

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2015/16



Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the annual review for the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, covering the period 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016. I am always impressed by the breadth of work which the Partnership undertakes in pursuit of the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. It reminds us that the AONB is special for so many reasons, and that work to benefit the landscape, the wildlife and the people who live in and visit the area needs to be equally broad.

The Partnership has been busy this year conserving priority habitats, managing important geological sites and working to help ensure that only appropriate development is permitted in this nationally important area. People's enjoyment and understanding has been addressed through the development of new interpretative materials and Codes of Conduct for recreation on the Malvern Hills and Commons. The AONB Partnership also cares deeply about supporting sustainable transport and community life and with this in mind I was delighted this year to see that the Malvern Hills Car Club further expanded its reach with a first vehicle now available in Ledbury (see page 7).

In the Autumn Budget Statement, Government confirmed that its core funding for AONBs will be protected over the next four years. I hope that all those with an interest in the future of protected landscapes take great heart from this news. In these straitened times it must be taken as a clear signal that AONBs and AONB Partnerships continue to have a high importance to the nation.

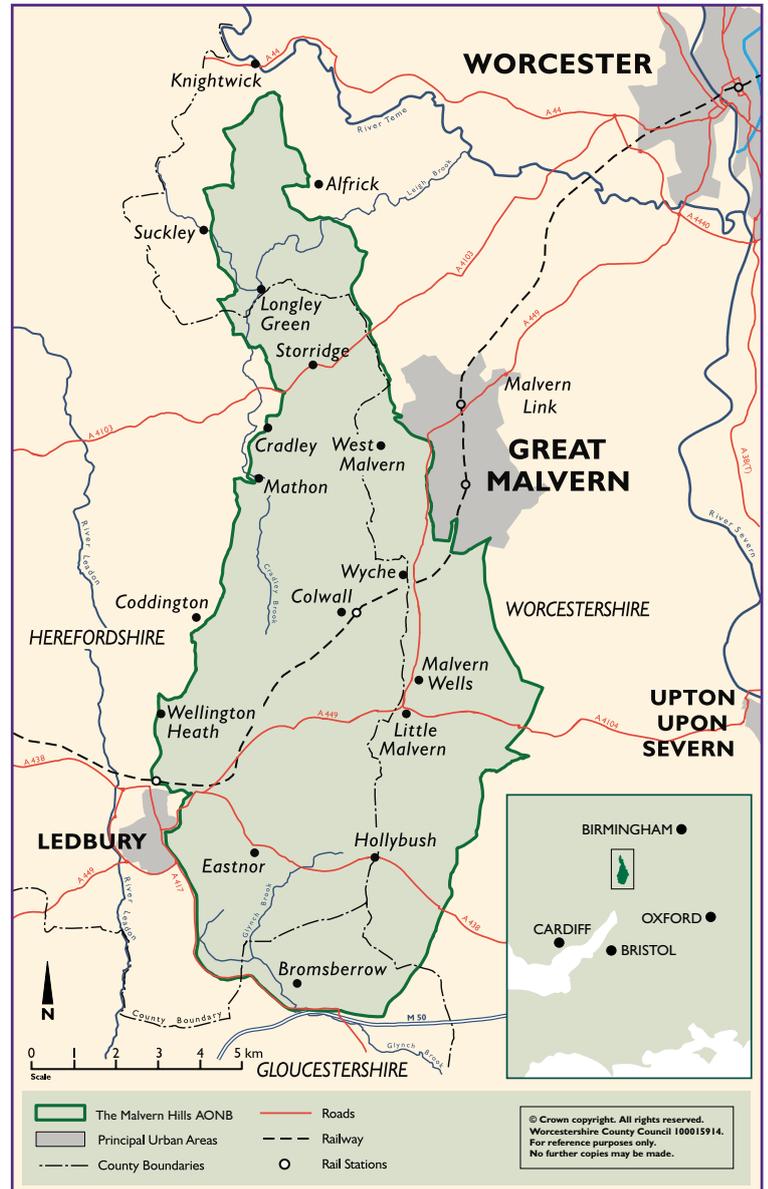
I hope that you enjoy reading about some of the achievements of the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership over the last 12 months.



John Raine

Cllr John Raine
Chairman, Malvern Hills AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



Photography Credits:

All photographs copyright Malvern Hills AONB Unit except Noble Chafer Beetle: Gary Farmer and Dark skies above the Malvern Hills: Dr Chris Baddiley.

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



Environmental colour assessment

The colours of building materials such as brick, steel and render can have a major impact on the special landscapes of the AONB, either helping a development to blend in to the background or to stand out from it. The AONB Partnership commissioned a colour study for the area this year, analysing and recording the colours present in different landscapes and settlements – a process known as Environmental Colour Assessment. This information has been digitised and used to create colour palettes and guidance which will assist people in the selection of colours for external finishes.

Environmental Colour Assessment was also used during the year to inform the choice of materials and colour for recladding the Wye Hall at the Royal Three Counties Showground and the selection of a new roof on a Victorian cowshed belonging to the Malvern Hills Conservators.



Victorian cow shed, The Hacketts

Geocentre walks

The Geocentre is located in the Wyche Innovation Centre and is a café and information hub located at the halfway point of the Geopark Way. Members of the public who visit often ask why there are no mapped walks leading up to and around the Hills. The AONB Sustainable Development Fund panel awarded a grant to the Geocentre to produce two such walks. One is a loop of about 1-1.5 hours that goes north from the Centre and guides you through Park Wood and up to the Worcestershire Beacon. The second is a southern-loop of about 1-1.25 hours that includes views from the spine of the Malvern Hills and Gardiner's Quarry. The guides are available on a free-loan basis (with a small deposit) from Cafe H2O at the Centre.



Interpretation at the Geocentre

Knights Quarry management

Knights Quarry is a rare exposure of Woolhope Limestone within the AONB. Being softer than the other Silurian limestones, it does not form ridges, or if it did, these have been worn away. The stratification shows the lifting at the east, from the same forces that pushed British Camp westwards, and the blockiness of the strata implies that it was laid down in shifting waters.

This important site was cleared and managed by dedicated Geosite Maintenance Volunteers, under supervision from Dr John Payne of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust. The quarry is one of four important geological sites managed in this way during 2015, funded by a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.



Geological Site Maintenance

Rare fruit trees to return to the three counties

A grant from Natural England's Innovation Fund to the AONB Partnership is being used to help ensure that some of our rarest fruit trees will once again grace traditional orchards across the three counties. Bud wood from 20 rare varieties, including the wonderfully named Dewdulip Seedling and Flower of the West, was provided to Walcot Nursery in Worcestershire where it has been grafted to new rootstock. The 300 new trees which result from this work will be planted out across some 40 extant orchards as part of the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project.



Grafting rare fruit trees

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project

The Heritage Lottery Funded Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project aims to help conserve and celebrate traditional orchards in parts of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The project, which commenced in November 2014, is now in full swing and by the close of 2015/16 its achievements included:

- 22 traditional orchards managed;
- 250 volunteers involved in restoring traditional orchards;
- 11 orchard management plans completed;
- 26 orchard work days carried out;
- 3 mistletoe training courses held; and
- 1 'Orchard Champions' course developed.

The Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project 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.



Noble Chafer Beetle

Autumn in Malvern Festival

Malvern is lucky to have had many artistic visitors down the years and even luckier to have the Autumn in Malvern Festival that rejoices in artists who have made their mark in Malvern's environs. This year Linda Hart led a walk over British Camp for the Festival and marked out, with verse, the points in the view where poets had lived and written. Great views, great poets and great poems helped conjure the beauties of the landscape from words alone, but made all the more powerful by the eye's gaze.



Autumn in Malvern guided walk

The future of Coombe Green Common

Coombe Green Common is part of the same common as Castlemorton, and like it, is a much loved place. The problems faced by both commons are just the same: how to keep them grazed and accessible for all who wish to enjoy them. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit provided a grant to the Parish Council this year to help with the scrub bashing on Coombe Green Common and, with an eye on the future, a consultant was engaged to produce a management plan for the site. This will help the Parish Council look after the common over the next five years, and help guide it in what to do thereafter.



Coombe Green Common

Interpretation at Tank/North Quarry

Tank Quarry and North Malvern Car Park tell part of a nationally important story: the creation of the landscape of the Malvern Hills AONB. A grant from the Sustainable Development Fund has enabled the Malvern Hills Conservators to improve the geological information at the site to better tell this story. Visitors to the site will be able to read new interpretation panels and to see examples of the main rock types which make up the area and which have been so crucial to the development of the area's distinctive landscape. Richard Edwards who runs an immensely popular U3A geology course has been advising on the project.



Interpreting North Quarry

Planning and development

The control and management of development throughout the AONB is now on a much surer footing following the formal approval of new Local Plans for Herefordshire and South Worcestershire. Both documents passed through rigorous public consultation and inspector-led public examinations before being approved. The AONB Unit attended one of the examination hearings during the year and argued successfully for the removal from the South Worcestershire Plan of a site which had been allocated for the development of 35 houses in the AONB at Malvern Wells.

During the year the AONB Unit argued against applications for a range of inappropriate development in the area, including large-scale poultry units at Chances Pitch and substantial residential schemes at Welland and Malvern Wells. These applications were all either withdrawn or were refused planning permission.



Proposed development site at Malvern Wells

The AONB from the air

Aerial photography, once so expensive, is now made easier by the advent of battery powered unmanned aerial vehicles, commonly known as drones. The AONB Partnership commissioned Monty Funk, a local company, to fly and film many of the highly distinctive landscapes and features of the AONB, including Castlemorton Common, Eastnor Castle and Deer Park and British Camp. Once complete, the edited film will be available for viewing on the AONB website and YouTube, but it is also expected to be used by a range of local organisations and interest groups to help promote and interpret the area.



Unmanned aerial vehicle

Cycling code of conduct

The Malvern Hills are a very popular destination for all sorts of recreational activities, including mountain biking. Following a series of complaints around erosion, dangerous riding and damage to a scheduled ancient monument on the hills, the Malvern Hills Conservators liaised with local cycling interests and formed a working group to encourage safe and responsible cycling.

With the working group's help, and following guidance from cycling charity CTC and International Mountain Biking UK, the Conservators produced a code of conduct for mountain bikers.

Following the code will help cyclists and other users share the hills safely whilst also protecting the landscape. The code of conduct is available from the Conservators' website, and copies have also been distributed to local groups and bike shops. Extra signs have also been put out on the hills where unlawful mountain biking is known to occur.



Enjoying the Hills.... by bicycle!

The Malvern Hills Conservators welcome cyclists on the bridleways of the Hills and Commons.

An Ordnance Survey map of the Hills will show you the position of the bridleways (OS Explorer 190).



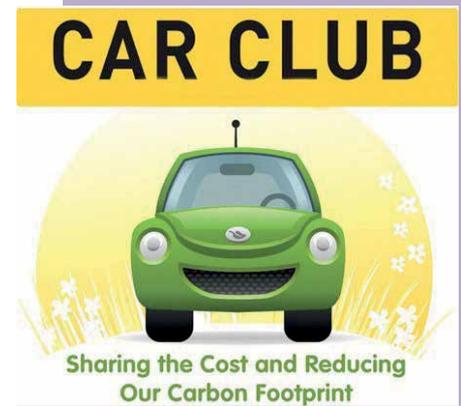
The Malvern Hills and Commons is an iconic landscape and nationally important for wildlife, geology and archaeology.

Here are some pointers on how you can enjoy yourself and help to keep the Malverns special.

Cycling code of conduct

Malvern Hills Car Club extends its reach

In 2009 a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund helped establish a car club in Colwall, Herefordshire. The club has since expanded to cover a wider area with cars now available in West Malvern and Malvern Wells as well as Colwall. During 2015/16 a new milestone was reached with the first car club vehicle established in the town of Ledbury. This highly successful local initiative now boasts 12 vehicles (as well as a number of electric bikes) and 72 club members, thanks largely to the dedication and skills of local volunteers.



Car Club logo

New street lighting for Herefordshire

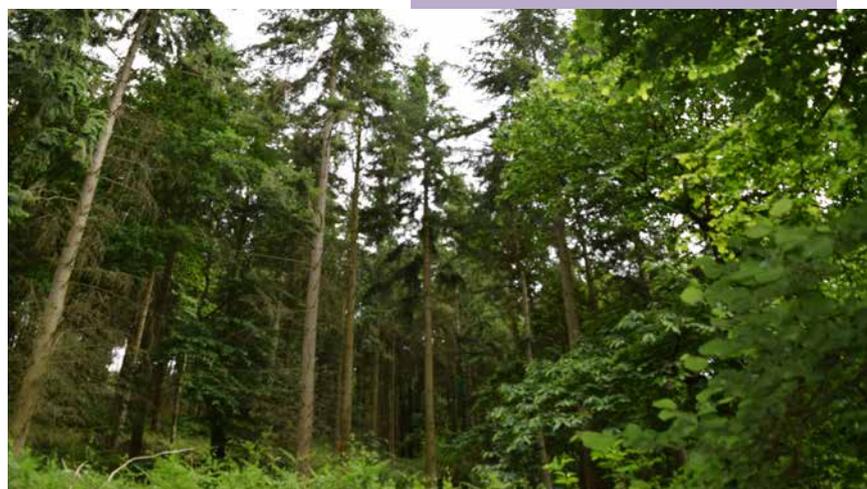
As part of a major programme to reduce carbon emissions and improve environmental performance Herefordshire Council has been replacing its old stock of street lights across the county with new, LED technology. Following concerns raised about the potential light pollution arising from these new luminaires the AONB Unit commissioned renowned astronomer Dr Chris Baddiley to model the effects of the new street lights on the night sky. His initial conclusions suggest that the improved directional nature of the lighting, coupled with Herefordshire Council's commitment to dim the lights by 50% between 12pm and 5am will result in reduced light pollution to the night sky. Dr Baddiley has confirmed this statistically, by his zenith photometer and all sky image systematic measurements at his observatory, the period.



Dark skies above the Malvern Hills

Management of Frith Wood

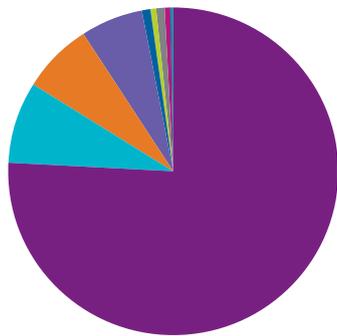
The Forestry Commission oversaw extensive management operations in Frith Wood near Ledbury during the autumn and winter of 2015/16. Approximately 1500 conifer and mixed broadleaved trees were felled and removed from the wood. This management is part of an overall aim to protect mature and veteran broadleaved trees and to restore the ancient woodland character of this important site which has been compromised by tree planting in the past.



Frith Wood

AONB Unit Financial Summary

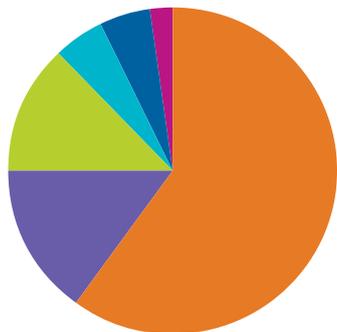
'Core' income



Defra (76%)	£139,384
Herefordshire Council (8%)	£14,647
Worcestershire County Council (7%)	£13,268
Malvern Hills District Council (6%)	£11,000
Gloucestershire County Council (0.5%)	£600
Forest of Dean District Council (0.6%)	£872
Parish Council voluntary contributions (1%)	£1,550
Miscellaneous voluntary contributions (0.3%)	£376
Earned income (0.6%)	£1,031

Total **£182,728**

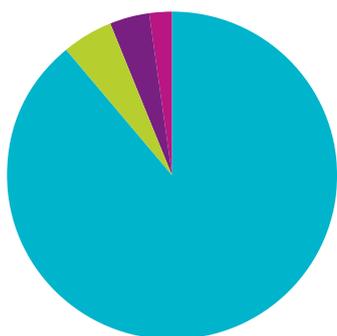
'Core' expenditure



Staff cost (including travel and training) (60%)	£110,004
Accommodation cost (5%)	£9,490
Partnership budget (15%)	£26,341
Partnership running costs (5%)	£9,237
Sustainable Development Fund (13%)	£23,399
Transfer to project reserve (2%)	£4,257

Total **£182,728**

Additional project income (and expenditure)



Herefordshire Council (2%)	£1,687
Heritage Lottery Fund (89%)	£65,571
Natural England Innovation Fund (5%)	£3,500
Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (4%)	£2,750

Total **£73,508**

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 Jones

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project Officer: Karen Humphries

malvern hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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