

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2016/17



Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the annual review for the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, covering the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017. I took over as Chairman of the AONB Joint Advisory Committee from John Raine in November 2016 and I wish to extend my warmest thanks to him for having steered the Partnership so well over the last five years. His will be a tough act to follow.

I have been delighted to see the Partnership becoming further engaged in the work of enabling more people to enjoy the wonders of the AONB. It is my belief that people do not care for or protect what they do not first understand and enjoy. Baby slings and mobility scooters (page 5) surely exemplify the Partnership's belief in access for all. The great interest and participation in the AONB photography competition (page 7) is also instructive in providing documentary evidence of the myriad different ways in which people enjoy the area.

This review reminds us that we have many challenges ahead. Combatting the effects of invasive species and disease on our native wildlife is something we can and should be helping with as a partnership. The ten years of landscape change report (page 7) also shows that subtle change can nevertheless be significant over a period of time.

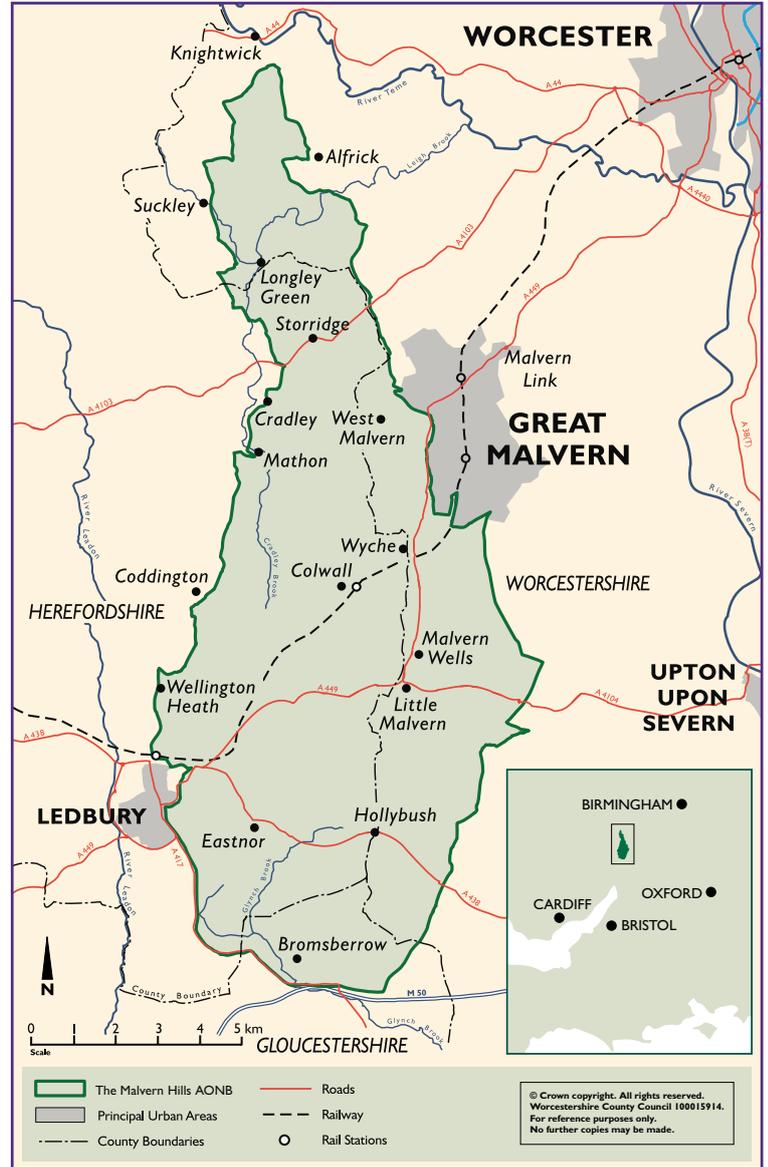
In my short time as Chairman I have already developed a deeper appreciation for all the work, much of it unseen, which goes into caring for this most special of landscapes. This annual review presents just a selection of the work undertaken but I would welcome any feedback on it or indeed on the work of the Partnership and how we could do even better. You can contact me via the AONB office (address on the back cover). In the meantime I hope you enjoy reading about some of the Partnership's achievements in 2016-17.



Gwyneth Rees

Cllr Gwyneth Rees

Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



Photography Credits:

All photographs copyright Malvern Hills AONB Unit except
 Front Cover: Katie Powell, Signal Crayfish: Severn Rivers Trust,
 Mondays up the Malverns: Rob Hedge, Mobility Scooters up
 the Malverns: Countryside Mobility, Picnic on Perseverance
 Hill: Philippa Machin, Grayling Conservation: Mel Mason

The following bodies provide core grant support to the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership:



Promoting colour in development

New guidance on the selection and use of colour in development was published by the AONB Partnership this year. The document provides advice to developers and landowners on appropriate colours to use in all forms of development, from painting a fence to erecting a new barn. The guidance is believed to be the first of its kind and has generated much interest. Its publication was picked up at national level by The Landscape Institute and has come to the attention of those that oversee many of the nation's other protected areas, with the High Weald AONB Partnership having recently commissioned similar work. Closer to home, 22 planning officers from five different Local Planning Authorities assembled in June 2016 to receive training on the guidance.

The techniques of Environmental Colour Assessment that underpin the guidance are now being put to use locally. For example, a new primary school within the AONB at Colwall is currently being built, using a colour scheme designed to complement the colours that exist in the local landscape. A dedicated palette of colours has also been produced to inform future development at the Three Counties Showground.



Colwall Primary School under construction

Working to improve water quality

Data shows that many of the water bodies in the AONB (in common with those outside the area) do not currently meet good quality standards, especially in relation to their biological and chemical health. During the year the AONB Partnership collaborated with the Severn Rivers Trust and local landowners to address a range of known issues on sections of the Suckley and Cradley brooks. Practical management actions included:

- erection of streamside fencing to prevent cattle eroding banks and to reduce sedimentation and nutrient enrichment of the water;
- thinning of bankside vegetation and removal of diseased trees to allow more light through to the water course; and
- provision of hard-standing around cattle feeders to reduce poaching.

Thanks are due to the landowners who have willingly supported this work and contributed financially to it.



Cattle Fencing, Suckley Brook

The natural beauty of verges

Roadside verges can play host to a wealth of local plant life which in turn can support many insects – some of which are vital in pollinating our crops. Verges can be especially important in areas which are otherwise intensively managed and can act as ecological corridors, connecting areas of conservation importance. During the summer of 2016 a survey of plant life was conducted on a number of verges in the eastern part of the AONB. The results highlighted that our verges vary in condition and in what they contribute to the natural beauty of the area. The report's recommendations also show that there is scope for improving their offer.

Some areas of verge were highlighted as being of particular importance for the plant life that they support. One is at Welland Green where the local Parish Council has welcomed the report's findings and agreed that the area of Green can be added to the list of Roadside Verge Nature Reserves on a trial basis. This means that the Green will benefit from dedicated management to protect its botanical interest, courtesy of Worcestershire County Council.



Welland Green RVNR

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project

The Heritage Lottery Funded Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project (TCTOP) aims to conserve and celebrate traditional orchards in parts of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, recognising them as wonderful places for wildlife and people.

The project is now entering its final year and has been a great success thus far, with over 300 volunteers helping to restore 37 veteran orchards and taking part in a wide range of training and events, from scything workshops to wassails. Twelve students have completed an ABC course for less able learners and 32 Orchard Champions are honing their orchard skills and acting as traditional orchard ambassadors throughout the Three Counties. Over 500 new traditional fruit trees have also been planted out in project orchards, helping to secure the future of these iconic habitats. The TCTOP is a 3 year project being managed by the Malvern Hills AONB Unit.

More information about the project and related activities can be found at www.tctop.org.uk



New fruit trees

Mondays up the Malverns

Evidence for the mental and physical health benefits arising from access to the natural world is growing all the time. The AONB Partnership is keen to work with others to ensure that the benefits of enjoying this nationally important area are maximised.

A grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to the local branch of the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) enabled the purchase of sturdy baby slings for use by new mothers and fathers who want to walk with their babies on the Malvern Hills. The slings are being used as part of the NCT's 'Mondays up the Malverns' programme of organised walks, encouraging and supporting parents from a range of backgrounds to enjoy the social and health benefits of walking in a group.

More information on the walks can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/980980848693978/>



© Rob Hedge

Mondays up the Malverns

Mobility Scooters up the Malverns

Those unable to walk up the hills under their own steam can now enjoy the glorious views they afford courtesy of two electric mobility scooters or 'trampers' which can be hired from Café H2O at the Malvern Hills Geocentre. A grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund helped to fund the lease of the first tramper; the second vehicle was donated following the publicity which was raised from the first.

The Trampers allow people with limited mobility to enjoy the popular ridgeway route up to the Worcestershire Beacon at the heart of the Malvern Hills AONB. The hire facility is one of nearly 40 national outdoor sites in the award-winning Countryside Mobility scheme which helps people to access the countryside.



© Countryside Mobility

Mobility Scooters up the Malverns

In order to fit with the Cafe operation, the Tramper is available every day except Wednesday. Booking is strongly recommended with slots available at 10 am and 2:30 pm.

To make a booking call 01684 252 414 or email teamjamboree@aol.co.uk

Website Link: <http://www.geocentre.co.uk/index.php/tramper>

See the full Tramper route in 3 minutes by following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rGdBVSLJws>

Ash dieback disease - survey

Common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is one of the most common tree species in the wooded and unwooded landscapes of the AONB. The potential impact of a fungal disease which has spread from continental Europe (commonly known as Chalara or ash dieback) could be devastating.

The AONB Partnership carried out a rapid, car-based survey of ash trees in the area this year, recording the general abundance and visual prominence of ash trees in different parts of the AONB. A number of individual trees were also photographed, measured and their condition noted. The results of the survey suggested no obvious signs of Chalara at present. However, the results provide a very valuable baseline against which future change in condition can be monitored.



Measuring an Ash tree

Looking north

The northern part of the Malvern Hills AONB in the vicinity of parishes such as Suckley, Alfrick and Storridge is characterised by a mosaic of ancient, semi-natural woodlands, traditional orchards and grasslands. The area lends itself to a larger scale approach to conservation which recognises that targeted actions can help to create a better-connected and more resilient landscape for people and for wildlife. To help to pave the way for such work a range of activities took place during the year, including:

- a landowners event attended by 51 local owners and managers who had the opportunity to speak with advisers from 11 different land, water and conservation management bodies;
- a funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to engage local people in collecting data about local wildlife;
- production of a suite of maps showing the distribution of key species across the area; and
- establishment of a working group bringing together key partners in the area to promote more integrated working.



Landowners meeting, Longley Green

Ten years of landscape change

2016 marked 10 years since the AONB Unit established a series of fixed point photographic locations across the many different landscape types of the AONB. The Centre for Rural Research at the University of Worcester (who were involved in the original work) were engaged to revisit and re-photograph these locations and to produce a report detailing the change which has taken place.

The report can be found at: <http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/publications/>.

Its headline results indicate that change in the last decade has often been small and incremental and that the nature, direction and significance of change varies across different areas. The report also shows that there has been a decline in certain features such as hedgerows, hedgerow trees and field trees which help to characterise the area. The report's findings will be used to inform the development of the next AONB management plan as well as providing a basis for how best to monitor landscape change in the future.



Fixed point photography

Capturing the view ... and the enjoyment

The AONB Partnership's first photography competition in over a decade was a huge success. Over 100 entries were received in two categories: The AONB Landscape and Enjoying the Landscape. Many fantastic images were submitted with some of the best going on display as posters in 'Exhibition walk' in Malvern for three months. Prizes were awarded to winners and runners up at a small ceremony in September 2016. To view the winning photos and all entries please visit: <http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/photography-competition-2016/>

Thanks to all who took part and to our sponsors: Malvern Imaging and Beacon Camera Club.



Picnic on Perseverance Hill

Geophysics on British Camp

British Camp is largely an iron-age construction but with a Norman motte (raised earthwork). There have long been questions about what buildings might have been on the motte, and whether and where the iron-age builders smelted their iron.

During the year a non-invasive geophysical survey was undertaken to help us learn more about this ancient monument. The results of the surveys are being interpreted, but at the time of writing, evidence of significant structures on the motte has not been found.

However, to the east of the motte, a ring-like structure has been revealed, reminiscent of a Bronze Age barrow. The work was supported by the Herefordshire Victoria County History Trust and the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.



Geophysics survey, British Camp

Neighbourhood Development Planning

Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) are community-led plans that guide the future development, regeneration and conservation of a local area. The AONB Unit is working with five parish councils in the area on the development of 'landscape-led' plans which seek to protect the local environment which local people value so highly.

During the year the AONB Unit commented on a 'Regulation 14' draft of the NDP for Cradley and this plan has now been through formal examination. The AONB Unit also provided financial support to Malvern Wells Parish Council, which commenced the development of its NDP by commissioning a baseline assessment of the landscape character and visual sensitivity of the parish.



Wellington Heath

Malvern stone bank

The rock of the Malvern Hills was extensively used in the past to build properties and walls, leaving a legacy of built form which is unique to the local area. Quarrying on the hills ceased a long time ago but there is still a need for this material, to repair traditional structures and to help create local character in new builds.

Aware that local stone was being sent to landfill when buildings or walls fall or are knocked down, the AONB Unit has rented a space on which to store Malvern stone until it can be used again. Over a period of 10 months some 90 tonnes of stone have been delivered to the site with 30 tonnes having been moved on and reused in local repairs.

Please contact the AONB Unit for more information on: AONB@worcestershire.gov.uk



Malvern stone bank postcard

Good crayfish, bad crayfish

Our native white-clawed crayfish is classed as endangered. One of its biggest threats is the non-native signal crayfish which was introduced in the 1970s and which out-competes its much smaller relation.

The Severn Rivers Trust has been working with local volunteers in the Suckley Brook catchment to monitor the population of signal crayfish and to begin to take steps to eradicate it from the area.

The results from this work are being fed into a national project researching the scale of the signal crayfish problem and the optimum methods of controlling it. Monitoring equipment for work on the Suckley Brook was part-funded by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.



Signal Crayfish

Route to the Hills

Route to the Hills is a project run by Malvern Hills District Council and funded largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund. MHDC has formed a project management group of which the Malvern Hills AONB Unit is a part. The aim of the project is to promote a walking route from Great Malvern Station to Rosebank Gardens, a 'gateway to the hills'.

In doing so, the route will tell the 'story of Malvern' through information boards, art installations and community activities. During the year the first information boards were installed in areas such as Malvern's Priory Park. It is now expected that the project will make great headway during 2017 and 2018.

See <http://www.routetothehills.co.uk/> for more details.



New information board, Priory Park

Spotlight on Coombegreen

Coombegreen is a common that is part of the larger area of Castlemorton Common. Like Castlemorton Common it lacks sufficient grazing to maintain the open landscape that is so valuable for wildlife and so enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Unlike Castlemorton Common, Coombegreen is not owned by the Malvern Hills Trust.

During the year the AONB Unit worked with the landowner and local residents to gauge interest in conserving Coombegreen Common. Considerable interest exists and a 'Friends of Coombegreen Common' group was set up to harness it. Various fundraising and educational events have gone on, all with a little help from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.



Coombegreen walk and talk

Helping our Graylings

The Grayling butterfly is an important species in the Malvern Hills but is in decline. Butterfly Conservation received a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to restore important habitat on the Northern Hills.

The species particularly depends on access to sunny rocks for basking and so much of the effort focused on removing scrub to expose such sites. 356 hours of help was given over to the project by 25 volunteers while the more technical work was carried out by a contractor.



Grayling conservation

More good news for traditional orchards

A grant from Natural England's Innovation Fund to the AONB Partnership has been used to help create a new 'traditional' Perry Pear orchard on the site of an historical orchard at Eastnor. Natural England funding was also used to help restock four extant orchards on sites throughout the AONB.

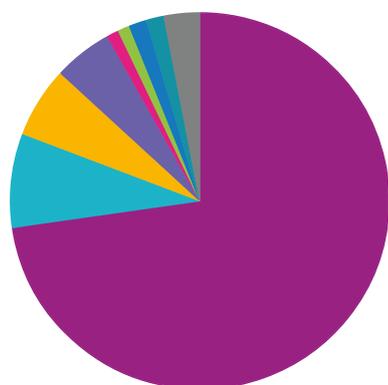
The Three Counties Agricultural Society completed the second and final phase of restocking its own 100 year old traditional orchard at the Three Counties Showground. Cider trees have been planted in the gaps in this old cooking apple orchard – including a new variety called 'Three Counties'. The fruit they yield will be used to help create the Showground's own cider.



Hill Farm orchard, Eastnor

AONB Unit Financial Structure

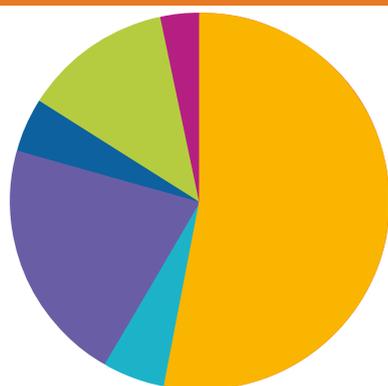
'Core' income



Defra (72.5%)	£141,781
Herefordshire Council (8.3%)	£16,334
Worcestershire County Council (6.8%)	£13,268
Malvern Hills District Council (5.6%)	£11,000
Gloucestershire County Council (0.3%)	£600
Forest of Dean District Council (0.4%)	£872
Parish Council voluntary contributions (1.5%)*	£3,000
Natural England (Innovation Fund) (1.5%)	£3,000
Miscellaneous voluntary contributions (3%)	£5,800

Total £195,655

'Core' expenditure



Staff cost (including travel and training) (53.2%)	£104,118
Accommodation cost (5.4%)	£10,601
Partnership budget (20.6%)	£40,244
Partnership running costs (4.7%)	£9,237
Sustainable Development Fund (12.8%)	£25,000
Transfer to project reserve (3.3%)	£6,455

Total £195,655

Additional project income (and expenditure)

Heritage Lottery Fund (Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project)

Total £88,791

*Warm thanks are due to Cradley PC, Colwall PC, Little Malvern and Welland PC, Malvern Wells PC and West Malvern PC.

The Unit staff structure for the year was as follows

AONB Partnership Manager: Paul Esrich

AONB Partnership Assistant Manager: David Armitage/Karen Humphries

AONB Partnership Support Officer: Sarah Jones

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project Officer: Karen Humphries

malvern hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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