this local produce.

Three Trees Farm direct sales

Producing high quality livestock on the family farm near Chiseldon, this LEADER project funded the building and equipping of a specialist meat preparation room and coldstore as well as some help with a new website selling their home-produced meat.

Roly & Camilla's Little Wittenham Lamb

A small investment from LEADER has enabled these lamb specialists, tenants of the Earth Trust at Wittenham Clumps, to buy equipment to sell their produce at local farmers' markets and at their special open farm days and events. Particularly keen to welcome people to their farm, they also acquired a canopy for a tractor trailer to enable people to learn about the farm or volunteer on conservation projects in all weathers.

LEADER Forum

Held in February 2011, this new event was organised by the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme Team with support from the North Wessex Downs AONB Team. It was targeted at farmers, foresters, rural businesses and communities based within the AONB seeking funding of up to £50,000 to develop their businesses or provide facilities for the benefit of their local area. Guest Clare Balding spoke passionately about the landscape and used her expert interviewing skills to draw out real experiences from three very different LEADER grantees. Clare dug deep to find out how they found the LEADER process, what difference they made locally, and reveal some useful advice for budding enterprises.

Smarter Choices Roadshow

A roadshow demonstrating sustainable transport options enabled visitors to learn about reducing their family carbon footprint and using more active methods of travel. Funded by our SDF, the Effective Initiatives Community Interest Company visited several schools in the Marlborough Area as well as visiting Marlborough High Street as part of Climate Day.

Greening Hermitage Campaign

The Greening Campaign is an innovative national campaign to help motivate people to reduce their energy consumption and therefore lower their personal and community carbon footprint. The local Greening Hermitage group received SDF funding to help them put on a series of event and community activities aimed at encouraging all households to implement ideas which save energy in the home and at work. More on [Greening Hermitage](#) (link).

Improved allotment facilities

A brand new allotment site was created at [Beenham](#) (link to Beenham Allotments), a borehole was installed at the [Marsh Lane, Hungerford](#) (link to Marsh Lane Allotment) site and repairs were made at [Fairfield Garden Allotments, also in Hungerford](#) (link to Fairfield Garden Allotments) thanks to funding from our SDF.

Guest speakers at local CPRE AGMs

AONB staff were guest speakers at the annual general meetings of the West Berkshire, Swindon & North Wilts and Wiltshire groups of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). The presentations explained the structure and remit of the North Wessex Downs AONB and some of the pressures faced by the landscape.

Chute byways TRO inquiry

We supported proposals to remove motorised traffic from historic byways across the North Wessex Downs. In one case we submitted evidence in support of a proposal by Wiltshire Council to make a permanent Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on byways in the Chute Forest landscape character area. The byways in question are in a tranquil area and well used by local people for walking and riding, but have been affected by motorised traffic from recreational use by trail bikes in particular. Our Director appeared as an expert witness for the local community at the ensuing non-statutory public inquiry. The Inspector recommended that a TRO be imposed on the central, most historically interesting, section of the route to exclude all motorised use.

Promoting Leisure and Tourism Opportunities

Encouraging local people and visitors to explore and enjoy the area is an important aspect of the AONB Partnership's work. We work to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to access and enjoy the AONB whilst minimising the impacts of visitors. Key to this is promoting a recreation and tourism sector that is well managed, sustainable and adds value to the local economy whilst respecting the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs.

Groundbreaking sustainable tourism project

In partnership with South East Protected Landscapes, we secured £990,000 from DEFRA for Stage 2 of our collaborative project to promote sustainable tourism. *Our Land* is an innovative public-private initiative to develop and market tourism that celebrates and underpins our finest landscapes across seven AONBs and two National Parks in south east England. Visit www.our-land.co.uk

1SW off-road cycling project

1SW is a project worth £7.5 million which aims to make participating South West Protected Landscapes world-class off-road cycling destinations. Legally accessible off-road routes across the North Wessex Downs AONB will shortly be surveyed and classified according to International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) grades. Visitors to the interactive [1SW website](http://www.1sw.org.uk) (link to www.1sw.org.uk) will be able to make an informed choice of routes based on their ability, by putting together black, blue, red and green sections of trail. It also offers a useful tool for rights of way managers to communicate information about particular problems or changes to trails and gather feedback.

The next stage of the project is to put the cycling infrastructure in place by collaborating with local businesses and cycling groups. This could include training for cycle guides, installing bike wash facilities at a local pub, or producing information on cycling opportunities around the local area.

Publication of *UP! on the North Wessex Downs 2011*

This 48-page edition featured tranquil ways to explore the AONB including walks around white horses and cycle routes along the canal. It also contained the latest news from the area, a pull-out calendar of events and an expanded Local Products Directory.

The new A5 format enabled wider distribution to encourage visitors to and within the area. New distribution channels included key motorway service stations and hotels in the area as well as Paddington Station. All local Tourist Information Centres, MPs and Parish Councils were written to personally to encourage active engagement in promoting the magazine.

E-bulletin

Six editions, and a special Christmas edition, have been sent out throughout the year on a bi-monthly basis promoting things to do and see within the AONB as well as the latest news from the team and our partnership. Work on a new template to aid distribution and improve the look of the e-bulletin began.

Wiltshire County Show revival

We supported the revival of the Wiltshire County Show in July after a gap of 44 years, working with the Wiltshire branch of the National Farmers' Union, local land managers and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Taking place on the Barbury Castle Estate high on the Marlborough Downs on the last day of the Barbury International Horse Trials, the aim of the show was to highlight the role of farming and food production in Wiltshire. The AONB helped with organisation and publicity, and we arranged for a local stonemason and master thatcher to show off their skills beside our own stand. We also sponsored the prize in the Farm Factor competition: every primary school in Wiltshire and Swindon was invited to make a three-dimensional model of a farm animal or farm scene. Entries were judged at the Show by Devizes MP Claire Perry. The first prize, a school visit to the Natural History Museum in London, was won by Class 6 at Burbage Primary School.

The Royal County of Berkshire Show

Held at the Newbury County Showground in September, the Show provides a national platform for farmers to highlight the role of farming and food production in and around Newbury. With over 65,000 visitors during the weekend, this event proved an excellent opportunity for the team to promote the North Wessex Downs AONB and highlight the LEADER programme (link to www.northwessexleader.org.uk)

The Hungerford Food Festival

AONB and LEADER staff were on hand at this food festival held in October at the John O'Gaunt School to encourage children (of all ages!) to have fun trying their hand at 'apple slinking'. We decided to use our locally sourced apples to give the slinky a try, and we had plenty of children peeling, coring and eating their apples whilst we talked to the parents about the North Wessex Downs AONB. The Festival was held over a week this year, with a film, local pub themed evenings, Hungerchef and Masterchef competitions, culminating in a Fayre on Sunday showcasing local produce from over 40 exhibitors. We helped revive the Festival last year with a grant from our Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) (link to Sustainable Development page).

A template for walks in the North Wessex Downs

We worked with the Berkshire Geoconservation Group (BGC) and the community of East Garston to develop a template for publishing walks in the AONB. A leaflet exploring the influence of chalk geology around East Garston was created and then the same format was used to create another leaflet for two scenic walks around Brightwalton (insert link - [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUSectionsHome/8?OpenDocument](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUSectionsHome/8?OpenDocument)). A set of countryside walks encouraging the use of public transport has also now been published by the AONB. The ten easy routes can be reached by bus from the Swindon and North East Wiltshire area and take in some of the most spectacular landscapes in the AONB.

We are using the template to help identify and create many other local walks leaflets in the North Wessex Downs. It will also make it easier and cheaper for more communities to produce new or revised walks leaflets to help people enjoy and understand the landscape.

Stonebridge Meadow Management Plan

Through our SDF we have supported a series of projects by Action for the River Kennet (ARK) at Stonebridge Lane in Marlborough. During the year, having launched a public appeal, ARK bought Stonebridge Meadow, which borders the River Kennet, jointly with Marlborough Town Council (MTC). We have deepened and extended our partnership with ARK and MTC by joining the management committee in an advisory role. We have also provided funding to expedite surveys and development of a management plan for the meadow. Excitingly, initial work has identified a number of black poplar trees (both male and female) on the site, and we hope to conserve and propagate these through a specific project if resources can be found.

Improved campsite facilities

A new shower block for a campsite was constructed with LEADER funding at Wyke Down Farm, Picketts Piece near Andover. This upgraded the existing facilities and enabled the site to run at full capacity.

Pewsey Walking Festival

Walkers and runners aged from seven to seventy celebrated the beauty and tranquillity of the Marlborough Downs and Pewsey Vale as they took part in the Pewsey Walking Festival this year. The Wiltshire Long Distance Walking Association were able to expand their annual challenge and reach a more diverse audience with the assistance of an SDF grant.

Ridgeway Trailblaze

The 'Trailblaze', made possible by a contribution from our SDF, is an innovative event where runners use a timing chip to record their times at checkpoints along the Ridgeway National Trail. This means that entrants can complete the course whenever suits them best, and has a far lesser impact on the trail surface than a single mass participation event. The Chilterns AONB has supported the same thing along the eastern part of the Ridgeway Path. More on [Ridgeway Trailblaze](#) (link to Ridgeway Trailblaze)

Barbury Castle Visitor Centre

We supported 'Breathe Barbury', a Community Interest Company, with guidance, training and an SDF grant towards developing a business plan for operating the new visitor centre at Barbury Castle. More on [Barbury Castle Visitor Centre](#) (link to Barbury Castle Visitor Centre).

East Woodhay Boardwalk

Access to a popular right of way near Woolton Hill in Hampshire has been improved with the construction of boardwalk thanks to help from our SDF. More on [East Woodhay Boardwalk](#) (link)

National and Regional Partnerships

The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) acts on behalf of the AONB family to promote the interests of our Protected Landscapes and the communities, nature and culture within them. We have worked hard to support the NAAONB and ensure that our needs are represented at the national level as well as working with a wide range of regional initiatives.

South East and East South West Protected Landscapes

We worked to promote best practice in management of AONBs and National Parks and helped to more effectively and efficiently influence regional and national decision-making by working closely with our partners in the South East and East and South West Protected Landscapes groups, including attending Leadership Group and Planning Officers' meetings. Our partnership work with these forums this year enabled us to secure a share in over £1million funding for protected landscapes in the south (see [Promoting Leisure and Tourism Opportunities](#) – link to that web page).

NAAONB Annual Conference

We attended the 12th annual conference of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) in Hythe. The conference was hosted by NAAONB, the Kent Downs, Surrey Hills and High Weald AONBs and the Parc Naturel Regional (PNR) des Caps et Marais d'Opale in France. It was a genuinely international affair, with plenary sessions addressed in English, French and Welsh and field visits on both sides of the Channel. The overall approach of the Conference was to demonstrate, in the International Year of Biodiversity, that the landscape approach taken by AONBs and PNRs supports biodiversity as well as many other objectives - indeed that taking a landscape approach is the best way to conserve and increase biodiversity.

NAAONB Funding Sub-group

We joined the sub-group established by the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) to consider future funding arrangements for the family of AONBs in England. A series of detailed discussions produced a collective position that we were then able to present to the new Government as representing our preference for future central government sponsorship.

National Planning Policy Framework

On behalf of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) we drafted and collated a response from the AONB family to the Government's call for suggestions of what should be in the then forthcoming draft National Planning Policy Framework.

Position statements on photovoltaic installations

Following the production of our own draft Renewable Energy Position Statement, we also assisted with the NAAONB draft [Position Statement on PV installations](#) (link).

South West Protected Landscapes training day

We hosted the annual regional training day for staff from the South West Protected Landscapes on 13th May at the Elm Farm Organic Research Centre in Hamstead Marshall – technically just in the South East. After a series of workshops, staff led a walk around the SDF-supported farm trail and a bike ride to show our visitors a little of the area.

Regional Steering Groups

We supported a wide range of partner alliances and initiatives across the four counties of the North Wessex Downs and beyond. This included staff attending the steering groups for Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Partnership Steering Group, Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, Berkshire Nature Conservation Forum, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Education project, North Wessex Farmland Birds Initiative Steering Groups (SW/SE) and Wiltshire FWAG Steering Group.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Forum

The Forum meets annually to discuss issues addressed through the work of the Council of Partners and the AONB Management Team. In October 2010, the Forum was held at Hungerford Town Hall and we were delighted that Richard Benyon MP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries, accepted our invitation to be our guest speaker.

The Forum comprises representatives from organisations and groups within the North Wessex Downs AONB, including: farmers, landowners, parish and town councillors, members of wildlife, conservation and history groups, community action groups, ramblers, horse-riders and others. Forum attendees nominate candidates to serve as Advisory Members on the Council of Partners.

Who's Who

The North Wessex Downs AONB Team, Management Working Group and Council of Partners between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2011:

The Council of Partners

The Council of Partners met on 22 July and 3 November 2010, and 10 March 2011. The members during this time were:

Chairman

Sir Charles Nunneley (until July 2010)

Mr Byron Carron (from November 2010)

Funding Partners

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

Hampshire County Council

Oxfordshire County Council

South Oxfordshire District council

Swindon Borough Council

Test Valley Borough Council

Vale of White Horse District Council

West Berkshire Council

Wiltshire Council

Natural England

Representing the interests of Community and Parish

CCB

Committee for Rural Hampshire

Friends of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys

Vacancy

Representing the interests of Farming and Rural Business

Axis Farming

Country Land and Business Association

Forestry Commission

National Farmers Union

Representing the interests of Historic Environment

Council for British Archaeology

English Heritage

Representing the interests of Nature Conservation

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Action for the River Kennet

Representing the interests of Recreation and Rural Tourism

Friends of the Ridgeway

Vacancy

Find out more about the responsibilities of the Council of Partners. (link to [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/4.1?OpenDocument](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/4.1?OpenDocument))

Management Working Group

The Management Working Group met on 22 April, 3 June, 19 August, 30 September and 16 December 2010, and 27 January 2011. The complete list of members during this time were:

Duncan Coe (*Chairman*)
Cllr Andrew Bennett
Sir Charles Nunneley (until July 2010) (*ex officio*)
Byron Carron (from November 2011)
Henry Oliver
Steve Russell (to December 2010)
Richard Broadhead (from March 2011)
Christopher Boreham
Alison Cross
Rupert Ashby (to April 2010)
Ben Underwood (to September 2010)
Tim Brock (from March 2011)
Vicky Fletcher
Imogen Parker
Moira Hankinson

Find out more about the responsibilities of the Management Working Group. (link to New page – Management Working Gro

up when it is created!)

The AONB Team

The AONB Team supports and works with the Management Working Group and the Council of Partners. Find out more about the current AONB Team (link to [http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/\\$LUcontent/1.2?OpenDocument](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/1.2?OpenDocument)).

Financial Summary

Income

Natural England	£	299,651.00
Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	£	5,351.03
Hampshire County Council	£	13,083.28
Oxfordshire County Council	£	8,918.39
South Oxfordshire District Council	£	5,351.03
Swindon Borough Council	£	5,351.03
Test Valley Borough Council	£	5,351.03
Vale of White Horse District Council	£	5,351.03
West Berkshire Council	£	13,083.28
Wiltshire Council	£	27,343.78
Balance brought forward	£	7,510.60
Total	£	396,345.48

Expenditure

Salaries (including Benefits)	£	215,705.94
Training Courses & Conferences	£	2,518.00
Recruitment & Relocation	£	36.90
Accommodation	£	45,930.73
IT	£	4,326.29
Projects	£	34,390.00
Communications	£	6,558.50
UP! Publication	£	10,745.00
Forum and Partnership	£	3,179.95
Promotion, PR & Events	£	1,583.27
Other General Office Costs	£	2,189.11
Partnership and National Working	£	600.00
Sustainable Development Fund	£	58,549.88
Total	£	386,313.57

Net underspend to be carried forward to 2011-2012

£ **5,727.70**