

2010
2011

malvern hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2010/11



Chairman's foreword



Dr Bryan G Smith,
Chairman of the
Joint Advisory
Committee

Welcome to the annual review for the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, covering the period 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011. The AONB Partnership is taking its share of budget reductions at this time of fiscal restraint. For example, during the period covered by this annual review 5% of the Partnership's central government funding was lost and we expect a further reduction of 21.5% in the period to 2014. The implications of this reduced funding are severe but the Partnership is working to ensure that resources will continue to be available to support the most worthwhile projects.

You can read about such work in this review. One example is the development of AONB guidance on a range of issues including landscape conservation (page 5) keeping horses (page 14) and on highways design (page 18). It is hoped that developers and land managers who use this guidance at an early stage will find that their applications for change are more likely to be supported by decision-makers, potentially saving on the costs involved in having to amend and resubmit proposals. A further benefit of this work is that it should reduce the need for AONB Unit staff to spend time (and so money) in commenting on individual planning applications in the future. AONB guidance is freely available to all, and this is significant at a time when many planning authorities are looking to introduce charges for pre-consultation advice.

This review also contains examples of the Partnership's work to support local businesses (pages 10 and 18) and to help local people in pursuing their own initiatives to reduce their impacts on the environment and to save money (page 14). I am particularly pleased that AONB resources have also been used to help secure a sustainable future for Malvern's iconic gas lamps. This work has been spearheaded by Transition Malvern, Malvern Hills District Council and local Parish Councils and is a great example of how partnership working can help to secure collective goals.

Despite the tough economic times we do know that the government is a strong supporter of AONBs and AONB Partnerships. During the last year the responsibility for strategic oversight and funding of AONBs in England was transferred from Natural England directly to Defra, which means the government department responsible for overseeing National Parks and AONBs is now one and the same. We also know that the government expects AONB Partnerships to play an important role in delivering many of the ambitions set out in the new Natural Environment White Paper.

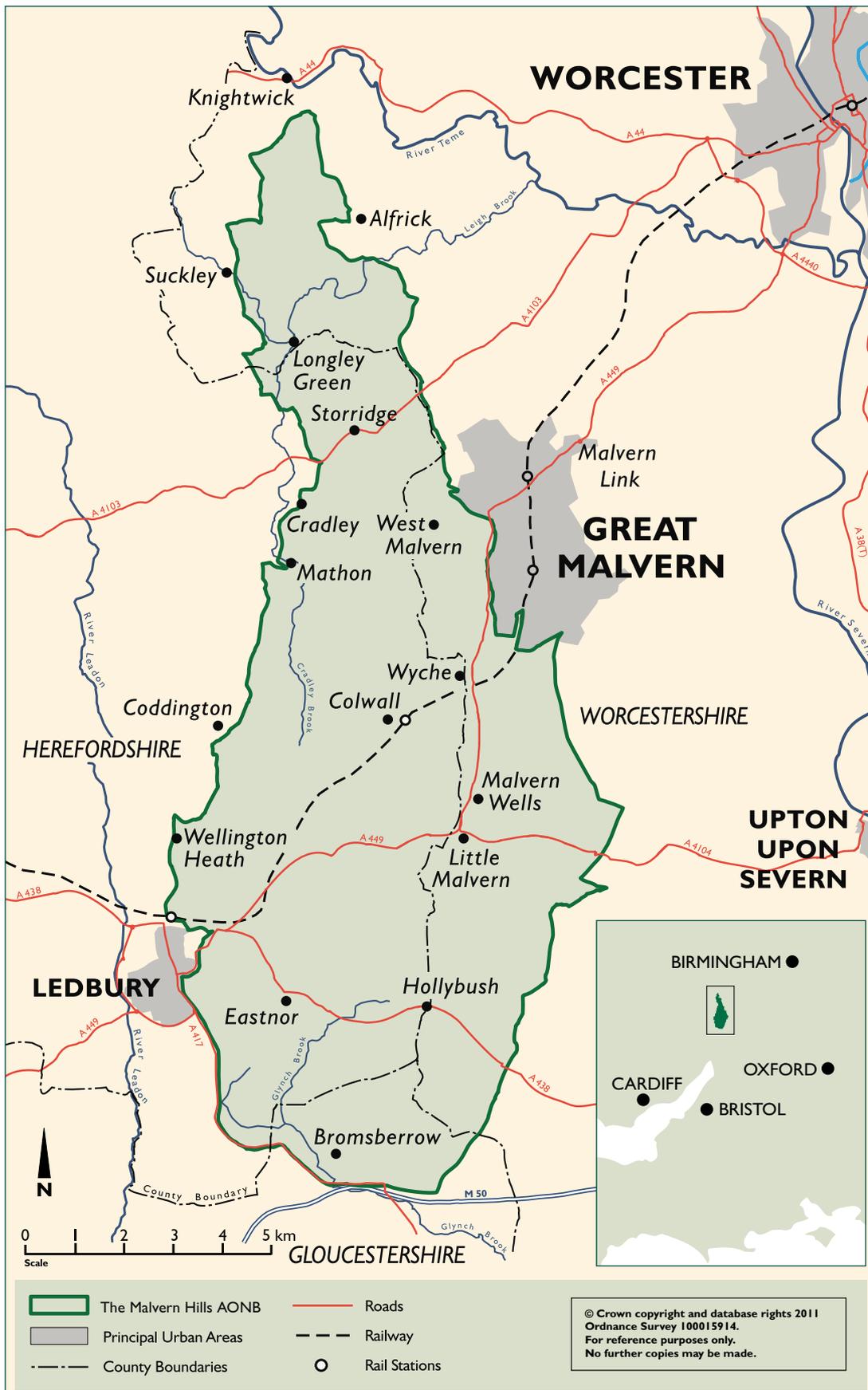
So there is much to do in the future. In the mean time I hope you enjoy reading about our efforts in the recent past.

Dr Bryan G Smith, Chairman of the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Reference Numbers

A reference number (given in brackets) is provided alongside each item of work mentioned in this annual review. This refers to a specific Guiding Principle or Strategic Objective contained within the AONB Management Plan. In this way the annual review demonstrates how the AONB Partnership is implementing the AONB Management Plan.

Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



Outline map of the Malvern Hills AONB

Landscape

Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants (L05)

2010/11 marked the tenth consecutive year in which AONB Partnership funding was used to support small-scale landscape and biodiversity improvements throughout the area. During the year £6,255 of grant aid was administered by Herefordshire Council and shared between eight landowners who carried out a variety of conservation work. The AONB grant funding levered in external contributions of £6,078 and was directed towards landowners who are not receiving financial support through agri-environment schemes. Some highlights of this grant-assisted work were as follows:

- The coppicing of a quarter of an acre of woodland on a steep slope at Tor Coppice in the Leigh Brook Valley at Alfrick. A site visit to this SSSI and Special Wildlife Site in the following spring found a rich variety of wildflowers that had flourished in the area.
- The planting of 900 new trees at Park Wood, owned by the Malvern Hills Conservators. This woodland is gradually being brought back into productive coppice management.
- The traditional laying of 220 metres of hedge at Boulter's Farm on Castlemorton Common. This now provides a stock-proof barrier between the farm and open common and has brought new life to an overgrown hedge. It also provides a demonstration of good hedgerow management to all the people who visit the area.



Tor Coppice



Volunteers at Park Wood

Burying Overhead Electricity Cables (L02)

St Wulstan's Local Nature Reserve in Malvern Wells was the latest location to benefit from a national scheme to improve the beauty of National Parks and AONBs. The scheme – which was established by the Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) – allows our local electricity company, Western Power Distribution, to remove certain overhead power cables and bury them underground. Approximately 480 metres of overhead line were removed from St Wulstan's this year. The work has benefitted the local landscape and contributed to people's enjoyment of this popular nature reserve which is owned and managed by Worcestershire County Council.



St Wulstan's with overhead lines



St Wulstan's without overhead lines

New Landscape Strategy and Guidelines for the AONB (L03)

Following the successful completion of a pilot project in 2009/10, a new Landscape Strategy for the whole of the AONB has now been produced. The strategy is based in part on existing Landscape Character Assessments but also factors in information about the historic landscape, local wildlife, local buildings and the various 'goods' and 'services' which the land in the AONB provides. At the core of the landscape strategy is a series of guidelines which can be used by developers and decision-makers to help retain the distinctive character of the AONB into the future. The landscape strategy can be downloaded from <http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/guidance.html>

Halesend from Grittlesend



Management Plan references

L02 – Restore distinctive landscapes and landscape features

L03 – Identify and promote opportunities for positive landscape change

L05 – Seek resources to promote landscape management and improvements

Biodiversity

Understanding and Conserving Traditional Orchards (B05)

Traditional orchards are recognised as one of the most important habitats for wildlife, both in the AONB and in the United Kingdom. To improve understanding of this resource the AONB Partnership commissioned the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to carry out a survey of 25 traditional orchards in the north of the AONB. With the generous permission of landowners, orchards were surveyed in the parishes of Lulsley, Knightwick, Alfrick, Suckley, Leigh, Storridge, Cradley, Mathon and West Malvern. Results highlighted that traditional orchards in this area hold significant biodiversity interest with almost 50% of sites surveyed potentially qualifying for Special Wildlife Site status. However, the survey also showed significant issues and threats to the long-term survival of these habitats. The AONB Partnership also paid for follow-up advice on management and potential funding sources to help orchard owners address these issues.

What's the big IBDA? (B05)

Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Areas (IBDAs) are large areas of countryside which provide a focus for the conservation of key habitats and species at a 'landscape' scale. Eight national pilot IBDAs have been established in England. One of these – 'the Wye, Severn and Avon Vales IBDA' – encompasses the whole of the Malvern Hills AONB. A research project to establish community interest and capacity in the restoration and management of traditional orchards in the IBDA was carried out this year, with funding provided by Natural England. The study gathered evidence on the problems facing owners and managers of traditional orchards and makes recommendations on how some of these issues can be addressed. It is hoped that this work will provide the basis for a large project that could help to conserve many traditional orchards throughout the area.

Orchard Management Advice (B01)

Colwall Orchard Group is dedicated to the restoration of traditional orchards within the parish of Colwall but the group is also fast-becoming a valued and important source of expertise throughout the AONB. A grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund this year allowed the group to provide much needed management advice to seven orchard owners outside of the Colwall parish boundary. An important 'discovery' made during these visits was the quantity of 'garden orchards' containing mature or veteran trees, presumably dating from when houses were built in once thriving orchards. It is hoped that future work will be carried out into how best to conserve this unexpected resource.

Malvern Hills Conservators (B01)

The Malvern Hills Conservators continued their considerable efforts to support biodiversity at various sites around the AONB. Skylarks and small heath butterflies benefited from on-going birch clearance on SSSI grassland at Pinnacle Hill. Small tree and bramble clearance at Gullet Quarry helped rare fritillary butterflies and rowan sapling clearance at North Hill improved conditions for flora and ground-nesting meadow pipits.



Birch Clearance on Pinnacle Hill

In brief

- The Malvern Hills Conservators erected 20 new dormouse boxes around Midsummer Hill. Three dormice were found in the middle section of the hills this year. (B01).
- Worcestershire County Council ran the Worcestershire Heritage Fruit Tree scheme to promote and support the use of local tree varieties in the area (B07).
- Hedgerow restoration work took place at St Wulstan’s Local Nature Reserve, managed by Worcestershire County Council (B01).

Management Plan references

B01 – Conserve, enhance and expand key habitats and populations of key species

B05 – Undertake survey and research on the AONB’s biodiversity resources

B07 – Promote greater understanding and enjoyment of the biodiversity resources of the AONB

Bug hunting with Colwall Orchard Group



Geodiversity



Whitman's Hill fossil foray

Community Earth Heritage Champions (G01 and G02)

Established by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust, the 'Champions' project equips local volunteers to understand and care for their local geological sites. There are currently six Champions sites in the AONB, supported by 23 volunteers. This year, volunteers carried out a variety of small-scale works at local quarries, including vegetation clearance. Some larger-scale vegetation clearance and access work was also carried out at Loxter Ashbed Quarry – a Champions site adjacent to Wellington Heath – with funding support from the AONB Partnership. In addition, many local residents and visitors attended Champions launch events at Dingle, Gardiners, Loxter Ashbed, Westminster Bank and Whitman's Hill quarries. Activities at these events ranged from guided walks and geological displays to musical concerts and fireworks!

Understanding and Awareness (G02)

Raising awareness and understanding of the geological heritage of the two counties is a major feature of the work of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust. Some key outputs from their work in the AONB this year were as follows:

- Publication of new circular trails leaflets for walks in Alfrick and the Suckley Hills and in Mathon and the Malvern Hills. These leaflets can be downloaded from www.EarthHeritageTrust.org
- Erection of geological interpretation panels in Chase End Quarry and in Loxter Ashbed Quarry.
- Creation of a permanent geological display in Ledbury Heritage Centre and displays in Wellington Heath Memorial Hall and Cradley Church.
- A family fossil foray and educational visits to Whitman's Hill Quarry, including 270 pupils from Nunnery Wood High School on a geology appetiser day.

Management Plan references

G01 – Conserve geodiversity in line with Geodiversity Action Plans

G02 – Promote greater understanding of the geology of the AONB

G03 – Undertake research to secure information on the state of the geodiversity resource

Loxter Ashbed Quarry



Survey, Research and Monitoring Highlights (G03)

- In conjunction with the Malvern Hills Conservators and Natural England, the AONB Partnership commissioned a detailed survey to pinpoint the key areas of geological interest in Tank Quarry.
- The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust produced site management plans for Crews Hill Nature Reserve and Chase End Quarry.

Historic Environment

The Eastnor Conservation Management Plan (H01 and H04)

The Eastnor Castle Estate is one of the most important land holdings within the AONB, not least because it contains a Grade II* registered park and garden of special historic interest. A comprehensive Conservation Management Plan was prepared this year covering the registered park and garden and some of the un-registered in-hand farm land. This contains policies designed to sustain and enhance the special features of the area. The Plan has itself informed a new 10 year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme to support environmental management on the Estate.



Herefordshire farmstead

Historic Farmsteads (H02)

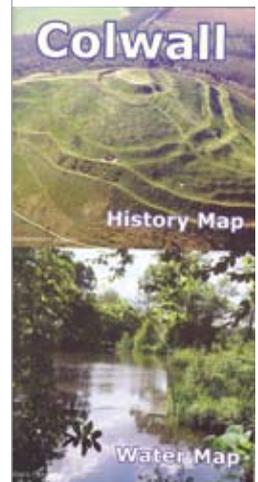
In 2010/11 work was undertaken to characterise historic farmsteads in the Malvern Hills National Character Area (similar to the area designated as AONB). This work was carried out under the banner of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscape Project and revealed a number of findings, including the following:

- Large-scale farmsteads are predominant in the south of the area.
- Many traditional buildings have survived in the area (except around Malvern), with 72% of farmsteads recorded from the late nineteenth century retaining more than half of their historic footprints.
- The proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use in this area is the lowest of any in the West Midlands region.

English Heritage has developed planning tools which can be used to help sustain and enhance the contribution that historic farmsteads make to local distinctiveness and landscape character.

Maps of Colwall (H03)

The Colwall Village Society promotes the history of the village to a wide audience. In 2010/11 the society was awarded a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to produce an historical map that reveals many of the important cultural sites of the parish, as well as those related to its water heritage. This publication fits in with the water trails leaflets that were published under the Malverns Heritage Project several years ago.



The new Colwall History Map

Lime Kilns Exposed (H03)

The Malvern Hills Conservators removed an area of scrub at the edge of Park Wood to fully reveal two lime kilns which were in use in the period circa 1870 to 1920. A new interpretation board explains how the lime kilns worked and their significance to the management of the wood.



Lime Kilns at Park Wood

Management Plan references

H01 – Preserve, conserve and enhance... Registered Parks and Gardens...

H02 – Undertake surveys and research to secure and document information on the historic environment

H03 – Promote greater public understanding and engagement with the historic environment

H04 – Prepare appropriate management documents for sites and features to guide future management

Farming and Forestry

Forestry Agreements (F01)

Forestry Commission grant schemes play an important role in helping to support desirable woodland management in the area. Four new Woodland Grant Schemes were established in the AONB this year across a total of 128 hectares of land. These included Woodland Improvement Grants at Eastnor and Suckley, and a Woodland Regeneration Grant for Berrington wood (to re-establish trees after felling). A new woodland was also created at Batchcombe with the help of a Woodland Creation Grant. Other work undertaken by the Forestry Commission within the AONB included 50 hectares of mixed stands thinning at Coneygree Wood in a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS) restoration area and 800 metres of ride widening to improve access and marginal/transitional edges for woodland birds.



Forestry management at Coneygree Wood



Local grazier and refrigerated trailer

Malvern Hills Beef and Lamb (F05)

The Malverns Heritage Project (see AONB Annual Report 2008/09) helped to bring grazing back to the hills and commons south of British Camp. Conservation management of this area has since been significantly strengthened with the establishment of a Higher Level Stewardship scheme supporting targeted grazing over a 10 year period. A final piece in the sustainable management jigsaw is the need to find a 'route to market' for the meat from the hills. This year, a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund was awarded to the principal grazier to buy advice from a marketing consultancy and to purchase a refrigerated trailer and display units in order to sell the meat directly to the customer. The grant also provided for the establishment of a marketing website www.malvernhillsmeats.co.uk.

FWAG Farmland Advice (F01)

As in previous years, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group received a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to visit and support landowners in the area who wished to join various agri-environmental grant schemes. Half the FWAG visits this year were made to owners of traditional orchards. Many owners indicated they were keen to move into supported management but were hindered by delays in registration with the Rural Land Registry. A total of 10 FWAG visits were carried out on 91 hectares of land.



Apple pressing equipment



Eastnor Deer Park

AONB Study Tour (FP1)

The annual AONB Joint Advisory Committee Study Tour had an agricultural theme this year. Committee members visited one of the area's few dairy farms which has recently established a cake-making business, powered by a ground source heat pump. The day also included a trip to Chase End Hill to hear about the re-establishment of grazing on the hills, a pit-stop to some polytunnels to discuss the pros and cons of plastic and a visit to a local orchard to learn about apple-pressing and cider-making.

Environmental Stewardship (F01 and F02)

Environmental Stewardship is a government scheme providing grants to land managers who deliver effective environmental management. Within this, the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme is targeted towards agreements that provide the maximum environmental outcomes. This year, five new HLS agreements commenced in the AONB, covering a total of 1085 hectares of land. Over the next 10 years these agreements will support a range of work which will be central to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. Key elements within the agreements include:

- Restoration of native, semi-natural woodland.
- Creation and restoration of traditional orchards.
- Restoration and maintenance of species-rich, semi-natural grassland.
- Creation of wood pasture.

Management Plan references

F01 - Promote the maximum uptake of agri-environment and woodland grant schemes

F02 - Bring characteristic habitats into favourable conservation condition

F05 - Increase the production and consumption of local food for example, by stimulating local demand

FP1 - Support a viable farming and forestry economy

Community-Living and Working

School Eco Garden (CO2)

A grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund was awarded to Malvern Wells Primary School this year to help establish an eco-garden. The garden has now become a place where the children have lessons about sustainability and the importance of local food and where they can put theory into practise. Over recent years, grants from the Sustainable Development Fund have now supported eco-clubs and eco-gardens at schools in Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.



Constructing school eco-garden



Children learning how to grow vegetables

Management Plan references

CP1 – Enable vibrant communities to grow sustainably

CO1 – Maintain and enhance access to essential services, particularly in areas of need, in sustainable and innovative ways

CO2 – Develop an enhanced sense of ownership for, and appreciation of, the AONB amongst local communities

CO3 – Foster opportunities for training in conservation and agriculture

Woodland Management Skills (CO3)

2010/11 marked the final year of a three year Coppice Apprenticeship in the Malvern Hills AONB, completed by Jenna Higgins. The Coppice Apprenticeship scheme is a national programme managed by the Small Woods Association which aims to promote woodland skills and management in different parts of the country. Having passed the course, Jenna has now received a Coppice Diploma and intends to use her new found knowledge and expertise to make a living in the local area. Jenna has received grant support from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund throughout the period of her apprenticeship, together with financial support from the Headley and Radcliffe Trusts. Local funding was provided in recognition of the shortage of woodland management skills in the area.

Malvern Water (CP1)

In November 2010 Coca Cola closed the plant that has bottled Malvern water in Colwall since 1892. The declared intention was to build houses upon the site. This plant was one of the major employers within the AONB and its business was based on a natural resource from the landscape. Not wishing to see the bottle works disappear, a group was formed comprising councillors from Herefordshire, Malvern Hills District, Colwall Parish, Malvern Town, the Malvern Spa Association and Malvern Museum. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit, because of its experience gained in helping to restore Holywell bottling plant and its established reputation for partnership working was asked to take a lead within the group. So far the group has stimulated a meeting with all the parties, chaired by the local MP Bill Wiggin, and discussed ideas with potential purchasers of the site. Those ideas include revitalising the bottling plant and using the water for a residential health care development. Both reflect the historic usage of Malvern water.



Interested parties meet at the Colwall Bottling Plant

Bee-Keepers Helped in Upton and Malvern (CO2 and CO3)

Honeybees play an important role in pollinating crops, yet it is common knowledge that these beneficial insects are in decline. The Upton and Malvern Bee-Keepers were awarded AONB funding last year to help arrest this decline, not least by encouraging more people to take up bee-keeping. The grant supported 10 talks by the group and assisted the purchase of bee-keepers suits for those that wanted to learn the art of keeping bees, including children's suits.

In brief

- Worcestershire Wildlife Trust was successful in applying for Worcestershire LEADER funding to create a new education centre at the Knapp and Papermill Nature Reserve near Suckley (CO2).
- £66,000 of Worcestershire LEADER funding was awarded for the provision of toilet facilities, a new disabled access and a kitchen in St James's Church, Welland (CO1).

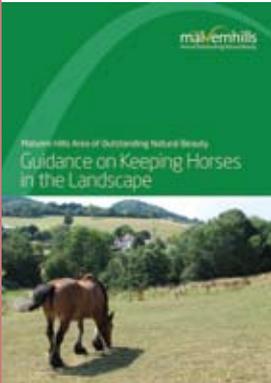


St James Church, Welland

Bee-keeping demonstration



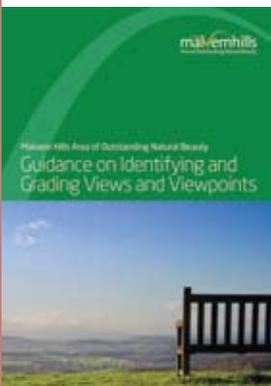
Built Development



Guidance on keeping horses

Guidance on Keeping Horses and Assessing Views (DP6 and D03)

The AONB Partnership produces topic-based guidance to help ensure that new development and landscape change conserves and enhances natural beauty. Last year saw the publication of two new guidance documents. 'Guidance on Keeping Horses in the Landscape' contains information for horse owners and managers about how to incorporate landscape and biodiversity enhancements into horse keeping operations. 'Guidance on Identifying and Grading Views and Viewpoints' helps people to make a reasoned judgement about how a proposed development or change in land use will alter views and how significant this might be. Both guidance documents are available to download at <http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/guidance.html>.



Guidance on assessing views

Home Energy Advice (DP3)

Colwall Greener received an AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant to continue its work advising local residents on the best way to conserve energy in their houses. 23 thermal imaging surveys, 11 household surveys and seven house inspections were carried out. This advice was followed up by the provision of 21 days of work from a home handyman service to help local people begin to take action on measures such as installing insulation and excluding draughts. The elderly and infirm have been particular users of the scheme since those providing advice and support are known and trusted.

Thermal imaging equipment



Management Plan references

DP3 – Development should be subject to high standards of design and sustainability. Energy conservation should be supported wherever possible

DP6 – Equestrian development should proceed in accordance with best practice guidelines

D01 – Encourage the recycling of small quantities of locally distinctive building materials

Energy Monitors (DP3)

Following feedback in 2009/10, energy monitor packs that had previously been available for loan in the local area were improved in 2010/11 through a grant provided by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund. The packs, assembled and distributed by Transition Malvern Hills, now include devices for monitoring water usage in the shower, a manual on how to improve your home insulation and a means of interpreting the data on computer software. 50 energy monitors were loaned out to approximately 50 households over the course of 2010/11. As a result, a range of energy conservation measures have been undertaken, including roof insulation, double glazing and taking shorter showers!

Malvern Gas Lamps (DP3 and HO1)

The AONB Sustainable Development Fund was used this year to support two distinct projects that focussed on retaining the heritage of Malvern's historic gas lamps. The first supported Malvern Wells Parish Council in its quest to improve the efficiency of those lamps that are powered by electricity. An LED substitute was developed which uses less power, has a longer life and even mimics the appearance of natural gas light. In a further nod to authenticity a new mantle was developed which looks like the original gas mantle.

The lamps of Malvern that run on gas suffer from two general problems: inefficient mechanisms and high maintenance costs. Site Designs, a local Malvern company, working closely with Transition Malvern Hills, designed and produced a prototype gas lamp that uses much less gas and gives more light with an improved reflector. In the past, essential maintenance of the lamps required a highly qualified, and therefore expensive, gas engineer. Site Designs worked with Worcester College of Technology to produce a short accredited course exclusively aimed at maintaining these lamps. A Sustainable Development Fund grant contributed to the development of the prototype and paid for five people now known as the 'Gasketeers', to attend the maintenance course.

In brief

- Castlemorton Parish Council and the Parish Hall Trust were awarded LEADER funding to make Castlemorton Village Hall more sustainable, including the installation of solar panels (DP3).
- The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust produced a guide to the geology of building stones used in Worcestershire (DO1).
- Bubbles Nursery at Eastnor was extended, with support from Herefordshire Council, and the quality of the work was recognised when the extension was a Finalist for a Local Authority Building Control Award (DP3).
- North Lodge on Bromesberrow Estate was renovated to a high standard (DP3).
- Malvern Hills District Council allocated resources from its Environmental Efficiency Programme to improve the energy efficiency of community buildings in the district through a series of energy audits and grant aid (DP3).



A Gasketeer maintaining the lamps



North Lodge after renovation

Management Plan references

DO3 – Identify important and strategic views to and from the Malvern Hills, and ensure that these are recognised as material considerations in relation to planning decisions

HO1 – Preserve, conserve and enhance...features of local architectural or historic interest

Tourism, Recreation and Access

Miles Without Stiles Highlights (T02)

2010/11 was the fifth consecutive year in which Herefordshire Council/AMEY Herefordshire Public Rights of Way worked to improve access arrangements in the six Herefordshire parishes of the AONB. The "Miles without Stiles" project began in 2006/07 with an audit of the accessibility of paths and tracks in the area. Since that time much has been done to make it easier for people to move about and enjoy the AONB countryside whilst ensuring that the needs of land managers are fully met. Financial support for the work has come from the AONB Partnership and great thanks are due to the land owners who have given permission for these improvements to be made. A summary of some of the main achievements of the "Miles without Stiles" project in the last five years are as follows:

- The replacement of 37 stiles with easy to open, fully accessible, pedestrian gates, 24 of these with kissing gates and three with integrated two-in-one field gates.
- The replacement of four narrow, stiled bridges with wider, gated, fully accessible bridges, including an eight metre bridge over Cradley Brook.
- The creation of an almost stile free route connecting Cradley to Mathon to Colwall and to 'The Kettle Sings' restaurant on the Malvern Hills.
- The creation of a dedicated circular access route (mobility friendly) based on Cradley Church.
- The completion of a number of stile free routes including linear routes between settlements, and circular routes.
- A fully gated path from Ledbury Church to Wellington Heath.
- Links from Colwall Station to other parishes and to the Malvern Hills.
- Improvements to the walking links from Ledbury town to Eastnor and into the AONB Parishes.
- The development and production of two dedicated guides with maps to help people enjoy stile free routes around Colwall and Cradley and Mathon.
- The installation of three notice boards with maps (at Colwall, Mathon and Wellington Heath) to improve people's knowledge of access opportunities in their local areas.

The establishment of a thriving and effective partnership between the Highways Authority, parish councils, parish footpath officers, local contractors and volunteers will help to ensure that this good work continues. Four out of the six Herefordshire Parishes in the AONB are now part of the Parish Paths Partnership Scheme, enabling them to look after and/or promote their local Public Right of Way networks. An on-going programme of practical training for local volunteer groups will support this work.

Management Plan references

T01 – Encourage and stimulate tourism and recreational use of the AONB

T02 – Provide enhanced sustainable access and accessibility to recreation and tourist facilities and the public rights of way network



Miles without Stiles publications

Learning From the Victorians (T02)

The paths on the Malvern Hills were not designed to cope with all of today's challenges, such as a changing rainfall pattern with more intense downpours. The Malvern Hills Conservators received a contribution from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to investigate and experiment with techniques to limit path damage, the idea being that lessons learnt from this exercise could be extended across the footpath system. During the investigations, eight hidden and blocked Victorian drain systems were unearthed and brought back into use and 300 metres of the Victorian path from St Ann's Well to Worcestershire Beacon was restored.

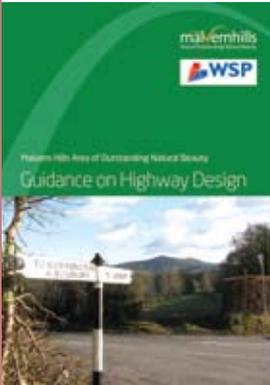
In brief

- Worcestershire County Council worked with a local landowner to remove a stile and allow those on wheelchairs and mobility scooters to use a footpath between Bearwoods Farm and Longley Green in the Suckley Hills (T02).
- Malvern has been awarded "Walkers are Welcome" status due to the fantastic countryside in and around the Malvern Hills, the wide range of walks for all abilities and the commitment to welcoming walkers (T01).



Track restoration works

Transport



Guidance on highway design

Guidance on Highway Design (TRO2)

A new guidance document relating to the management of highways in the AONB was launched this year. The document aims to ensure that road signs, markings and roadside infrastructure respect the special character of the AONB whilst also serving their primary purpose of directing traffic and keeping road users safe. Advice on the guidance was generously given by WSP Civils and the guidance was produced in conjunction with staff in the local Highways Authorities and is intended for their use. It is one of a series of AONB guidance documents which is being produced to inform the work of developers and decision makers.

Come Cycling Bike Hire (TRP1 and TRO6)

Until recently the town of Ledbury had a valuable cycle hire business attached to a cycle shop. When the shop closed, so did the cycle hire business. Ledbury Cycle Forum realised that a vibrant and viable cycle hire facility is key to the development of sustainable tourism and sustainable transport in and around the town. An AONB grant was used to support the purchase of 10 bicycles for a new hire business which is located adjacent to Ledbury train station and on the site of existing holiday cottages. The grant also covered the costs of reprinting an existing cycle leaflet and the establishment of a website that links promoted cycle routes to local accommodation providers. The website can be found at www.ledburycyclehire.com. The cycle hire business has been so successful that a further 10 bikes have recently been purchased to meet additional demand.

Ledbury Cycle Hire



Transport Planning in Worcestershire (TRO1 and TRP1)

Worcestershire County Council launched a new Local Transport Plan this year, covering the period 2011-2026. Delivery of this important plan should ensure that transport helps to protect and enhance the built and natural environment of the AONB.

Due to reduced available funding Worcestershire County Council also launched a consultation on proposals for reducing subsidised bus services in the county. The AONB Partnership responded to this consultation, making the case for a continuation of public transport services in the AONB.

In brief

- AONB Sustainable Development Funding was given to Colwall Greener to support the purchase of two electric bikes for loan to local people, enabling them to trial before they buy (TRO6).
- Worcestershire County Council replaced a section of concrete post and steel tube fencing along the Old Wyche Road in Malvern. This material is part of the local scene on the highway network in the area (TRO2).
- Eastnor Castles Estates Company arranged free bus transport for wedding guests using Eastnor Castle and supported the use of public transport for visitors to The Big Chill festival in August (TRP1).
- Gloucestershire County Council designed the Byways project to provide signed cycle routes connecting North Gloucestershire with Ledbury, Eastnor and the Malvern Hills (TRO5).

Management Plan references

TRP1 – Local people and visitors should be able to access their desired destination by sustainable alternatives to the private car

TRO1 – Promote the coordinated planning of integrated bus and rail travel to and within the AONB

TRO2 – Ensure that all road and infrastructure improvements are designed and implemented to have minimum impact on the special character of the AONB

TRO5 – Investigate the development of dedicated routes for cyclists within the AONB

TRO6 – Develop, support and promote sustainable transport options



Buying Colwall Greener's electric bikes



New post and tube fencing

AONB Unit Report

AONB Unit Performance Indicators

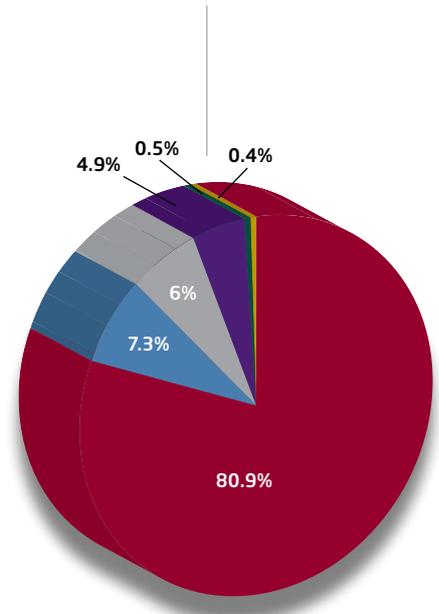
A framework for monitoring AONB Partnership performance is in place. The performance of the AONB Staff Unit in 2010-11 is summarised in the following table.

Theme	Measure for the indicator	Definition	Performance
AONB Management Plan	The AONB Partnership has a current Management Plan which meets the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.	The Plan has been reviewed within five years of the last one; it conforms to the guidance for AONB Management Plans provided by Natural England; it has been formally adopted and published by all the relevant local authorities.	Yes
AONB Partnership	The AONB has an active and effective governance structure.	Record of regular Joint Advisory Committee and Steering Group meetings.	6 meetings
		AONB has undertaken a formal review of its governance structures within the last five years and had an adopted current set of terms of reference.	Yes
AONB Staff Unit	The AONB Unit has staff resources to undertake its work.	The total number of AONB staff, in full-time equivalents, that were directly managed and hosted by the AONB Unit, at the financial year end.	2.6
	AONB Unit staff invests in continuous professional development.	Of the total in the measure above, list the number who undertook and recorded a minimum of 30 hours of training, personal development or similar during the year.	2.6
Financial resources	The AONB Unit secures direct income to fund its work.	Total income received into the AONB unit's own account from all sources during the financial year.	Total £222,254
		The percentage of the figure in Measure 4a above which was received from Natural England and Local Authorities.	100%
		The amount received from Natural England and Local Authorities.	Total £222,254
Leverage and "added value"	Additional resources mobilised by the AONB unit through its partnership work.	Total direct funding received plus the total funding for projects and partnership programmes including matching income for SDF funded projects, total funds for HLF Project etc.	Total £301,118
		The percentage of the figure above which was received from Natural England.	59.7%
Financial management and reporting	Agreed timetable and requirements for financial management and reporting with Natural England met by the AONB unit.	The Unit submitted its final grant claim to Natural England by the required date.	Yes
		Published its annual report for the preceding year within six months of the financial year end.	Yes
		Submitted its business plan and grant application for the succeeding financial year by the required date.	Yes
Partnership working with management communities	The AONB Unit is an active partner in the work of the National Association of AONBs.	The AONB Unit (through its host authority or partnership organisation) was a full member of the National Association of AONBs.	Yes
		Was represented by attendance at the Annual Conference of the Association.	Yes
		All AONB Unit core staff attended at least one other national or regional NAAONB sponsored event.	Yes
	The AONB Unit was actively involved in partnership working at a local level.	Total number of project steering groups, research initiatives, working groups and partnerships where the AONB Unit played an active and key role.	7
	The AONB Management Plan is formally endorsed and supported by partner organisations.	List the number of organisations who formally endorsed the plan when written and at the last review.	7
Business Plan targets	Achievement of the targets set out by the AONB Unit in its annual business plan or equivalent.	Include all actions set out in the annual business plan/core bid document agreed with Natural England.	Yes (77% of bid actions met)

AONB Unit Financial Summary

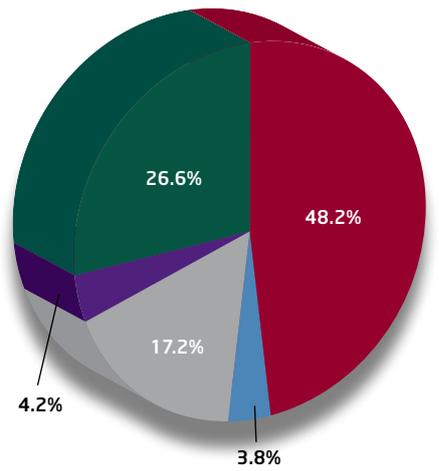
CORE INCOME

Natural England	£179,807
Herefordshire Council	£16,230
Worcestershire County Council	£13,268
Malvern Hills District Council	£11,000
Gloucestershire County Council	£1,077
Forest of Dean District Council	£872
Total	£222,254



CORE EXPENDITURE

Staff costs (inc, travel and training)	£107,188
Accommodation and office costs	£8,448
Partnership budget	£38,282
Partnership running costs	£9,237
Sustainable Development Fund	£59,099
Total	£222,254



STAFF

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	Emma Hiller

AONB Governance

Joint Advisory Committee 2010-11

Elected Members:

Dr B Smith (Chairman)	Malvern Hills Conservators
Prof J Raine (Vice-Chairman)	Malvern Hills District Council
Mr J Black	Worcestershire Association of Local Councils
Mrs N Carless	Herefordshire Association of Local Councils
Mr C Smith	Worcestershire County Council
Dr K Pollock	Worcestershire County Council
Miss M Cooper	Herefordshire Council
Mr R Mills*	Herefordshire Council
Mr C Cheeseman	Malvern Hills District Council
Dr R Long	Forest of Dean District Council (also representing Gloucestershire County Council)

* Replaced by Mr T Johnson

Non-Elected Members:

Mr M R Allfrey	National Farmers Union
Mr A Fleming	English Heritage
Mr P Hands*	Visit Herefordshire/Destination Worcestershire
Mr J Hervey-Bathurst	Country Landowners and Business Association
Mr W Barnes	Forestry Commission
Prof R Bryant	Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust
Mr D Ward/Mr F Hill	Campaign to Protect Rural England
Ms H McDowall	Natural England

* Replaced by Ms J Lewis

Co-opted Members:

Mr A Lee	Herefordshire Local Access Forum
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Steering Group 2010-11

Ian Rowat (Chairman)	Malvern Hills Conservators
Hazel McDowall	Natural England
Andy Maginnis	Worcestershire County Council
Heather Royle*	Malvern Hills District Council
James Bisset/Rob Hemblade	Herefordshire Council
Robert Niblett	Gloucestershire County Council
Nigel Gibbons	Forest of Dean District Council

* Replaced by Rebecca Mayman

Photography credits

All photographs copyright Malvern Hills AONB Unit except:

Front cover - Hedgelaying at Boulters Farm - *Reg Farmer*

Front cover - Bees - *Trevor Smart, Malvern and Upton Bee-keepers*

Front cover - Whitman's Hill fossil foray - *Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust*

Front cover, main photo - Tor Coppice - *Tania Smith*

Tor Coppice - *Tania Smith*

Volunteers at Park Wood - *Malvern Hills Conservators*

Birch Clearance on Pinnacle Hill - *Malvern Hills Conservators*

Bug hunting with Colwall Orchard Group - *Howard Manning, Colwall Orchard Group*

Whitman's Hill fossil foray - *Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust*

Loxter Ashbed Quarry - *Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust*

Herefordshire farmstead - *Jeremy Lake*

Forestry management at Coneygree Wood - *Forestry Commission*

Constructing school eco-garden - *Ruth Seabrook*

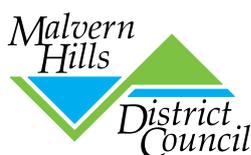
Bee-keeping demonstration - *Trevor Smart, Malvern and Upton Bee-keepers*

North Lodge after renovation - *Bromesberrow Estate*

Miles without Stiles publications - *Herefordshire Council*

Track restoration works - *Malvern Hills Conservators*

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



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