

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2017/18



Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the annual review for the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, containing examples of just some of the Partnership's work in the period 1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018. This review reminds us of the myriad ways in which the Partnership works to support people in conserving and enhancing natural beauty. From influencing road traffic signage to supporting craft workshops aimed at recycling plastics, it is all here.

As a Colwall resident and member of Colwall Parish Council it has been fascinating to watch a new school emerge from arable land at the edge of the village (page 4). The AONB Partnership had a hand both in the choice of site and in the colour scheme for the new school which was picked to be complementary to the highly valued landscape which frames it.

In the north of the AONB a new project has begun, working with local people to help collect data about some of our most precious wildlife. I believe that data collection should be a means to end and this project illustrates that ethic. The ultimate aim is to use this new found knowledge to help local landowners and managers to better support wildlife in a way which is consistent with their own management aspirations.

I am not particularly fond of new jargon but the AONB Partnership's report on Natural Capital (page 5) is an important read. The Government's new 25 year Environment Plan recognises that the natural world provides many goods and services which benefit humans directly and which need safeguarding. We in this AONB should, in my opinion, be embracing this concept.

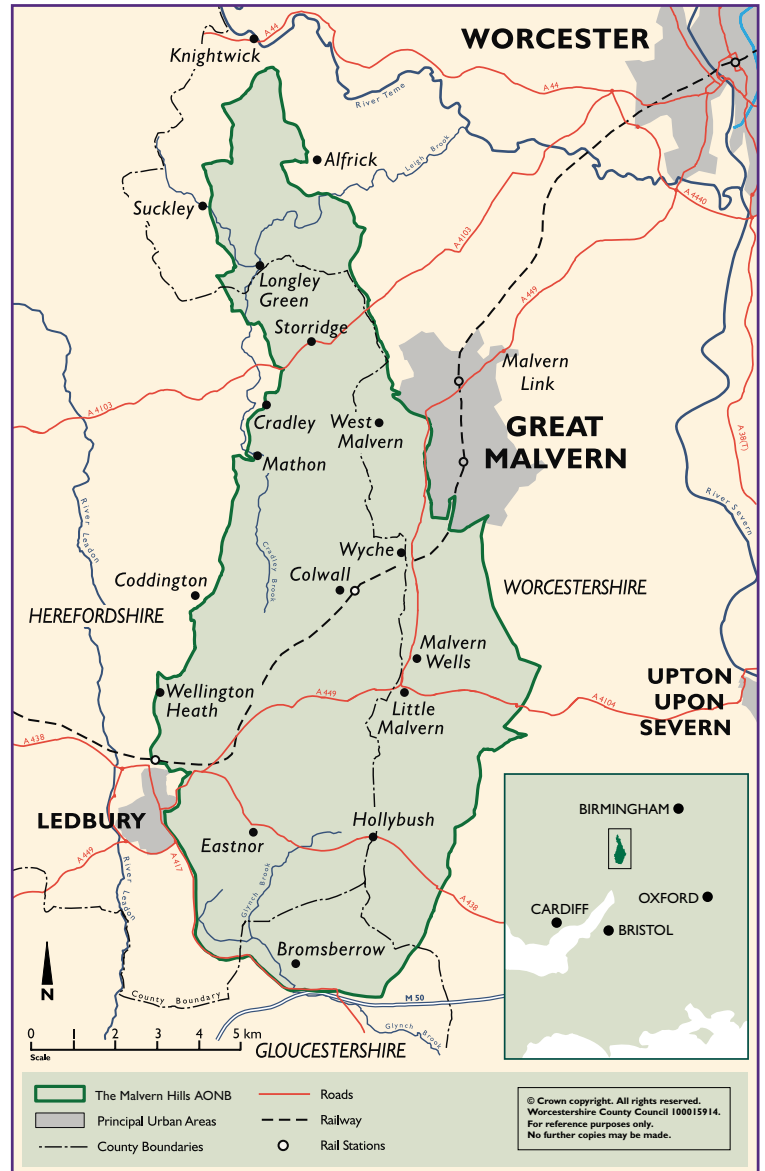
With the future rather than the past in mind may I take this opportunity to remind you that the current AONB Management Plan is being reviewed in 2018 with a new plan expected to be published in April 2019. I encourage you to engage with this review process if you can. Information about the review can be found at: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk



Gwyneth Rees

Cllr Gwyneth Rees
Chairman, Malvern Hills AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



Photography Credits:

All photographs Malvern Hills AONB Unit except Front cover: Kelda White, Project information for volunteers: Lucy Grove, A butterfly made from plastic bottles: Craftcase, New gates at Malvern Splash: MHDC, Official launch of the new book: Mike Redman, Goblin Gold: Peter Creed.

The AONB Partnership is an umbrella term comprising all of those bodies and individuals that work together to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB. More information on the Partnership can be found at: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/aonb-partnership

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



Speed reduction across Castlemorton Common

Following a request from the local Parish Council a new 50mph speed limit (formerly 60mph) was introduced on the B4208 in the parish of Castlemorton, in the eastern part of the AONB. Considerable effort was put into devising a scheme which would be both effective at reducing speed and sensitive to the high value landscape of the AONB. Initially, Worcestershire County Council engineers designed a scheme for consultation which was informed by the AONB Partnership's Guidance on Highways Design. The AONB Unit, supported by friends at the engineering firm WSP, responded to the consultation with suggested changes aimed at making the signage even more sympathetic. The result from this collaborative approach is a series of speed reduction measures which are sensitive to the open and informal character of this area of historic common land.



50mph signage, Castlemorton

Conserving and enhancing special places in West Malvern

The AONB is full of places which are special to people for many different reasons. The AONB Partnership does not own or manage land itself but it does work with landowners and other interested parties to help keep places special. During the year it supported landowners and managers in West Malvern in the following ways:

- Bluebell Fields, Old Hollow – advice to West Malvern Parish Council on how best to manage encroaching bracken and scrub in this much loved area.
- Grassland near Slatch Coppice - commissioned a botanical survey and worked with a local farmer to ensure that this area of semi-improved grassland was managed to benefit wildflowers and grasses.
- Lower Road Special Wildlife Site – provision of a water supply and improved access to enable grazing to take place, in accordance with the management requirements for the site.



Old Hollow Bluebells, West Malvern

A new Primary School in Colwall

The construction of a new school is always a significant event for the community it serves. The school which opened in Colwall early in 2018 is also significant for its design approach and for the wider measures which were taken to conserve and enhance the special character of the village and the AONB. These included the following:

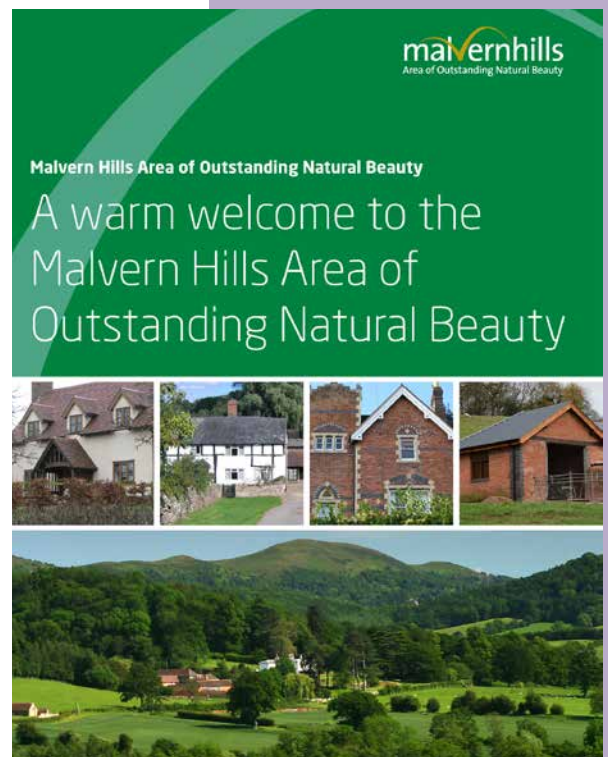
- a technique called Environmental Colour Assessment was used to ensure that the engaging colours of the school are locally recognisable and complementary to those which are present in the surrounding landscape;
- shared use of the adjacent village hall car park to pick up and drop off children saved an area of agricultural land which would otherwise have been tarmacked for new car parking;
- external lighting safeguards the area's precious dark skies through the use of full cut-off luminaires with a warm colour temperature. A timed cut-off of all external lighting has also been secured by planning condition;
- an emphasis on highway design - reducing the width of the carriageway and increasing the width of pavements - rather than signage and lighting helps to preserve the rural feel of the village edge location.



Colwall Primary School

Calling all new property owners

Those who have just acquired land or property in the Malvern Hills AONB are likely to consider themselves very fortunate. However, along with the great enjoyment that comes from living and/or working in one of the country's finest landscapes may come an element of uncertainty and even confusion. What particular rules or regulations apply in an AONB? Is planning permission needed to make certain changes to property? The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership has produced a new leaflet which aims to answer these questions and which outlines ways in which owners of land and buildings can help to keep the area special. Approximately a dozen local estate agents and solicitors kindly agreed to distribute the leaflet to their clients during the conveyancing process. It is hoped that those who are buying property in the area will now be better informed about what the AONB designation might mean for them. The leaflet can be downloaded at: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/publications.



Leaflet for new property owners

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.

Working in conjunction with Worcestershire County Council, the AONB Unit initiated a pilot project to begin to improve a number of roadside verges in the east of the AONB. Very competitive vegetation such as nettles, docks and scrub were cut from verges, with some of this cut material then being removed from site to improve conditions for a greater variety of plants. A funding application made during the year to the European Union's Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) to support this pilot work was successful. As a result, further verge management activity to benefit wild flowers and pollinators is expected in the parishes of Malvern Wells, Little Malvern and Welland, and Castlemorton over the next 3 years.



Collecting grass by Little Malvern Priory

The Natural Capital of the Malvern Hills AONB

'Natural Capital' is a relatively new concept, much used by today's policy makers and strategists. Put simply, it is a way of defining the wide range of benefits that human beings derive from nature. For example, an area of broadleaved woodland helps to clean and regulate our air and may slow run-off into streams and rivers following heavy rain, thus helping to reduce flooding down-stream. It may also offer a beautiful place for recreation and wildlife watching which benefits our physical and mental health.

During the year, the first ever study into the Natural Capital of the Malvern Hills AONB was completed. The report identifies the Natural Capital 'assets' of the AONB, summarises how they benefit people and compares the benefits of one type of asset with another. It shows that certain habitats which might not be very productive in terms of saleable outputs (e.g. food or timber) are, nevertheless, highly valuable to society in many other ways. A Natural Capital approach enables organisations to identify, measure and value their dependencies, as well as their impacts, on the natural world. You can find the publication on the AONB website at: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/publications.



Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, Suckley

Finding rare species in the Malverns

The northern part of the Malvern Hills AONB in parishes such as Suckley, Alfrick and Storrige is believed to be wildlife-rich but our knowledge of what lives there is very limited, often confined to sites such as nature reserves. A new two year project called 'Finding Rare Species in the Malverns' aims to address this gap in our knowledge by working with local volunteers to survey woods, meadows and streams etc, especially those that have not been surveyed in the past. As the title suggests, a particular focus of the project is the rare and iconic wildlife of the area, including dormice and horseshoe bats, though all data on the natural world is of interest.

The project commenced in September 2017 and highlights thus far have included workshops on how to identify and survey for Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Dormice and Otters and a guided Spring Flora walk. The project is being managed by the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership. For more information please contact the Project officer Lucy Grove at lucy@wbrc.org.uk.

What's in a view?

Research tells us that visitors to the AONB particularly value the scenery and views on offer, yet much of what can be seen from the Malvern Hills is not designated as an AONB and so is not subject to the same levels of protection. During the year the AONB Unit commented on three proposals for major expansions of residential development around Ledbury. These are outside of but within the setting of the AONB, where development can affect peoples' enjoyment and experience of the AONB itself.

The AONB Partnership also developed guidance on respecting landscape in views. This guidance sets out principles which those involved in creating new developments should consider in order to ensure that new development does not impact negatively on special views. The Partnership will soon be consulting on this new guidance prior to publication.



Project information for volunteers



The setting of the AONB, Ledbury

Making light and making headlines

The AONB Sustainable Development Fund is often used to support innovation. One of the most innovative projects over the years has been the development – by Brian Harper of Sight Designs, West Malvern – of a biodigester running off dog poo, that makes gas to light a gas lamp. This slightly bizarre idea has really caught people's interest. Just before Christmas 2017 a national newspaper wrote about the project and the story went viral. The AONB Unit and Brian have had inquiries from around the country and around the world. Beyond the innovation itself it is hoped that media coverage drawing more attention to this global issue will encourage more dog owners to 'pick it up.'

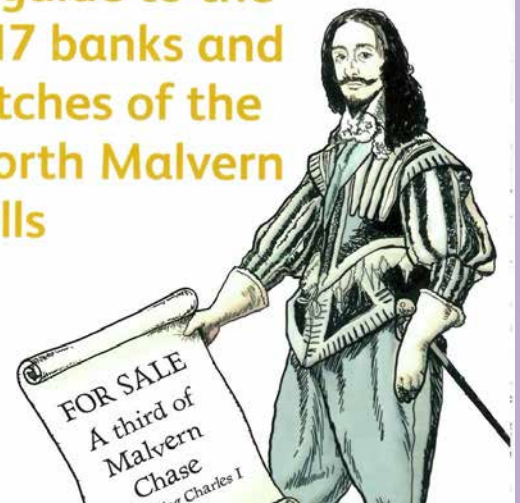


Tokyo TV filming beside the biodigester

Our unnoticed heritage

For centuries there have been banks and ditches over the northern Malvern Hills. Apart from the Shire Ditch – a scheduled ancient monument - their presence has been without explanation, until now. George Demidowicz, a historical geographer who recently moved to the area noticed these features whilst walking over the hills and then used his archival research skills to explain them. The banks and ditches are land ownership boundaries, dating from the early part of the C17 when Charles I sold his rights over Malvern Chase in order to raise money. An AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant enabled George to produce a leaflet and a walking app, so that others could understand and appreciate this new knowledge.

A guide to the C17 banks and ditches of the North Malvern Hills



The new banks and ditches leaflet

Recycling Plastics

There are plastics everywhere, not least in the news this year. But before the international hubbub, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund Panel gave a grant to the people who run a local enterprise called the Craft Case. They travelled around local schools and community centres teaching children how to make beautiful things from rubbish and bringing home environmental messages.



A butterfly made from plastic bottles

Delivering a Route to the Hills

The Route to the Hills Project, run by Malvern Hills District Council and financed largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund, continues apace. The AONB Unit is on the Project Management Group and has been closely involved with all its component projects.

This year, these have involved making promotional films for the area, installing eye-catchers, such as new gates at the Splash Leisure complex in the town and quirky benches on the route. These benches pick up themes associated with the area. One has a Morgan car wheel and fender, another, a Florence Nightingale allusion, and yet another with a hairy thigh, a reference to the faun, Mr Tumnus from the Narnia stories. A range of publications and activities for all generations has also been produced including a tree guide to the magnificent specimens for which Malvern is famous.



New gates at Malvern Splash

Wellbeing day at Alfrick

Living in the countryside can be lovely, but it can also be lonely. Whether you are young or old, if you are without transport and neighbours you can feel very isolated, and it is now recognised that loneliness can cause huge problems for personal wellbeing. Village halls can play an important role in bringing people together. A small AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant to local organisation Community First allowed village hall representatives from around the AONB area to meet at Alfrick Village Hall to share best practice in tackling rural loneliness. They also joined with local volunteers, activity providers and local organisations to learn about what works in helping reduce loneliness, and what to look out for in a village hall setting. With activities and stalls and tea and cake, it was also an opportunity for local people to drop in and enjoy a very successful day.



Leigh and Bransford Village Hall

Herbalist Foraging

'White-witchery' a cynic might say, when faced with a project to teach people how to identify hedge plants and turn them into potions and ointments. However, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund Panel saw this project as a way of helping people to appreciate the natural world and linking it to good health. The courses took place at the Colwall Community Orchard packing shed, whose refurbishment has been supported by this self-same fund.

The grant provided by the AONB Partnership also helped set up a small business within the area, whose courses continue to be popular, and indeed have spread from west to east across the hills. When those who run the Cube Community Centre in Malvern were deciding on what to plant in a new hedgerow, they let it be a foraging hedge, so that courses could also be run in the vicinity of this venue in the town. A small AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant was provided to buy the saplings.



Collecting Hawthorn berries

Planning for the future

Many local communities are embracing the powers afforded to them under the Localism Act (2011) to take control over aspects of future development by producing Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs). Nowhere is this more apparent than in Herefordshire where 84% of Town and Parish Councils have either produced or are in the process of producing NDPs.

The Malvern Hills AONB Unit has been keen to support Parish Councils in the area to produce NDPs which help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. During the year the Unit provided comments on the Regulation 14 draft plans for Colwall and Ledbury and a Regulation 16 plan for Wellington Heath. The Unit has also worked to support Malvern Wells Parish Council in the development of its NDP. Evidence from those plans which have been made/adopted so far suggests that Inspectors value a strong landscape evidence base, like that which underpins a number of NDPs being produced in the AONB.



Residential development, West Malvern

Orchard Champions

Up to 90% of traditional orchards have been lost since the 1950s, and one third of all those which remain are in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project (TCTOP) was set up as a response to this and, since it started in 2014, has gone from strength to strength. At its heart was the idea that to save traditional orchards people needed to connect with them and to discover their importance, not only as amazing wildlife habitats but also as special places for people.

Over the years the TCTOP has provided opportunities for over 300 people to learn orchard skills and to get involved in a wide range of projects. New traditional orchards have been created too and 500 trees of rare local varieties have been planted, safeguarding our local fruit heritage.

In addition to the practical restoration of 40 traditional orchards, history and heritage projects, wildlife surveys and myriad orchard events and celebrations, 40 Orchard Champions will have graduated from the project training course and are now equipped with the skills and knowledge to become orchard ambassadors. This fantastic group of people have already given a staggering 1500 hours of volunteer time to orchard activities.

And whilst the main part of the TCTOP is now complete we are not finished yet. The Heritage Lottery Fund has agreed an extension to the project until December 2018, to allow us to time to explore and expand some of the ideas and initiatives which have arisen from our work. These include:

- linking our Orchard Champions work to the established networks of County Tree Wardens, hopefully recruiting new people to the Tree Council's existing networks and vice versa;
- allowing existing TCTOP volunteers to sign up to master classes, thus extending their orchard knowledge;
- establishing a 'mother orchard' for Worcestershire, a genetic bank of all the original Worcestershire fruit varieties;
- exploring the difficult question of what to do with excess fruit in small orchards; and
- re-inventing our website so that we leave behind a really good record of the amazing work done through our volunteers and project partners.



Inspecting rare variety fruit trees grown for TCTOP



Pruning demonstration for Orchard Champions



Perry Pear blossom, Longney Orchard

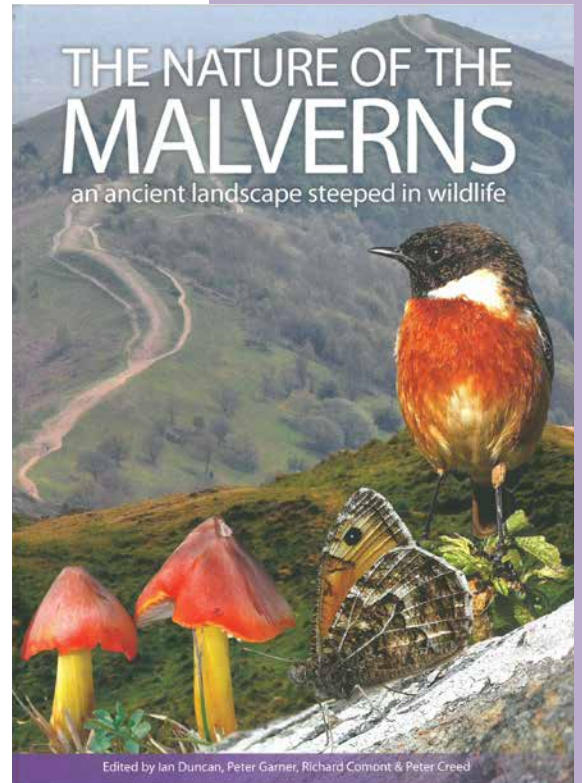
The Nature of the Malverns

This year saw the completion of a two year project to produce the Nature of the Malverns book. This is the first ever book to cover such a wide range of the natural history of the Hills, from climate and landscape to the area's diverse fauna and flora. 38 local experts contributed their specialist knowledge for free and the book was ably edited by local naturalists Ian Duncan and Peter Garner.

With a foreword written by Brett Westwood, whose enthusiasm for the natural world can be regularly heard on Radio 4, the book shines with vivid, sharp photos which illustrate and enliven the fascinating text. The book was launched by Brett in May 2018, and was followed by a guided walk on the Hills to highlight what can be seen on the ground.

Grants for the production of the book were provided by the Malvern Hills Trust and the AONB Sustainable Development Fund. Interest in the book has been very high with over a third of the printed copies sold before the launch and with talks being given at local book stores to further promote the new publication. This is great news for local conservation since profits from sales are to be reinvested in works on the ground, which will benefit the nature of the Malverns.

Those with an interest in the nature of the Malverns are encouraged to purchase a copy of the book. But to whet the appetite, one of the many wonders to be discovered within its covers is Goblin Gold. This beautiful and unusual species of moss lines the earthen walls of rabbit burrows along the Malvern ridge. It has lens like cells that refract any light to make the moss glow in the dimness, giving off a golden hue, hence its English name of Goblin Gold. The moss is locally abundant on the Malverns but absent from most of southern and eastern Britain.



The Nature of the Malverns: front cover



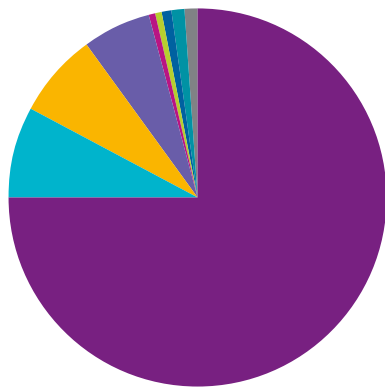
Official launch of the new book



Goblin Gold

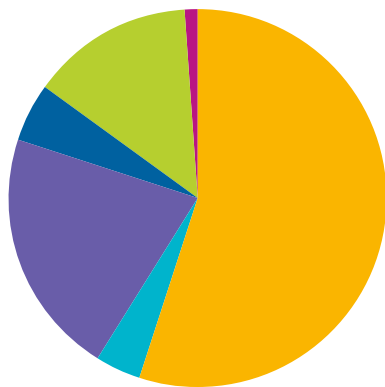
AONB Unit Financial Structure

'Core' income



Defra (75%)	£144,220
Herefordshire Council (8%)	£16,334
Worcestershire County Council (7%)	£13,268
Malvern Hills District Council (6%)	£11,000
Gloucestershire County Council (0.5%)	£600
Forest of Dean District Council (0.5%)	£872
Parish Council voluntary contributions (1.5%)*	£3,000
Contribution to project work (Natural England) (1.5%)	£2,500
Total	£191,794

'Core' expenditure



Staff cost (including travel and training) (55%)	£105,769
Accommodation cost (4%)	£7,680
Partnership budget (21%)	£40,523
Partnership running costs (5%)	£9,237
Sustainable Development Fund (14%)	£26,175
Transfer to project reserve (1%)	£2,410
Total	£191,794

Additional project income (and expenditure)

Heritage Lottery Fund (Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project)

Total **£107,542**

* Warm thanks are due to Colwall, Cradley, Little Malvern and Welland, Malvern Wells and West Malvern Parish Councils for their contributions

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 (P/T)

malvern hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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