



Blackdown Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



ANNUAL REVIEW 2018-2019

FOREWORD

The year got off to an exciting start with the launch of the Culm Community Crayfish project. We delivered a fantastic range of activities to inspire and engage local communities and help safeguard the white-clawed crayfish. The River Culm, in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), is one of only two sites in Devon where this endangered species remains.

Later in the year, there was more good news as we received the go-ahead for the £1 million Connecting the Culm project – part of the wider EU Interreg 2 Seas funded ‘Co-Adapt’ programme – working to tackle some significant challenges faced by the River Culm. Other water- and catchment-related partnership projects included Woods for Water (Otter & Axe catchment) and the Corry & Coly Natural Flood Management project (river Axe catchment).

We kept historic heritage in the spotlight with a partnership project linked to

historic field boundaries, funded by Historic England. The project was delivered in conjunction with local historians and landowners and enabled a more complete valuation of the Blackdown Hills AONB’s natural capital.

Blackdown Hills AONB management plan underwent a full review and consultation, with policies sharpened up and aligned with the Government’s 25-year environment plan. A new five-year high-level delivery plan was integrated into the management plan, along with a planning guidance section.

We have been strengthening our work to engage communities, working with neighbouring AONB’s, via our shared Nature and Wellbeing project and volunteer co-ordinator role. Through our new website, seasonal events guide and an annual programme of events we have been encouraging locals and visitors alike to discover, enjoy and learn more about the Blackdown Hills.

PAUL DIVIANI

Chair, Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT REVIEW

We participated in a review of the existing Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) and management guidelines for East Devon, Blackdown Hills AONB and East Devon AONB. Following a public consultation, the revised LCA has now been adopted. It will be used by planners, developers, AONB’s and others to help conserve and enhance the rich diversity of landscapes in East Devon and the Blackdown Hills.

PLANNING

We made substantive responses to 71 planning applications and considered 51 others. The number of applications in 2018/19 totalled 413; a similar figure to previous years. Blackdown Hills AONB was consulted in 30% of cases.

blackdownhills.org.uk/planning

Cover photo: Liam Marsh



CATCHMENT COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE

October 2019

Bringing together community representatives, land owners and managers, and practitioners from the East Devon Catchment Partnership to cocreate solutions to ensure the future health of the river catchments of the Axe (including Yarty), Otter, Culm and Clyst. We addressed issues such as flooding, water quality, invasive species, fish passage and biodiversity.

blackdownhills.org.uk/catchmentcommunities



Photo: Tom Lindsay

CULM COMMUNITY CRAYFISH PROJECT

January 2018 – January 2019

We've been helping communities around the River Culm learn about, survey and look after this endangered species; gathering important information about the native white-clawed crayfish, the non-native signal crayfish, and the diverse wildlife of the River Culm with a view to safeguarding the fragile populations of white-clawed crayfish.

blackdownhills.org.uk/crayfish



Photo: James Maben

CORRY & COLY NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT

December 2018 – March 2020

Working in partnership with the Environment Agency, Devon County Council's Flood and Coastal Risk Team, East Devon AONB Partnership, Westcountry Rivers Trust and FWAG South West, we are leading this two-year project to tackle flooding and water quality in the Corry and Coly, the two sub-catchments of the River Axe.

blackdownhills.org.uk/corrycoly



Photo: Devon Wildlife Trust

CONNECTING THE CULM

February 2019 – January 2022

We are embarking on a new three-year project to find natural solutions to some of the issues facing the River Culm and its catchment.

This new initiative called Connecting the Culm is part of Co-Adapt, a €7million project involving eight European projects (including three in the UK). The projects will encourage local communities and key organisations to work collaboratively to ‘co-create’ solutions to make us more resilient to the effects of climate change, while also supporting the natural world.

The aims of Connecting the Culm are to make the River Culm and its floodplain more resilient to flood and drought, improve water quality, support biodiversity and habitat, and involve local people and organisations in the process of exploring solutions and making decisions.

The project will receive 60% of project funding from the European Regional Development Fund, through the Interreg 2 Seas programme.

Connecting the Culm has been developed by a partnership of organisations including Devon County Council, Environment Agency, Mid Devon District Council and National Trust, and will be led by Blackdown Hills AONB.

**[blackdownhills.org.uk/
connectingtheculm](https://blackdownhills.org.uk/connectingtheculm)**

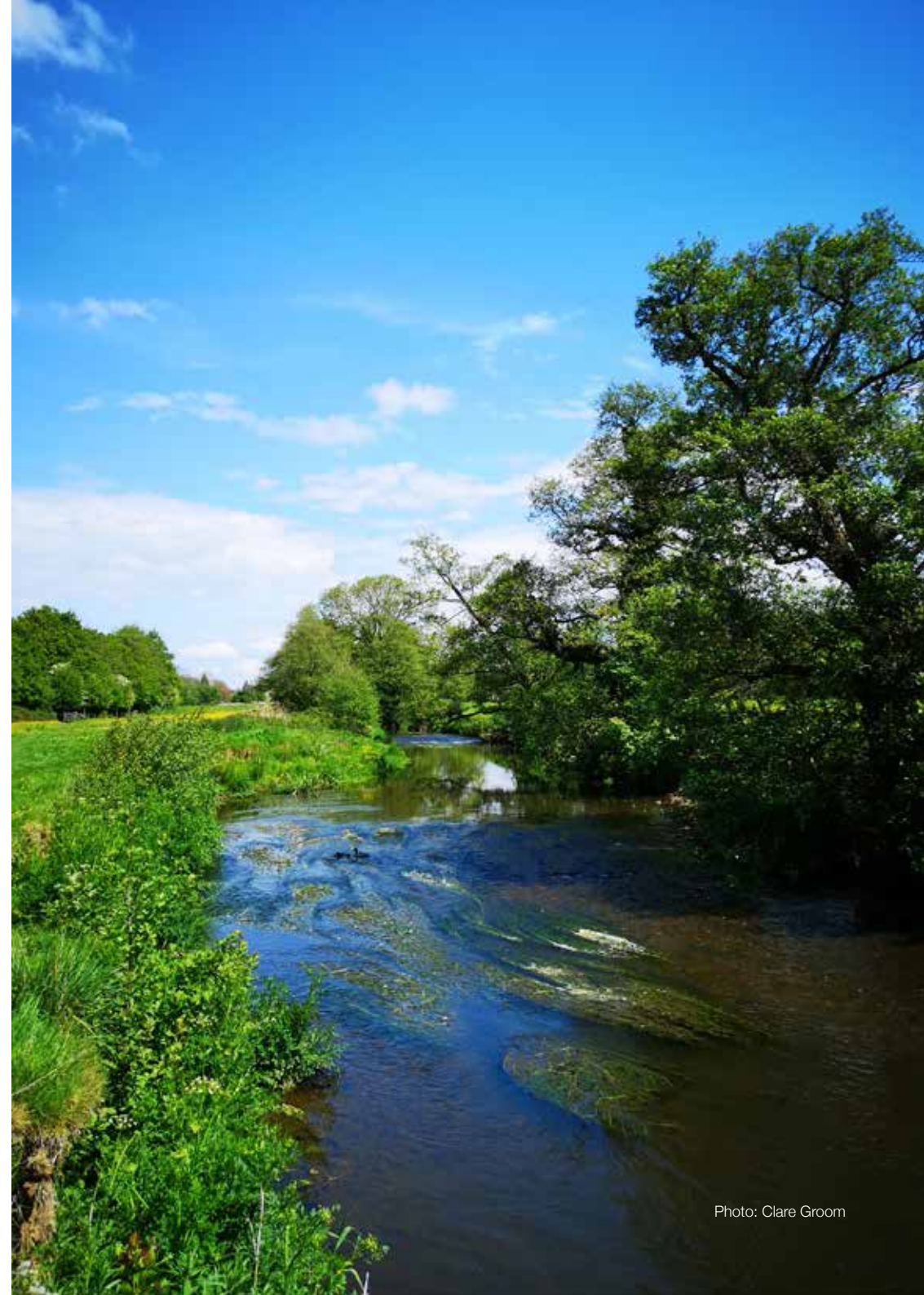


Photo: Liam Marsh

WOODS FOR WATER

December 2017 – March 2021

The Woods for Water project is stimulating woodland planting and management in appropriate locations to combat flooding and improve water quality. The project team has been undertaking targeted visits and providing bespoke advice to landowners, encouraging and supporting them to manage woodland effectively.

The project is focussing on three areas: North Devon, the Camel Estuary, and East Devon, the latter taking in part of the Blackdown Hills AONB. Led by North Devon Biosphere, Blackdown Hills AONB is coordinating locally.

blackdownhills.org.uk/woodsforwater

FARMING & WOODLAND GROUP

June 2018 – June 2021

Following a successful partnership bid by Butterfly Conservation to Natural England, a new training and collaboration network has been set up for farmers and other land managers within the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This is known as the Blackdown Hills Farming and Woodland Group.

blackdownhills.org.uk/farmingwoodland

FIELD BOUNDARIES & LINEAR LANDSCAPE FEATURES

April 2018 – March 2019

An extensive and connected field boundary network is one of the special qualities that led to the Blackdown Hills' designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This case study explored some of the field boundaries and linear landscape features of the Blackdown Hills AONB, to assess their heritage value, the benefits they provide to people, and the role play in our landscape.

blackdownhills.org.uk/boundaries



Photo: Liam Marsh

200 people engaged through health and wellbeing activities



NATURE AND WELLBEING

Working with the other Somerset AONBs our Nature and Wellbeing project continued to support members to access the countryside and experience the health and wellbeing benefits of doing so.

In the Blackdown Hills there were a total of 24 sessions, involving five groups.

- Chard Watch (an organisation that supports vulnerable and socially-isolated people) have taken part in conservation and art activities at Folly Farm.
- Working with Forestry England and Zing Somerset, we have facilitated Wild Days for young families from Halcon and Priorswood housing estates in Taunton.

- Chard Memory Café (people living with dementia and their carers) have been participating in seasonal art sessions at Ferne Animal Sanctuary.
- Manor Court Primary School, Chard, have been involving children and their families in wildlife-based activities
- Green Days (day care supporting adults with learning disabilities) have been helping us evaluate the accessibility of destinations around the Blackdown Hills AONB.

blackdownhills.org.uk/letnaturenurture

VOLUNTEERING

Work has continued to cultivate lasting links between local groups looking for volunteer support and people looking for volunteering opportunities.

- Working with partners including Forestry England, British Trust for Ornithology and the Reptile and Amphibian Group for Somerset to recruit volunteers to conduct wildlife surveys.
- Providing volunteering opportunities and volunteers to support group activities relating to our Nature and Wellbeing project, for example habitat

management and restoration activities at Otterhead Lakes.

- Supporting volunteers to develop the community garden at Honiton Beehive.

blackdownhills.org.uk/volunteering

Photo: James Maben



85 volunteers participated in AONB activities

EVENTS

We worked alongside partners to develop a varied programme of events, promoting them via a seasonal printed guide, social media and online calendar.

- The first Somerset Festival of Nature – working with National Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust and other partners.
- Naturally Healthy Month across Devon and Somerset – accessible events and a video-based social media campaign.
- Sing & stroll at Otterhead Lakes, an easy-to-access gentle walk.
- A wild day out at Castle Neroche, a family event to increase countryside access.
- Hedges, herbs & history – guided walk.
- Wildlife events including dawn chorus, bat walks and talks, river dipping, and a nightjars and owls evening.
- Crayfish activities in Culmstock at River Culm Fair and Soapbox Derby
- Stalls at Uffculme Green Day and Honiton Show.
- Carols at the Wellington Monument.



Photo: Rhudian Williams

948 event attendees



Photo: Liam Marsh

WEBSITE

We launched our new mobile-compatible website with a much improved calendar, maps, blogging and social media integration, and we continue to work with stakeholders to develop online content.

25,811 website visitors

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

AONB Income	Cost (£)
Income brought forward from 2017/18	37,509
Defra	165,465
Devon County Council	9,274
Somerset County Council	5,392
Mid Devon District Council	8,500
East Devon District Council	9,323
South Somerset District Council	6,000
Taunton Deane Borough Council	10,000
Other income	19,521
Income carried forward to 2019/20*	-28,287
Total income	242,697

* Monies received for Blackdown Hills AONB ongoing projects.

AONB Expenditure	Cost (£)
Staffing	148,155
Office costs	13,914
Partnership costs	29,414
Heritage Lottery Fund Culm Community Crayfish project	8,105
Partnership projects	39,824
Sustainable Development Fund	3,285
Total expenditure	242,697

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND GRANTS 2018-19

Projects	Cost (£)
Ancient Kiln Build & Pottery Workshop	910
Lighting Up Tennis in Hemyock	2,000
Clayhidon Community Website	375
Total	3,285

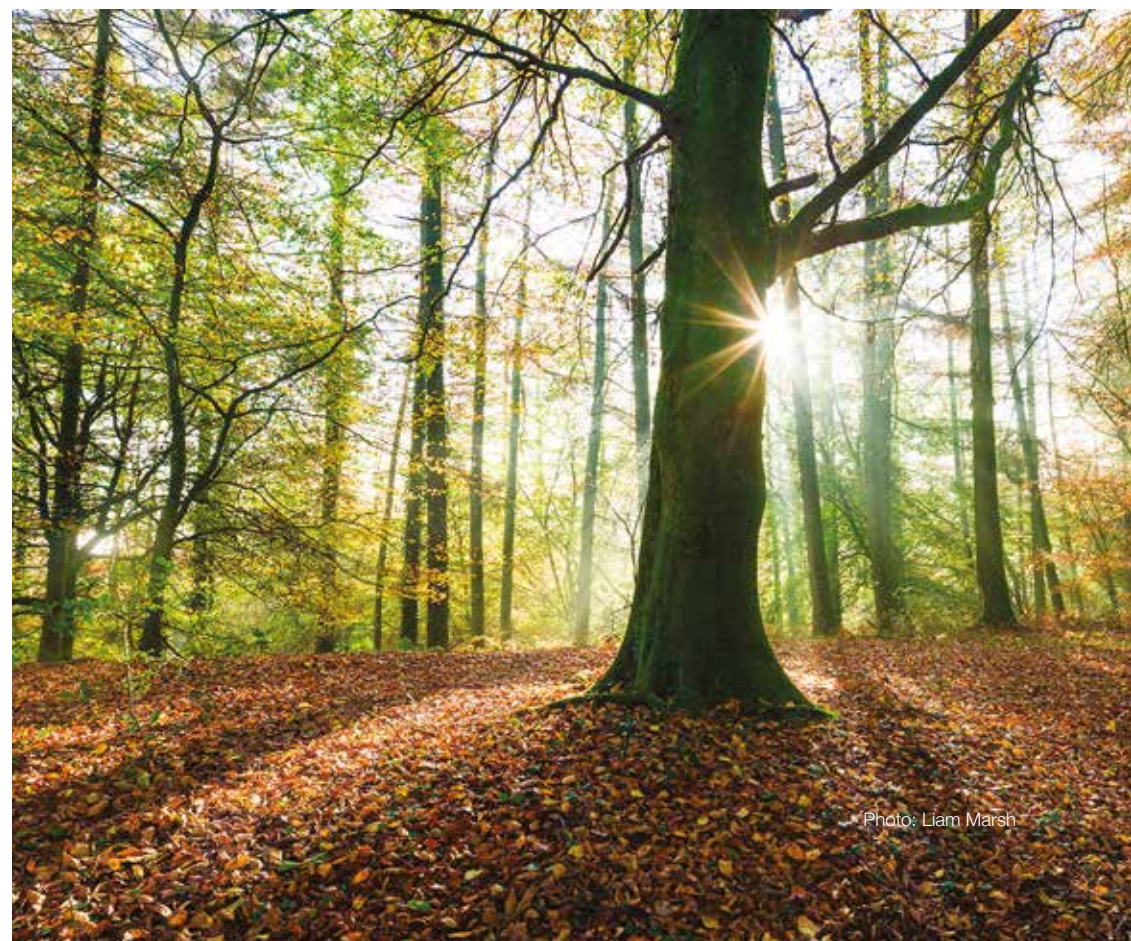


Photo: Liam Marsh

HOW TO CONTACT US

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WWW.BLACKDOWNHILLS.ORG.UK



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Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is funded by Defra, Devon and Somerset County Councils, as well as East Devon, Mid Devon, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset District Councils.