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Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) E-Bulletin January 2011 – Issue 9

Welcome to Issue 9 of the Malvern Hills AONB e-Bulletin. Firstly, the AONB Unit would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Summarised below are some key pieces of work that have been taking place in and around the Malvern Hills AONB. Please forward this email on to anyone else who may be interested.

Horse guidance document now available

A new guidance document on 'Keeping Horses in the Landscape' has just been produced by the AONB Partnership. The guidance aims to make horse owners and land managers more aware of their local landscape, encouraging good practice in a range of topics from choosing grass mixtures to landscape sensitive fencing. The work is based on a two-year study funded by the South East England Development Agency. A copy of the guidance document can be downloaded from the guidance section on the Malvern Hills AONB website:

<http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/guidance.html>

The conservation of Traditional Orchards

Many traditional orchards in the AONB are managed neither for fruit nor for wildlife and only remain standing by default. Following the completion earlier in the year of a survey of 25 traditional orchards the AONB Partnership has been considering how best to help conserve this valuable habitat. During the latter part of 2010 staff in the AONB Unit have been exploring the potential to develop a large, externally funded orchard conservation project in conjunction with colleagues in partner bodies and with interested individuals. We would be grateful to hear from those who might be interested in such a project and/or who have local knowledge on this subject which they could share with us.

A Landscape Strategy for the Malvern Hills AONB

Draft landscape character guidelines for the AONB have now been produced. The guidelines aim to bring information on a number of different themes (including landscape character, biodiversity and the historic environment) into a single place to help inform future management of the area. The contents of the guidelines have been informed by Natural England's work to develop draft Integrated Objectives for the Malvern Hills National Character Area (NCA). In this way it is hoped that the AONB guidelines and the NCA objectives will complement each other. A workshop was also held earlier this month to discuss the AONB guidelines and add more local

flavour to them. Please contact the AONB Partnership office if you would like more information on the guidelines which will be available shortly.

Burying overhead electricity cables

Work to bury overhead electricity lines at St Wulstan's Local Nature Reserve has recently been completed. This will help to create a more pleasurable experience for the many users of the reserve which is managed by Worcestershire County Council. The AONB Partnership is waiting to hear from Central Networks about 15 other schemes that have been proposed for 'undergrounding' in the area. Please get in touch if you feel that there is an electricity cable (11kv or 33kv only) near you that that is detrimental to the beauty of the AONB.

Sustainable Development Fund Projects

This year the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund has grant aided 13 projects to the tune of £53,000. Whilst all of the projects are interesting, two are particularly unusual and reflect locally distinctive features in the AONB. The first concerns the Malvern gas lamps which are listed structures and a valued part of the local heritage. Unfortunately these lamps are costly to run and maintain and so are under increasing financial scrutiny in the current economic climate. A group of volunteers in Malvern Wells has been awarded an SDF grant to develop a replacement light source that runs off light-emitting diodes. Proof of concept is nearing completion and has shown that power consumption and maintenance bills can be drastically reduced. The second project also uses electricity, this time to help cyclists and would-be cyclists to overcome the Malvern Hills. Colwall Greener received a grant to purchase two electric bikes which can be loaned out to allow local people to 'try before they buy' this form of sustainable transport. The scheme has run throughout the summer and has demonstrated that the bikes can indeed cope with the challenge posed by the Malvern Hills. People within the Malvern Hills AONB who would like to test an electric bike should contact Robin Coates at Colwall Greener, (robin@robincoates.com).

Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants

Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants are designed to assist those landowners who fall outside the larger agri-environment support schemes but who wish to conserve important local habitats and landscape features. £6,000 of grants have been awarded this year for coppicing, hedge laying, hedge and orchard planting, and the creation of a mother orchard. The latter project involves grafting old local varieties of pear and apple tree onto modern root stocks which then act as a reserve for the reproduction of these varieties. Those interested in obtaining such varieties should contact the AONB Partnership office.

Changes in AONB Partnership funding

It has recently been announced that central government funding to AONB Partnerships in 2011/12 will reduce by 5.4% as part of an overall reduction of 21.5% to be achieved by 2014/15. It has also been confirmed that central government resources and responsibility for the funding and strategic oversight of AONBs will transfer from Natural England to Defra.

If you do not wish to be on the mailing list for future e-Bulletins please feel free to contact the Malvern Hills AONB Office by email on aonb@worcestershire.gov.uk and we will remove you from the list. Further information on the AONB and the work of the AONB Partnership can be found at <http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/>