

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Annual Review 2013-2014

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

The past year has seen increasing financial pressure on all publicly funded bodies, with protected landscapes no exception. I am proud to say that the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership and our staff team have responded positively and creatively to the challenge.

If we are to continue our work conserving and enhancing this precious landscape, we must look to new ways of funding projects. One of our major achievements this year has been the development of *Blackdown Hills Natural Futures*. This exciting project will involve local people and graduate trainees in discovering, conserving and celebrating the wildlife and habitats on our doorsteps. We now await the decision on our substantial bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) which we hope will enable Blackdown Hills Natural Futures to go ahead and bring in much-needed support for local communities and the wildlife of the AONB. Funds have already been pledged by: South West Water Charitable Donations Committee; Wessex Water; Wessex Watermark; South Somerset District Council Community Grant; Viscount Amory's Charitable Trust, Somerset County Councillor James Hunt

and Councillors Andrew Moulding, Ray Radford and myself from Devon County Council.

Another great success this year was the *What Makes a View?* project which gave people the chance to speak up for much-loved local views. This work, funded through the European CORDIALE initiative and generously matched by Devon County Council, once again showed how working in new ways and with new sources of funding can help us achieve our conservation goals. I was delighted when the project won 'highly commended' at the 2013 Landscape Institute's awards in London and I would like to thank everyone who took part.

This year also saw the completion of Making it Local programme, which delivered £1.74m of EU LEADER funding across both the Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONBs. We are now working on the application for the next round of rural development funding to bring vital grants into the two AONBs and improve the prosperity of our important rural communities.

Despite the challenges we face, we have a clear vision for the coming years thanks

to the completion of the Blackdown Hills AONB's new Management Plan for 2014-2019. This has been a major undertaking over the last year and my thanks go to everyone who has contributed comments and expertise. The new plan will give every organisation in our partnership a strong guide as we look forward to the next five years working together in caring for the Blackdown Hills AONB.



Cllr Paul Diviani
Chairman, Blackdown Hills AONB
Partnership

LANDSCAPE



- *What Makes a View?* used arts and science-based approaches to examine the importance of views in the Blackdown Hills as part of the European CORDIALE project funded by INTERREG IVa and Devon County Council.
- We completed a major funding bid to HLF for the *Blackdown Hills Natural Futures* project, to help communities record, enhance and celebrate the habitats on their doorsteps.
- We launched *Dunkeswell War Stories*, a film-based online learning resource funded by HLF telling the stories of the American airbase at Dunkeswell during the Second World War.
- We developed *Blackdowns' Metal Makers* with Somerset County Council and The Carousel Project to engage local schools and families with the AONB's distinctive heritage of early ironworking.
- We supported the Somerset Bat Group and Somerset Environmental Records Centre in carrying out the third Blackdown Hills Big Bat Survey, to monitor species and inform future conservation.
- With funding from HLF and our partners at Forestry Commission/Neroche scheme, we helped to deliver the Blackdown Hills Trust's Force for Nature project to increase practical volunteering activity.

SUSTAINABILITY



- We supported the establishment of the Blackdown Hills Rough Grazing Association which shares expertise on managing the AONB's rough, wildlife-rich grazing land, and is a legacy of the Beef & Butterflies project funded by Making it Local and Natural England.
- We supported several communities interested in developing neighbourhood plans, commented on local plans and responded to major planning applications such as a new housing site at Churchinford.
- We were actively involved in policy discussions on future works to the A303, seeking to minimise environmental impact whilst improving safety.
- We provided advice and guidance to local planning authorities and developers on landscape and planning issues related to wind turbine and solar PV developments.
- We supported 10 local community projects through the Sustainable Development Fund, awarding grants totalling £16,200.
- We launched the Blackdown Hills Countryside Fund, administered by Devon Community Foundation, to raise funds to support local community wildlife and heritage projects.
- We continued to support Making it Local, a community-led European funding programme which invested £1.74m in projects in the Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONBs, which finished in December 2014, and started community consultation for the next round of funding.

COMMUNICATION AND MANAGEMENT



- In consultation with local people, we developed the Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plan 2014-2019. This will guide the work of the AONB Partnership for the next five years.
- We promoted nearly 100 outdoor events, supporting local groups and encouraging people to experience, enjoy and learn about the countryside.
- We developed the Blackdown Hills Volunteering Hub, part of the Force for Nature project, to provide an online portal to all the countryside volunteering opportunities offered by our partners within the AONB.
- We have expanded our social network audience to over 2000 people, providing a valuable source of information about local countryside news and events.

Hoare frost from Golden Lane by Gary Spencer – winner of the What Makes a View? landscape photography competition 2013



FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2013/2014

Income	£
2012/13 income brought forward	28,490
Defra	170,033
Devon County Council	10,635
Somerset County Council	6,000
Mid Devon District Council	10,000
East Devon District Council	10,116
South Somerset District Council	6,000
Taunton Deane Borough Council	10,000
Rental income	5,750
Other income	8,167
Project income	7,490
Income carried forward to 2014/15	-30,716*
Total income	241,965

Expenditure	£
Staffing	150,239
Office costs	20,067
Partnership costs	27,900
Heritage Lottery Fund Projects	19,074
Partnership Projects	6,485
Sustainable Development Fund	18,200
Total expenditure	241,965

* Monies received for Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project and funds for other projects

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND GRANTS 2013/2014

Projects	£
Making it Local development workers	2,872
Local Stories	2,860
Culmwoods Co-op Training	800
Wild Learning Community	2,000
Tracey Estate Gardens	1,656
Sustaining the Willow Sheep	982
Culmwoods Co-op Training	430
Services to Small Woods	2,000
Welcome to the Blackdown Hills AONB	400
Longmead wildlife and learning area	2,200
Administration	2,000
Total	18,200

The Blackdown Hills is one of the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty landscapes protected for the nation because of their exceptional countryside, heritage and wildlife. The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership consists of over 80 organisations with a small, dedicated staff team based in Hemyock. To find out more about the Blackdown Hills AONB, including news, events and walks, go to:

www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk



BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP 2013/2014

Axe Vale Conservation Society
Blackdown Hills Business Association
Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
Blackdown Hills Transition Group
Blackdown Hills Trust
Blackdown Hills Walking Group
Blackdown & East Devon Woodland Association
Blackdown Support Group
British Horse Society
Butterfly Conservation
Community Council for Somerset
Community Council of Devon
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Council for Voluntary Service (Mid Devon)
Country Land and Business Association
Culm Valley Young Farmers
Devon County Council
Devon Wildlife Trust
Devon Youth Association (Young Devon)
East Devon Council for Voluntary Service
East Devon District Council
English Heritage
Environment Agency
Forest Enterprise
Forestry Commission
FWAG South West
Highways Agency
Mid Devon District Council
National Farmers Union
National Trust
Natural England
Parish councils within the AONB
Ramblers Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Silvanus Trust
Somerset County Council
Somerset Rural Youth Project
Somerset Young Farmers Club
Somerset Wildlife Trust
South Somerset District Council
Stockland Turbaries
Taunton Deane Borough Council
The Conservation Volunteers
Wessex Water
Women's Institute

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT GROUP 2013/2014

Cllr Paul Diviani East Devon District Council (chairman)
Bruce Payne Culm & North parishes (vice chairman)
Cllr John Berry Devon County Council
Cllr James Hunt Somerset County Council
Cllr Frank Rosamond Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Ros Roderigo South Somerset District Council
Cllr David Reed Taunton Deane Borough Council
Heather Stallard Blackdown Hills Business Association and
Blackdown Support Group
Martin Turner Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
Charles Hill Blackdown Hills Transition Group
Geoffrey Sworder Campaign to Protect Rural England
Malcolm Bayer Forestry Commission
Mark Pope National Farmers Union
Andy Mayled National Trust (deceased)
Cathy Fitzroy Natural England
Paul Wright Ramblers (Devon & Somerset) (resigned)
David Northcote-Wright Somerset Wildlife Trust
Chloe Date The Conservation Volunteers (resigned)
Graham Long Otter & West parishes
David Allen Yarty & East parishes

Co-opted member:

John Greenshields Blackdown & East Devon Woodland
Association

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB STAFF TEAM 2013/2014

Linda Bennett manager
Lisa Turner planning officer
Pippa Rayner funding and development officer
Jackie Vaughan office manager
Katherine Findlay information officer

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Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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