

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Annual Review 2015-2016

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

It is now 25 years since the designation of the Blackdown Hills as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The recognition of the area as a protected landscape was somewhat controversial in the early days but, since then, communities across the Blackdowns have come to appreciate and value the AONB and the partnership working it facilitates.

We have always encouraged people to enjoy, understand and care for the distinctive landscape of the Blackdown Hills. The 25th anniversary celebrations have given us the opportunity to do this with renewed vigour.

The **Blackdown Hills Natural Futures** project (supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund) is helping people of all ages discover the area's varied wildlife. A high point was the family nature day at Otterhead Lakes, attended by more than 100 people.

Through our **Nature and Wellbeing** project, with the Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills AONBs, we are exploring the benefits protected landscapes can

bring to people's physical and mental wellbeing. Our thanks to Somerset County Council for funding this initiative.

The £1.6 million **Making it Local** programme, across Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONBs, opened for applications towards the end of 2015. This, the third EU-funded rural development programme for the Blackdown Hills, has an emphasis on increasing employment – so important in rural areas – and, for the first time, the programme is open to the farming and forestry sectors.

None of this work would be possible without the support of our funding partners – Defra and the six local authorities. So, we were particularly heartened when the ministers announced in January that, despite difficult financial times, our funding would not only be sustained but increased by inflation over the next four years. This is certainly an endorsement of the importance Government places on our work. The referendum decision has created a period of uncertainty for all our protected landscapes and the rural economy. A number of new faces and organisations joined the Partnership Management Group

following elections in March and they, along with existing members, will play an important role in ensuring that we have the necessary resources to continue the AONB's vital work into the future.



Cllr Paul Diviani
Chairman, Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership

LANDSCAPE



- The first year of the *Blackdown Hills Natural Futures* project exceeded all expectations. Our three trainee ecologists surveyed more than 45 sites across the AONB and secured full-time employment in the ecology or conservation sectors. Twelve communities are improving their local areas for wildlife through practical nature projects.
- A detailed study of RAF Culmhead was made, setting out the history and national significance of the airfield and providing recommendations for further recording and conservation work. Key World War II features were cleared of vegetation.
- Archaeological features within the AONB are to be mapped using aerial photos and other remote-sensing techniques. This is thanks to a successful application to Historic England's National Mapping Programme by Devon County Council's Historic Environment team.
- The National Trust continued to explore options for restoration of the Wellington Monument, which is the tallest three-sided obelisk in the world.
- Local conservation partners developed a strategy to improve the outlook for rare butterflies including the marsh fritillary and brown hairstreak.
- Working with Natural England and FWAG South West, we held a workshop on the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme to encourage local farmers and landowners to apply. Later we gave feedback to local MPs, Neil Parish and Rebecca Pow, raising some of the issues with the Scheme affecting farmers in the AONB.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



- Through the work of our new nature and wellbeing officer we have started to explore ways to help people in neighbouring towns benefit from the naturally healthy environment of the Blackdown Hills.
- We made substantive responses to 60 planning applications and offered advice on many more.
- We worked with Devon Landscape Policy Group to produce advice on using Landscape Character Assessments in neighbourhood planning: <http://bit.ly/LCA-NP>
- We continue to be closely involved with Devon County Council's proposals for improvements to the A30 between Honiton and Devonshire Inn, with a view to limiting the impact on the AONB's landscape and wildlife. Transport under-secretary, Andrew Jones MP, visited in August to view the route and hear the views of the local community.
- The *Making it Local* programme approved its first applications, funding three projects in or near the Blackdown Hills.
- Some of our Natural Futures Community Nature Projects received grants from our Sustainable Development Fund, carrying out pond restoration, creating flower-rich grassland and producing a local nature-trail leaflet.
- Representatives from the Blackdown Hills Parish Network and AONB met with local MPs in what they anticipate will be an annual meeting, to discuss matters of concern to local communities for example planning, superfast broadband and the new agri-environment scheme.

COMMUNICATION AND MANAGEMENT



- We published our 25th anniversary edition of Countryside Events detailing more than 60 opportunities for people to enjoy and learn about the AONB.
- Filming for the new Naturally Blackdowns web resource took place over the summer. Local experts were interviewed about the AONB's special places, heritage and wildlife: <http://www.blackdownhillsnaturalfutures.org/film-clips>
- We produced primary school lesson plans on Hembury, one of the most important hill forts in Devon which dates back to the Neolithic period.
- The websites, e-newsletters and social media channels of both the AONB Partnership and the Natural Futures project continue to be important tools for communicating our work



FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2015/2016

AONB Income	£
2014/15 income brought forward	35,149
Defra	157,213
Devon County Council	9,274
Somerset County Council	6,000
Mid Devon District Council	10,000
East Devon District Council	9,711
South Somerset District Council	6,000
Taunton Deane Borough Council	8,500
Rental income	2,516
Other income	1,929
Income carried forward to 2016/17 *	-54,130
Total income	192,162

AONB Expenditure	£
Staffing	122,853
Office costs	17,639
Partnership costs	20,431
Heritage Lottery Fund Project Natural Futures **	8,000
Partnership projects	16,341
Sustainable Development Fund	6,898
Match funding for Natural Futures **	4,250
Total expenditure	192,162

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

** Blackdown Hills Natural Futures is a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) supported project running from 2015 - 2018. The total value of the project is £442,662 comprising a HLF grant of £246,500, in-kind (non-cash) contributions of £121,430 with the balance of funding from the AONB Partnership, Devon County Council Locality Budgets, Somerset County Health & Wellbeing budget, South Somerset District Council Community grant, South West Water, the Viscount Amory's Charitable Trust, Wessex Water and Wessex Watermark.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND GRANTS 2015/2016

Projects	£
Otter, Wolf & Love Balsam Awareness Project	1,688
Ancient Technology Festival	999
Hemyock Iconic Pump	980
Tatworth Village Pond	838
Chardstock Nature Trail Leaflet	732
Newberry Field, Open Space For All	595
Most Wanted (Butterfly ID cards)	507
Administration	559
Total	6,898

The work of the AONB Partnership is funded by Defra, Devon and Somerset county councils, East Devon, Mid Devon and South Somerset district councils and Taunton Deane Borough Council.

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP 2015/2016

Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers
Blackdown Hills Business Association
Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Blackdown Hills Rough Grazing Association
Blackdown Hills Trust
Blackdown & East Devon Woodland Association
Blackdown Support Group
British Horse Society
Butterfly Conservation
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Community Council for Somerset
Council for Voluntary Service (Mid Devon)
Country Land and Business Association
Devon Biodiversity Records Centre
Devon Communities Together
Devon County Council
Devon Wildlife Trust
Devon Women's Institute
Devon Young Farmers Club
Devon Youth Association (Young Devon)
East Devon Council for Voluntary Service
East Devon District Council
Environment Agency
Forest Enterprise
Forestry Commission
FWAG South West
Historic England
Mid Devon District Council
National Farmers Union
National Trust
Natural England
Neroche Woodlanders
Otterhead Estate Trust
Parish councils (falling entirely or partially within AONB)
Ramblers Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Somerset County Council
Somerset Environmental Records Centre
Somerset Rural Youth Project
Somerset Wildlife Trust
Somerset Women's Institute
Somerset Young Farmers Club
South Somerset District Council
South West Heritage Trust
Taunton Deane Borough Council
Transition Group (Blackdown Hills)
Wessex Water

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT GROUP 2015/2016

Cllr Paul Diviani East Devon District Council (chairman)
Bruce Payne co-opted (vice chairman)
Cllr John Berry Devon County Council
Cllr James Hunt Somerset County Council
Cllr Frank Rosamond Mid Devon District Council
Cllr Martin Wale South Somerset District Council
Cllr Charlotte Edwards Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cathy Fitzroy Natural England

Heather Stallard Blackdown Hills Business Association
and Blackdown Support Group
Martin Turner Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
Charles Hill Blackdown Hills Transition Group
Margaret Hall Campaign to Protect Rural England
Mark Pope National Farmers Union
Vacant National Trust
David Northcote-Wright Somerset Wildlife Trust
Graham Long Otter & West parishes
David Allen Yarty & East parishes (resigned October 2015)

Co-opted member:

John Greenshields Blackdown & East Devon Woodland
Association

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB STAFF TEAM 2015/2016

Linda Bennett manager
Lisa Turner planning officer
Jackie Vaughan office manager
Katherine Findlay information officer (until September 2015)
Kate West information officer (until January 2016)
Kristen Lambert nature and wellbeing officer
James Maben Blackdown Hills Natural Futures manager
Conrad Barrowclough Blackdown Hills Natural Futures officer

The Blackdown Hills is one of the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty protected for the nation because of their exceptional countryside, heritage and wildlife. The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership consists of more than 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:

Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership, St Ivel House, Hemyock, Cullompton, Devon EX15 3SJ
Tel: 01823 680681 Email: blackdownhills@devon.gov.uk Web: www.blackdownhill.org.uk