

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Outstanding Beauty Outstanding Achievements

Highlights of the work of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership



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Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

The Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of 47 AONBs which cover approximately 18% of England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

AONBs are rightly regarded as a treasured natural resource. Along with National Parks, they form part of the United Kingdom's family of Protected Landscapes which are recognised internationally.

Most people who enjoy the countryside, and particularly those who live within the boundaries of an AONB, realise how lucky they are, but only a small proportion of them know the facts behind their good fortune. For instance, the enjoyment and the social and economic benefits they derive from their AONB come at a very low cost to the British taxpayer – around 18p per person a year compared with the cost of the National Parks (80p per person).

"I am consistently amazed how the small amounts of money AONB Units get are transformed into wonderful spending within the area . . ."

Sir John Johnson, former Chairman, The Countryside Commission

The Malvern Hills AONB

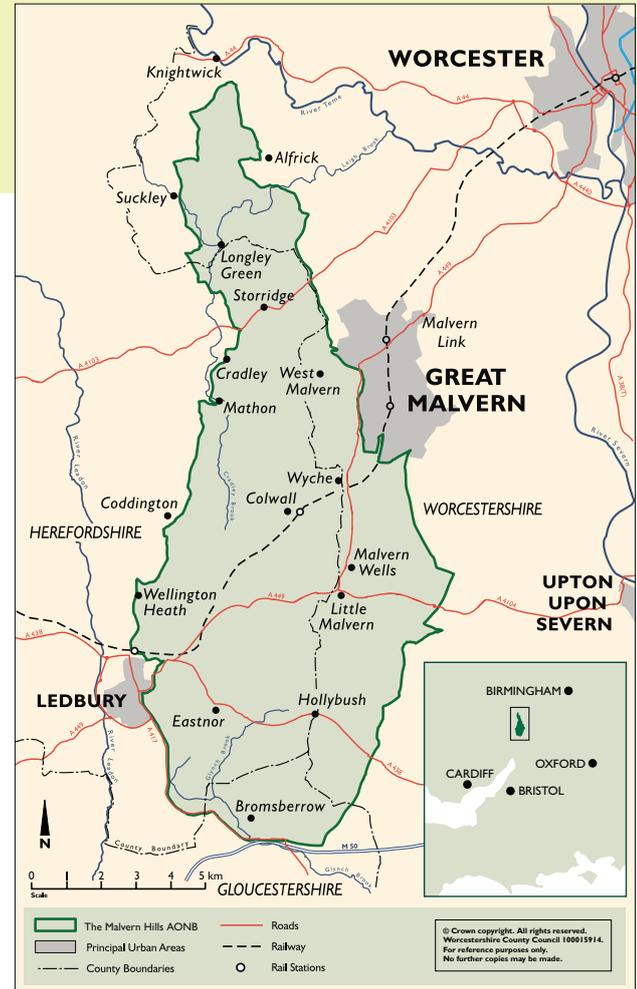
The AONB

The Malvern Hills AONB was designated in 1959. The area is of national importance because of its natural beauty and its distinctive character. The special features of the area include its varied geology, a wide variety of landscapes and landscape features, nationally important wildlife habitats, a rich and distinctive historic environment and thriving, active communities.

The AONB Partnership

The AONB Partnership is a working partnership between those who live and work in the area, those who manage the land and those charged with conserving and enhancing the special features of the area. Local authorities, government agencies, voluntary bodies, landowners and community groups are all represented on the Partnership but there is no limit or restriction on who can be involved. Resources from national and local government are available to support the work of those who wish to conserve and enhance the area. A management plan exists to guide the work of the AONB Partnership.

This document gives an overview of some of the recent achievements of the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership in conserving natural beauty and meeting a wide range of policy objectives. It also demonstrates how AONB resources can add value to the work of others.





Securing resources

A key role of the AONB Partnership is to source and secure funding to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB.

The Malverns Heritage Project

In 2004 the AONB Partnership was awarded almost £1 m of external funding, including £750,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, to help restore two elements of the AONB's heritage: its grazed hills and the water features from which its world famous spring waters flow.

Grazing on the hills and commons

The Malvern Hills Conservators, private landowners and **Natural England** have been working for many years to improve the nationally important grasslands of the AONB. Resources from the Malverns Heritage Project have been used to support this effort in a number of ways:

- Installation of cattle grids and gates to support grazing activities
- Financial support for a grazier to manage livestock on the Malvern Hills
- Research into options for the long-term management of Castlemorton Common
- Provision of information and interpretation
- Evaluation of the success of habitat management for key species



Top left: Cattle grid installed as part of the Malverns Heritage Project

Left: Cattle grazing on Castlemorton Common

Water, water everywhere

Working in close co-operation with the **Malvern Spa Association** and a variety of other local interests, funding from the Malverns Heritage Project has been used to restore 17 of the Malverns' distinctive wells and spouts and to raise awareness of the area's unique water resources.

Key achievements include:

- Repair of stonework, railings and drainage systems
- Relaying of cobbles and repointing of bricks
- Recutting of stone plaques and erection of pillars
- Restoring the flow of water to spouts which had "dried up"
- New web-based educational pages on Malverns' hydrology and the history and medicinal qualities of the water
- Production of a junior education pack for use in local schools
- Development of an education centre at Holywell



Top right: Barnards Green Trough
Right: North Malvern Clock Tower

Promoting a more sustainable

The AONB Partnership receives delegated funding from central government for a Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to support projects that bring social, environmental and economic benefits to the AONB. This funding enables people to test new ideas and to pilot new ways of living and working in the AONB. Over a period of three years 40 grants totalling just over £185,000 have been awarded to local communities, businesses and statutory and voluntary organisations.

The environmental economy

- A grant received by **Worcestershire Youth Support Services** has funded the development of a skills and knowledge base amongst young people who are considering work in rural industries. Part of this research has been an exploration of job opportunities for young people and, as a result, local businesses have become more aware of the potential for employing young people.

- The **Malvern Hills Coppice Network** is a collection of local woodland workers and others with an interest in woods and their management. Financial support has helped Network members to promote their products, services and businesses through the creation of a web-based directory. A machinery pool has been created, with equipment and tools being shared by members as and when they are needed. AONB funding is also being used to support a full time coppice apprentice in the area, part of a nationally recognised and accredited apprenticeship programme.



Top left: Fencing at Evendine

Left: Wood processing at Caves Folly Nurseries

way of life

Overall the AONB Sustainable Development Fund has levered in external funds in the proportion of 1:3

Source: Land Use Consultants

- A company called **Wildwood Coppice Crafts** has received a grant towards the purchase of specialist equipment for extracting silver birch from the slopes of the Malvern Hills. The trees, which are damaging the nationally important grassland of the Hills, are being sold to Worcester Racecourse to make horse jumps. Previously, the racecourse had brought in its birch from the south east of England.

Reducing our carbon footprint

- **Malvern Hills District Council** organised an exhibition promoting sustainable living to local people. The two day event provided practical ideas on sustainable house design and renewable technologies, and on how to recycle and to save energy.

- **Bubble House Worms Farming Enterprises** conducted a trial of a new form of technology for composting organic canteen waste which would otherwise be sent to landfill. Two local schools and the Malvern Hills Outdoor Education Centre took part in the trial. Following this pilot, other schools in the area have expressed an interest in following suit.

- **Caves Folly Nurseries** used an SDF grant to help purchase a tractor and wood processor. This has enabled the business to become a recognised outlet for the sale of local logs as fuel for domestic and retail customers, reducing the need to bring in fuel from outside the area and reducing carbon footprints.

- **Welcome To Our Future** ran an information seminar at Colwall Village Hall on sustainable building construction and the use of renewable energy sources. The aim was to help community groups and voluntary bodies to make community buildings more sustainable and energy efficient. Representatives from communities throughout the AONB attended the event.



Right: Composting bins at the Malvern Hills Outdoor Education Centre

Providing a welcome

The AONB Partnership works closely with the local community to ensure that residents and visitors value and enjoy their environs. The Partnership is also committed to enhancing tranquillity and to reducing car use.

Access for all

- In 2007 the **Malvern Access Group** produced a guide that highlights the accessibility of a range of shops and businesses within the town of Malvern. Financial support from the AONB enabled this guide to be expanded to include information on access opportunities in the wider countryside.
- A small grant to **Worcestershire County Council** has been used to promote a community transport service around Alfrick and Suckley, leading to greater social mobility for both young and old and fewer cars on the road.

- 'Miles without Stiles' is a **Herefordshire Council** programme to make the countryside of the AONB more accessible to those with reduced mobility. AONB funding over three years has enabled the Council to audit the accessibility of paths and tracks in the area and to 'open up' 12 kms of path by replacing 42 stiles with gates. It is intended that a barrier-free route will eventually link the three villages of Colwall, Mathon and Cradley. Information about Miles without Stiles routes can be downloaded from www.herefordshire.gov.uk

Top left: Enjoying the Malvern Hills AONB
Left: Train leaving Colwall Station

Green tourism and transport

- A grant to **Caves Folly Nurseries** helped in the establishment of a small bunkhouse, campsite, 'organic' shop and visitor centre on site. The proximity of the Nurseries to the train station and the centre of the village allows this site to be used as a test-bed for sustainable tourism. Only visitors arriving on foot, horse or bicycle can stay at the camp site.
- An AONB collaboration with the **Malverns Showground** resulted in a series of leaflets promoting walks, a horse ride and a cycle ride starting from this popular visitor attraction. The aim is to reduce car use and to encourage visitors to extend their stay in the AONB, thus benefiting local businesses.
- A grant to the **Cotswolds and Malverns Transport Partnership** has supported the publication of a guide promoting the AONB to users of the Oxford-Hereford rail line.
- The Hills Hopper is a local bus service formerly funded through the **Malvern Hills Rural Transport Partnership**. The service runs on weekends and bank holidays (April - September). Over 8000 people have used the bus since 2005.
- **Worcestershire County Council** has produced a series of Parish Paths leaflets providing local people with a map of paths and bridleways to be found on their doorstep, together with key information about points of interest. It is hoped that these guides will reduce car use amongst local walkers and riders.

Right: 'Organic' shop at Caves Folly Nurseries





Supporting landowners and



The AONB Partnership recognises that the conservation of this special area lies in the hands of those who own and manage it. Support for landowners and managers is, therefore, a key component of the Partnership's endeavours.

Practical enhancements

- The availability of Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants within the AONB has allowed **landowners** to make small improvements and add local distinctiveness to their land. The result has been an increase in orchards and spinneys planted with traditional varieties and species, coppiced trees, hedgelaying, pollarding, and scrub clearance from commons and ponds.

Over a period of seven years, the Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants scheme has helped to create 1500m of hedgerow and to plant 1800 trees in the AONB.

This work, undertaken locally by local people, helps to enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.

- AONB funds have been used to help purchase and install stock-proof fencing and gates at two nature reserves in the AONB – St Wulstan's (owned by **Malvern Hills District Council** and managed by **Worcestershire County Council**) and the Knapp and Papermill (owned and managed by the **Worcestershire Wildlife Trust**). This fencing infrastructure has allowed the sites to be grazed - a more sustainable management regime which has helped to sustain the wildlife interest of the reserves.

Top left: Landscape at Suckley

Left: Cradley Brook

managers

Advice and support

- Over a number of years, the AONB Partnership has supported the **Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)** in providing practical conservation advice to farmers and other land managers. This advice has been dispensed through awareness raising events, group site visits and through the production of farm Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). Funding has also enabled FWAG Officers to carry out over 30 one-to-one farm visits in the AONB, to provide site-based land management advice and to help those applying for agri-environment support. Eleven Entry Level Stewardship applications and eight Higher Level Stewardship applications have arisen from these visits.
- In 2008 the **Small Woods Association** arranged for specialist advisors to visit four

large property owners in the AONB and to carry out feasibility assessments on the use of wood as a carbon-neutral fuel in estate buildings. The aim was to encourage the increased use of on-site woodfuel resources. These visits were subsidised by the AONB Partnership.

- **The Malvern Hills Conservators** own and manage the Shire Ditch – a Scheduled Monument that runs along the ridge of the Hills. A project to assess the extent of the ditch, record pressure points and to provide recommendations for management was commissioned by the Conservators and carried out by **Worcestershire County Council's Historic Environment and Archaeology Service**. Match funding for this survey was provided through the AONB Partnership.

Top right: Newly laid hedge at Welland

Right: Shire Ditch





Engaging the community

Those who live and work in the AONB have a valuable role to play in helping to conserve and enhance the special features of the area. The AONB Partnership works to encourage and support a range of local groups in their efforts.

Education for the future

- The pupils at **St Mary's First School, Bromesberrow** have established an Eco Club. Finance from the AONB Partnership has been used to purchase equipment, seeds and plants so that the school can grow food, compost waste and landscape its grounds with native trees and a hedgerow. Parents, children, the local gardening club and community have all got their hands dirty with the Eco Club.
- Students studying for a Masters Degree in Sustainable Development Advocacy (SDA) regularly undertake work placements and projects with a range of local organisations

in the AONB. An important aim of these placements is to help businesses and community groups to work towards more sustainable practices. Projects have included energy and environmental audits, feasibility studies and waste minimisation strategies. AONB grants to **The Bulmer Foundation** have been used to provide bursary support for SDA students.

- With AONB support, the **Soil Association** ran a series of workshops in local schools to demonstrate how sustainable farming can provide local food, support the economy and conserve the local environment. 10 schools and 300 children took part.



Top left: Mistletoe training at Snatford

Left: Checking bracket fungi, Colwall Orchard Group

“Superb morning! Children were fully engaged and full of enthusiasm for changing their own eating habits.”

Teacher, Somers Park Primary School

Community engagement

- The **Colwall Orchard Group** boasts almost 50 local members. Financial support with training and tools has enabled the group to survey 36 traditional orchards in the parish and to carry out practical tree management work at a number of these sites. A Mistletoe Fair and a Wassail in the village attracted many local residents and raised awareness of the value of local orchards. In 2008 the Colwall Apple Day celebrations were enjoyed by over 350 villagers with 200 litres of juice being produced by the end of the day.
- AONB funding has been used to provide practical support to volunteers working with the **Malvern Hills Conservators** and the **Malvern Hills Coppice Network**. Assistance has been given

towards the purchase of tools and equipment, insurance cover, protective clothing and training opportunities. Funds have also been used to offer subsidised training to those who wish to learn the skills of hedgelaying and coppice management. Over 40 people in the area have attended such courses.

- A partnership project led by **England's Past for Everyone** has involved members of the local community in the investigation and understanding of Frith Wood in the west of the AONB. Local people accompanied experts in researching the geology, ecology and archaeology of the Wood. Information on these subjects has been brought together into a booklet which is available for local residents and visitors.

Top right: Malvern Hills Coppice Network volunteer
Right: Apple juicing with the Colwall Orchard Group





Working with others

The AONB Partnership is always looking to establish new working relationships and to explore ways in which it can add value, share ideas and promote best practice. Partnership working takes place regionally and nationally, as well as at the local level.

Local, regional and national working

- The AONB Partnership is represented on the county-wide **LEADER Programmes** for Herefordshire and Worcestershire.
- AONB staff are represented on **Herefordshire Council's** Local Sites Partnership. This group aims to improve the proportion of local sites under positive conservation management and to help Herefordshire Council to deliver its Local Area Agreement.
- The **region's AONBs** and the **Peak District National Park Authority** are working together to obtain funding from **Advantage West Midlands**, to deliver economic benefits in the protected areas linked to their high quality environments.
- AONBs in the West Midlands have jointly undertaken a feasibility study to assess the need for regional level advocacy and coordination for the region's Protected Landscapes.
- The AONB Team Manager regularly feeds into national level consultations in order to influence Government policy. This input takes place through the **National Association for AONBs** - the independent body which represents AONBs at a national level.
- In 2008 the Malvern Hills AONB were co-hosts of the 10th Annual AONB Conference which attracted over 180 delegates from across the UK.



Top left: Castlemorton Common open day

Left: Abseiling at Tank Quarry

Monitoring the health of the AONB

The health of the AONB is the ultimate measure of the effectiveness of the AONB Partnership. A monitoring programme has been established to track changes in the condition of the special features of the area. Targeted research and survey work have also been used to improve our knowledge of these features. Collaboration with a range of key partners has been a hallmark of this work.

Key achievements

- The publication by **English Heritage** of 'The Malvern Hills, an Ancient Landscape' – containing the results of systematic archaeological research in the area.
- The development by the **Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust** of a template for assessing the condition of Local Geological Sites. This has since become the national standard for this work.
- The development by the **University of Worcester** of a methodology for monitoring landscape change, based on Landscape Character Assessment.
- A comprehensive survey of the condition of all listed buildings and an assessment of locally important structures within the AONB
- The engagement of a planning consultant to monitor and report on development activity within the AONB on an annual basis.
- The production of the first ever report on the state of the Malvern Hills AONB in 2006, bringing together data on a wide range of AONB attributes. The 2006 report was updated in 2009.

Right: Sunset





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How can we work with you? AONB resources are available to support those involved in conserving and enhancing this nationally important area. Please contact the AONB Office for more information.

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

