

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2014/15



Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the annual review for the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, covering the period 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015. This has been a very productive year for big projects and initiatives. The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded funding of over £800,000 to support the Three Counties Traditional Orchards Project (page 4) and the Route to the Hills Project (page 6). Almost 7km of overhead cable was buried in seven locations within the AONB, making 2014/15 the most successful year by far for this initiative in the area (see page 3). In amongst these high profile works the AONB Partnership continued to make a big difference in lots of smaller, but nonetheless very important, ways. As ever, work has been delivered across the very broad range of interests and areas that the Partnership represents.

This is the first annual review to be published under the auspices of the 'new' AONB management plan (2014-2019). The eagle-eyed amongst you will note that we have taken this opportunity to refresh the design and to shorten the annual review, by focussing on a smaller number of projects. The aim is to make the review more accessible to a wider audience. Rest assured that we are still documenting all work undertaken across a broad spectrum to conserve and enhance the AONB. Further information is available on request.

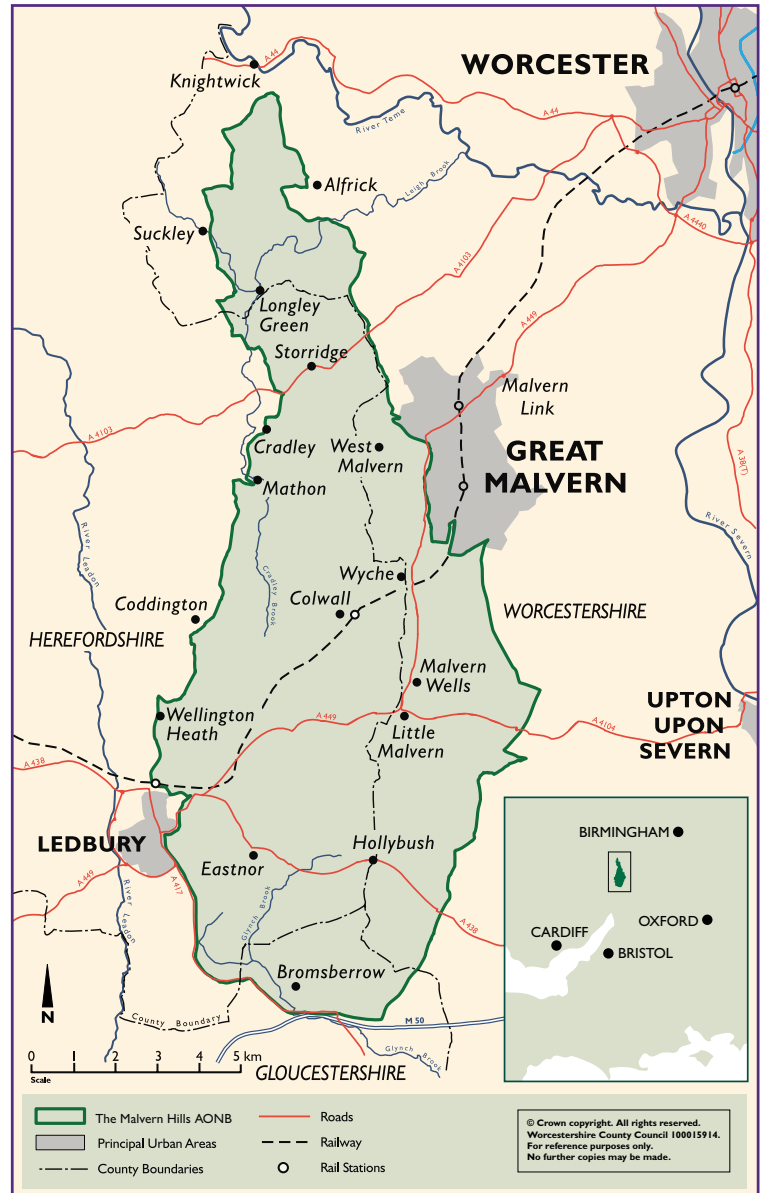
In the meantime I hope you find this review both interesting and helpful.



John Raine

Cllr John Raine
Chair, Malvern Hills AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



Photography Credits:

All photographs copyright Malvern Hills AONB Unit except:
Pg 4 Bat detector and field guide – Malvern Hills Conservators

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



Burying Overhead Power Lines

March 2015 marked the end of a five year spending period for burying low voltage power-lines in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Within the Malvern Hills AONB, seven schemes came to fruition during the course of the year, resulting in a total of 7km of overhead cable being removed in the parishes of Mathon, Eastnor and Colwall. Underground cable has been installed in its place.

This national scheme – which has been introduced and overseen by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) – has brought considerable amenity benefits to protected landscapes throughout the country. In the Malvern Hills AONB work on the ground has been carried out by Western Power Distribution and the company is to be congratulated on the execution of the undergrounding projects.



Petty France before



Petty France after



Eastnor Castle estate before



Eastnor Castle estate after

Caring for our Grasslands

Species-rich grasslands may suffer from overshadowing by trees which can reduce plant growth and diversity. In separate initiatives, Bromesberrow estate and the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust undertook woodland thinning and clearance operations to benefit important grassland sites and the species that depend on them.



Woodland management, Bromesberrow

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project

The AONB Partnership and many others were delighted to receive the news in September 2014 that the Heritage Lottery Fund had agreed to provide £332,000 to help conserve and celebrate traditional orchards across Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project will provide training and equipment to a wide range of individuals who wish to learn about, enjoy and help to care for, traditional orchards. A Project Officer was appointed and three local 'hubs' have begun the work of engaging local people in the delivery of a variety of tasks. More information can be found at:

<http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/three-counties-traditional-orchard-project/>.



Traditional orchard visit, Alfrick

Bats on the Malvern Hills

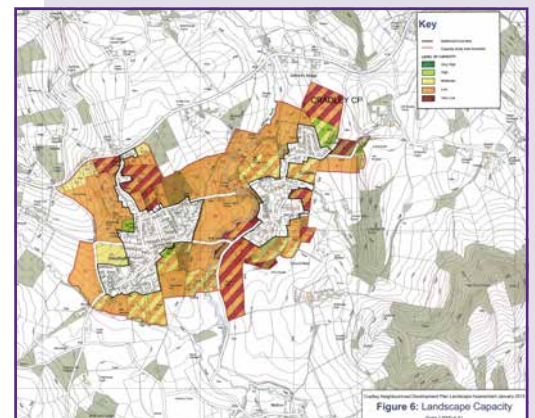
In the spring of 2014 The Malvern Hills Conservators were provided with an AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant to buy bat detectors. With the help of enthusiastic volunteers and the Vincent Wildlife Trust they tracked the flight paths of various species, including the rare Lesser Horseshoe Bat. It turned out that many bats follow certain lines of trees, and are reluctant to cross open spaces. Even when flying across roads, they fly between trees growing either side, whose branches almost touch. Knowing the flight paths and behaviour of these bats will now inform how the Conservators manage the woodlands on the hills.



Bat detector and field guide

Neighbourhood Planning

A Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is a community-led plan for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of an area. During the year the AONB Unit supported three local communities—Colwall and Cradley in Herefordshire and Welland and Little Malvern in Worcestershire – to develop their NDPs. The Unit helped to commission, finance and manage landscape assessments which assess and grade potential development sites. These studies should help communities to direct new development to locations which are most able to accommodate them. The Unit also contributed to local decision making, attended public consultation events and helped to draft plan policies.



Landscape capacity map, Cradley

Landscape Scale Conservation

Work commenced this year on a long-term project to improve the connectivity, buffering and management of the Malvern Hills and Commons with adjoining areas to the east. Work during 2014/15 focussed on data gathering, mapping and assessment and included:

- a walk-over transect survey of birds, butterflies and bees where little or no wildlife survey data currently exists;
- three bat surveys using ultrasonic time expansion detectors attached to a car;
- research into the specific requirements and behaviours of key species in the project area;
- pilot work to map the habitats and land uses which exist within the project area.

Armed with this information, the plan is now to engage in discussions with local landowners to identify specific management works which will benefit key species in the area. This is a partnership project involving the Malvern Hills AONB Unit and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, with input from Malvern Hills Conservators and government agencies.



Traditional orchard wildlife survey

Clencher's Mill Turning Again

Watermills once created their own characteristic landscapes with the buildings, the water channels, ponds and even plantation of trees, whose timber was used to repair the worn cogs of the mill. Clencher's Mill on the Eastnor Castle estate is just such a mill. Grants from Natural England and the AONB Sustainable Development Fund have helped the estate to restore this mill and landscape. During 2014/15 the pond wall was repaired. This now provides the water which powers an 1820s iron overshoot water-wheel, which turns the mill stones to grind the grain. Through the year the mill was visited by the public during open days and by many children on school visits, providing a rare opportunity to witness a working watermill in action.



Clencher's Mill and pond

Caring for our Ancient Trees and Woods

The Woodland Trust is currently working across the country to deliver an ambitious ancient woodland restoration project. Staff from the Trust and staff in the AONB Unit have collaborated this year to identify veteran trees which have become swamped by young, competing growth and to advise and support landowners. With help from the owner, veteran trees on eight sites at Mathon Court have been halo thinned. This involves clearing an area of ground from the trunk to the span of the branches, allowing the veteran trees to breathe again.

Landscape Enhancements at The Three Counties Showground

During the autumn and winter of 2014/15 estate staff worked hard to enhance the visual appeal of The Three Counties Showground and to benefit local wildlife. Work included:

- planting a new section of native hedgerow to replace a hedge which had been lost in the past;
- removing a long line of non-native conifers from another hedge line, thus providing more room for native broadleaved trees to thrive;
- completing a survey of wildlife in a traditional orchard in the north west corner of the site. The survey's findings were then used to inform a management plan which was drawn up for the orchard;
- grafting work on Perry Pear trees which form part of a national collection on site.

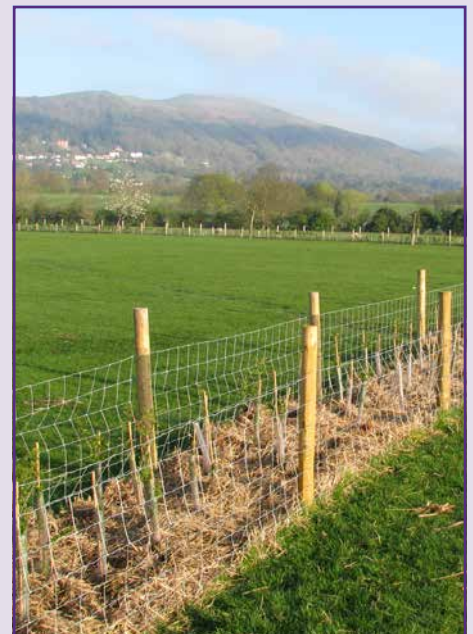
These works form part of an ongoing mini landscape plan which has been produced by the Three Counties Agricultural Society working alongside the AONB Partnership, Malvern Hills District Council and local landscape architect Carly Tinkler.

Route to the Hills

The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant of £482,000 to Malvern Hills District Council to deliver its Route to the Hills Project. The Project falls into two parts: firstly information, interpretation and public art works that tell the stories that Malvern has to tell. Secondly, the human capital of volunteers to act as guides, the involvement of schools, and a local theatre company to enliven the stories. A Learning and Community Engagement Officer has now been appointed and project is set to run for three years. Hard landscaping elements are expected to be completed within 18 months. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit is actively involved in the project management group.



Veteran tree restoration, Mathon Court



New native hedgerow, Three Counties Showground



Route to the Hills exhibition

Malvern Munch

Exercise and good food: so much of Malvern's Water Cure was based on just that. In a modern day revival, Malvern Hills District Council ran the Malvern Munch alongside their successful food festival. The Munch took 70 paying guests on a guided walk around the hills, stopping off at various points to sample local food and drink. The landscape of the local area and the skills of those who manage it combine to provide an enticing supply of local foods such as Holywell Water and Wilce's cider. As such, the AONB was pleased to offer a grant to get this off the ground.



Malvern Munch, Rosebank Gardens

Geosite Maintenance

The Malvern Hills AONB is famous for its nationally important geology, and this extends beyond the confines of the Malvern Hills themselves. There are many exposures of rock that help us understand the structure of our impressive landscape but nature often covers them. Fortunately the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust is keen to tackle this problem. A grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund was used to buy tools and provisions for volunteers whose work led to the restoration of eight Local Geological Sites. This important work will continue into 2015/16.



Volunteers, High Wood Quarry

What to do with Dog Poo

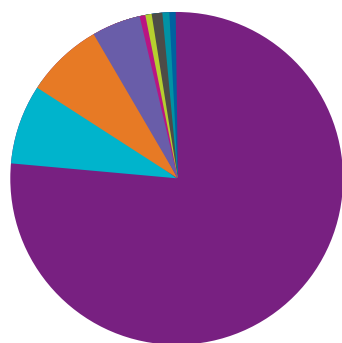
Dog fouling is one of the most complained about issues on the Malvern Hills. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership is trialling a new approach that could attract those who bag dog poo by turning the waste into something useful. The Sustainable Development Fund has provided a grant to Sight Designs to research techniques to make this possible. Currently the whole venture is subject to Non-Disclosure Agreements. More will be revealed in due course.



Waste or asset?

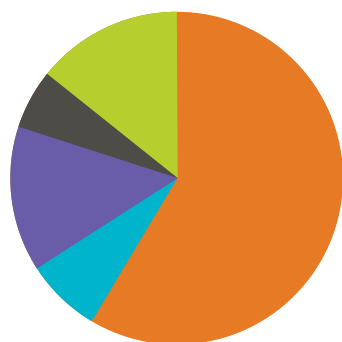
AONB Unit Financial Summary

'Core' income



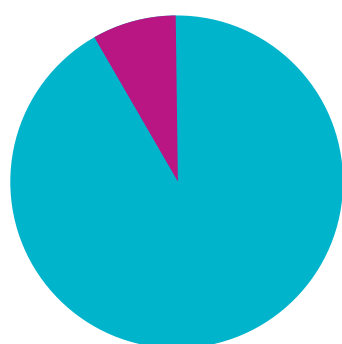
Defra (76.01%)	£139,384
Herefordshire Council (7.99%)	£14,647
Worcestershire County Council (7.24%)	£13,268
Malvern Hills District Council (6%)	£11,000
Gloucestershire County Council (0.33%)	£600
Forest of Dean District Council (0.48%)	£872
Parish Council voluntary contributions (1.39%)	£2,550
Miscellaneous voluntary contributions (0.16%)	£290
Contribution from reserve (0.42%)	£770
Total	£183,381

'Core' expenditure



Staff cost (inc travel and training) (58.23%)	£106,774
Accommodation costs (6.3%)	£11,555
Partnership budget (13.98%)	£25,639
Partnership running costs (5.04%)	£9,237
Sustainable Development Fund (16.46%)	£30,176
Total	£183,381

Additional project income (and expenditure)



Herefordshire Council (7.22%)	£1,687
Heritage Lottery Fund (92.78%)	£21,671
Total	£23,358

The Unit staff structure for the year was as follows:

AONB Partnership Manager: Paul Esrich
AONB Partnership Assistant Manager: David Armitage
AONB Partnership Support Officer: Sarah Baker
Development/Project Officer: Karen Humphries

malvern hills
 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Malvern Hills AONB, Manor House,
 Grange Road, Malvern, WR14 3EY
Tel: 01684 560616
Web: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk