



Mendip Hills AONB Unit
Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2010-11

Welcome to the Annual Review 2010-11 in which we highlight the work undertaken and key achievements of the AONB Unit and its Partnership activity.

As you will see, the AONB Unit has, due to the commitment and professionalism of its staff, again delivered a varied programme of activities despite reduced staffing and funding. Highlights include the hosting of the International Junior Ranger Camp, the development of the Young Ranger scheme and the management work on Black Down and Burrington Ham.

The AONB Partnership Committee confirmed its new Terms of Reference in July 2010 and 3 elected parish reps, representing 28 parishes, now form part of a 17 member committee. We have been delighted by the response from parish councils to our request for financial contributions. The Partnership is committed to developing its work with parish councils over the next year.

In addition to implementing the new Partnership structure and recommendations, Sarah Jackson, AONB Manager was elected to the Board of the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) at the national conference in July 2010. This has been a significant year for the work of the NAAONB with the change in Government and the move to transfer AONB sponsorship from Natural England to Defra that took place on 1st April 2011.

The work of Howard Davies, CEO of the NAAONB has been key to Defra confirming the AONB four year funding arrangement, that although reducing by 5% each year over that period, it was not the up front cut anticipated by many. The NAAONB has established a good working relationship with Richard Benyon Minister for the Environment and Fisheries, and Defra staff. This was demonstrated at the 4th April AONB press event held in South Devon AONB when Richard Benyon spoke of the effectiveness of AONB Partnerships and their role in delivering the Governments Big Society agenda.

Local authorities are facing significant financial pressures and the AONB Partnership has been subject to further cuts ranging from 20% -100%. A Futures Working Group has been established to investigate new funding sources and the setting up of an independent, possibly a shadow body, to assist the Partnership to deliver the statutory AONB Management Plan and other work to benefit the AONB area.

The AONB Partnership has demonstrated over many years that joint working, to produce and deliver the AONB Management Plan, is the most cost effective and efficient way to fulfill the statutory duties placed on local authorities by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000. More than this, it enables a much wider range of organisations to share skills, expertise and resources, to ensure that this nationally designated landscape is conserved and enhanced and can be enjoyed by current and future generations.

I hope that you will support me and the Partnership in seeking a viable way forward to ensure this work continues.

Cllr Dawn Hill, Chairman

Sustaining Black Down

- Black Down Project application submitted to Heritage Lottery Fund
- £52,896 invested in Black Down Project management work
- Archaeological Management Plan produced for Black Down and Burrington Ham

Volunteer Rangers from Near and Far

- International Junior Ranger Camp 2010 hosted by Mendip Hills AONB with 8 countries and 12 parks represented
- Independent review of Young Ranger scheme stated that it was 'one of the best examples of excellence'

- 1,053 volunteer hours given by 16 Volunteer Rangers
- 124 volunteer hours given by 2 Young Ranger Assistants
- 147 volunteer hours given by Volunteer Project Assistant
- 155 volunteer hours given by Advanced Young Rangers

Local Support

- £54,032 awarded to 13 projects from the Sustainable Development Fund, totaling a value of £109,915
- £1730 received in contributions from AONB parish councils towards the 2011-12 Delivery Plan

Planning Protection

- AONB Planning Liaison Officer responded to:
 - 9 national consultations and 20 local authority consultations
 - 12 applications deemed as major or potential for significant impact on the AONB
 - National Grid Hinkley C & Bristol airport consultation
 - 6 pre-application local authority consultations relating to large solar farms



City of Bristol College students bagging stone for Black Down



Transporting stone using low impact vehicle



Contractors laying stone pitching



Volunteers tending the stone pitched Beacon Batch Barrow

Sustaining Black Down – The Black Down Project

The Black Down Project has been established to conserve the heritage landscape, biodiversity and archaeological features of the Burrington Commons. It will work with local communities and users to achieve well-managed, sustainable access and combat the problems of erosion, damage to archaeology, illegal access by vehicles and poor signage.

The AONB Unit set up the Black Down Advisory Group in 2009, bringing together those with a management responsibility for the area to coordinate the project.

The project will:

- Repair the most heavily eroded paths and landscape scars and restore important habitats
- Encourage understanding of the heritage by engaging local communities and user groups in a range of learning, interpretation, participation and volunteering programmes
- Communicate information on current and future management activities and ensure that the area is promoted to various groups in a responsible and sustainable way, with coherent and coordinated information regarding walking, cycling and horse riding through events and activities, leaflets, web information and signing

So far the AONB Project Officer has:

- Installed vehicle barriers and boulders at entrances to prevent illegal access
- Produced and promoted the Partnership Guidelines for Event Organisers
- Commissioned and installed signage at key entrance points and to clarify which routes are bridleways and footpaths. A Natural England Access and SDF grants were obtained for this work.

The AONB Unit administered the commissioning of the Archaeological Management Plan for Black Down and Burrington Ham (Living Landscape Consultancy with University of Leicester Archaeological Services, Aug 2010). A Higher Level Stewardship grant paid for the work.

The first project from this plan has been the Beacon Batch barrow stone pitching work coordinated by the AONB Project Officer. Stone was bagged by Bristol College students and transported up to the trig point by a specialist soft tyre vehicle to prevent further damage. Contractors carried out the stone pitching observed by an archaeologist as required by the English Heritage Scheduled Monument consent. This work was completed at the end of March 2011 and has been recently turf capped by volunteers.

The AONB Unit commissioned Rural Environment Practice to develop the Heritage Lottery Fund bid submitted in November for footpath, interpretation and activities programmes. The bid was unsuccessful but work is currently underway to resubmit the bid. Access work will continue in 2011 with volunteers and the resources the AONB has allocated.

AONB Young Ranger Scheme

The Mendip Hills Young Ranger scheme has been running since 2005 offering a two-year programme to 15 young people every other year. The Young Rangers have the opportunity to progress to Advanced Young Rangers and then onto the adult Volunteer Rangers. Nearly 1500 hours of volunteer help were given during the year from all Rangers.

The Mendip Hills AONB were the first protected landscape in Europe to host the International Junior Ranger Camp, 24-31 July 2010. The camp of 24 Young Rangers and their 16 mentors was based at Fernhill Farm and Goblin Combe. EUROPARC congratulated the AONB Unit on the camp with many new friendships formed and the Mendip Hills now known in other parts of Europe. Many organisations and local businesses contributed including Bristol Airport, Butcombe Brewery, Bath and West Show, National Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Active Mendip and Cheddar Caves and Gorge.

The AONB Project Officer has been running the Young Ranger scheme 2nd year programme. This year they have taken part in orienteering, practical conservation tasks, tree and plant identification and an archery session organised by one of the AONB Volunteer Rangers. The Project Officer also coordinates and runs the Advanced Young Ranger programme. This group helped the Mendip Society with tasks at Sladers Leigh and the Rickford Village Association's orchard providing a total of 155 volunteer hours.

The AONB commissioned an independent review of its scheme from Future Directions consultancy. The review identified new partners and established a commitment from existing and new partners to the programme. An application was made to HLF Young Roots for funding. However, the bid that would have included a new scheme at Goblin Combe Centre was withdrawn, due to a lack of match funding and AONB officer time. In the short term, the AONB staff will continue the current scheme and make new links with established groups of young people.

AONB Volunteers

Volunteers make a significant contribution to delivery of the AONB Units work. As a percentage of delivery, volunteers provided 18%, exceeding the target figure of 11%.

The AONB Unit has continued to expand the volunteering opportunities it offers. Volunteers are undertaking site visits on Black Down and assisting the Avon and Somerset Path Watch initiative. Volunteer Rangers make regular site visits, litter picks, attend shows and events for the AONB. Young Ranger Assistants help run the Young Ranger scheme and the Advanced Young Rangers having completed their two-year scheme now assist with tasks.

Working with the Quantock Hills AONB, the two AONBs have set up, and as of April 1st 2011, share a Volunteer Coordinator post. This new post will liaise with parish councils and other bodies to identify tasks and coordinate volunteer work parties.



International Junior Rangers on Cheddar Gorge cliffs with Rob Stephens, National Trust Ranger

Local Support - AONB Sustainable Development Fund

£54,032 awarded to 13 projects

Total value of projects undertaken **£109,915**

Size of grants ranged from **£925 - £10,750**

Grants ranged from 24%-81% of project costs

9 projects involved volunteers

10 other applications were considered but refused and 2 withdrew from grant offers

Compton Martin Village Pond - Compton Martin Parish Council **£4000**

Restoration of the village pond involved carefully removing wildlife and then clearing weed and silt before relining the pond and refilling. Two local landowners provided land on which to deposit silt and lent equipment. In undertaking the work the parish council also repaired the village pump and standpipe, and refurbished the seat.

Mendip Hills Festival of Archaeology - Wells Museum /Somerset Wildlife Trust - **£1660**

Funding was provided for a coordinator to organise and promote the Festival of Archaeology events that took place 17th July- 1st August 2010. Over 24 events were included in a promotional leaflet celebrating and encouraging participation in the areas heritage. The events attracted significant media coverage of the launch and individual events.

Music on Mendip - Local Journeys - **£6820**

This project was a collaboration between composer Duncan Speakman and over 40 GCSE music students and their tutors from Churchill School, to create music inspired by Dolebury Warren. Duncan Speakman is a Bristol based sound artist and composer with an international reputation. The music can now be downloaded and listened to on iPod or other mp3 players. The music was featured as part of North Somerset Arts week May 2011. www.localjourneys.or.uk/mom

Forest School- East Harptree Primary School - **£3000**

Funding was provided to establish a Forest School using the local woods. Sessions ran for 6-8 weeks with groups of 8 children supported by at least one local volunteer. The scheme is designed to encourage and inspire individuals through positive outdoor experiences.

Burrington Commons Signage - AONB Unit - **£2950**

The site is one of the most heavily visited in the AONB due to it being very accessible to Bristol and being designated Open Access. As part of the AONB led project to improve management on Black Down, new oak gateway and way-marking signage to inform visitors to clarify footpaths and bridleways were installed, match funded by the AONB Partnership.

Mendip Hills Barn Owl Conservation Project - Hawk and Owl Trust - **£5000**

This 6 month project gathered information about barn owl sites, visited 4 schools to teach children about conservation, visited 18 farms to advise about creating barn owl habitats and install nest boxes. AONB Young Rangers, scouts and a disabled group built 27 owl boxes. An Owl Prowl took place in the Forestry Commissions Stockhill Forest and a public talk attended by 50 people took place at Fernhill Farm.

Solar Thermal system- Fernhill Farm - **£6000**

Grant for 50% of the costs of purchasing and installing the ground mounted solar thermal system that linked to the wood fuel boiler is to provide hot water and reduce use of wood fuel. Fernhill Farm is a traditional livestock farm that has diversified to provide a resource for local community and other groups to experience a working farm and rural skills.



Music on Mendip, pupils from Churchill School with composer Duncan Speakman on Dolebury Warren.

© Local Journeys

Dolebury Warren Interpretation Panels – Avon Wildlife Trust - £4000

The grant part funded the writing, design and production of three interpretation panels for the 93 hectare reserve managed by Avon Wildlife Trust and owned by the National Trust. The new signs promoting the special character and wildlife of the site replace a number of old signs.

Wheelchairs are Welcome, Sladers Leigh - Mendip Society - £4160

Funding was used to build an access ramp from the Strawberry Line to the gate at the entrance to Sladers Leigh Local Nature Reserve and provide short grass grid pathway suitable for wheelchairs. A bench, seat and graphic for information board were also part funded. The Young Rangers assisted with the work and there will be a celebratory event on July 17th 2011 that the SDF 2011 fund is assisting.

Rainwater capture system, Warren Farm - Small Bros - £2435

Installation of rainwater capture system for the toilet facilities at the new sustainable 'Featherdown Farms' camping business and cater for farm visits by local schools and community groups as part of the farms stewardship agreement.

Gaining confidence through Conservation volunteering - Osprey Outdoors - £4142

This not-for-profit business set up and ran volunteering tasks for people who are isolated because of physical disabilities or infirmities due to old age, or drug and alcohol abuse. Transport was arranged from collection points in Weston super Mare and all tools and equipment were provided. The tasks included work with the National Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust and Fernhill Farm. Twelve days, that achieved total of 135 volunteer days were run between December and March.

Mendip Hills Living Landscapes Explorers Project - Wells Museum /Somerset Wildlife Trust - £10750

Funding was provided for 4 linked activities to promote the geological, archaeological and historical past of the AONB. Following the success of the 2010 Festival of Archaeology in July funding was provided for the coordinator to further develop relations with organisations to plan the programme for 2011. The Heritage Seminar that the AONB Unit had previously organised for the last 9 years was held on 5th March 2011 at Wells Museum and attracted over 100 people. The coordinator started organising the first 'Mendip Rocks' programme to be held August – October 2011. A training day for local organisations on writing and uploading podcasts to download from the internet was held in February.

The Pound wall restoration – Rodney Stoke Parish Council - £925

Restoration of the lime mortar walls of The Pound that used to be a holding for stray animals found in the village was undertaken. The AONB had previously provided funding to clear the area and install a bench to create a pleasant rest area. Volunteers from the village and AONB Volunteer Rangers received training from specialist wallers over 3 days.

Where the grants were spent	No of grants	Value of grants	Grant recipients	
AONB wide	4	21492	Businesses	4
N.Somerset	3	13230	Parish Councils	2
Somerset	3	9360	Local organisations	5
Som/N.Som	1	2950	Schools	1
B&NES	2	7000	AONB Unit	1
	Total	54032	Total	13

AONB Young Ranger assists Mendip Society volunteers at Sladers Leigh – © Judith Tranter



Osprey Outdoor volunteers © Wendy Watkins



Tessa Munt MP lends a hand with Rodney Stoke lime mortar walling

Working in partnership the AONB Unit is protecting and promoting the beautiful Mendip Hills.

To help connect habitats the AONB Unit has supported the **Somerset Wildlife Trust's (SWT) Living Landscape project** for 5 years and this year made a contribution of £5000 towards the work that has included surveying of 218 ha of land, 5 Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) and 2 Entry Level Scheme visits.

Avon Wildlife Trusts 'Avon Wildflower Grasslands project' adjoins the SWT area and this year completed 407ha grassland survey and submitted one HLS application with another one in preparation. The AONB provided a grant of £2000

To encourage people to explore and learn about the natural and historic landscape the AONB has worked closely with **Wells and Mendip Museum and the Somerset Wildlife Trust** in delivering the package of projects. The Heritage Seminar and Festival of Archaeology, previously run by the AONB Unit, are now run by this new partnership. The AONB provided additional funding to match fund the SDF grant they received.

Rickford community orchard work has been assisted by the AONB Unit through a contribution to the costs of new tree ties and other materials and assistance of the Young Rangers.

Funding was provided to 3 rural events - **Mendip Ploughing Match, Wrington and Burrington Hedging competition and the North Somerset Ploughing Match.**

The AONB has provided sponsorship of categories in these shows for many years. Organisers have been informed that this was the last year that funding would be provided due to reduced AONB budget.



Rickford Community Orchard - © Judith Tranter

Marketing and Promotion

- 587 Wild Walk publications sold
- 20 press releases and 11 monthly email updates sent out
- 58 articles appeared in local and national media
- AONB web site redesigned and incorporating National AONB Family brand
- 5,000 Mendip Hills AONB Visitor Guide 2011 produced
- 12 articles produced in Mendip Times with a monthly distribution of 20000

Regional and national work

Defra/Natural England transfer – the transfer of sponsorship from NE to Defra has involved significant work on behalf of the NAAONB. As the AONB lead officer and a Board member the AONB Manager has been involved in regional and national meetings. Nationally, AONB Partnerships have welcomed the recognition given by Richard Benyon, Environment and Fisheries Minister to the work they undertake. The new tripartite agreement signed by NAAONB, DEFRA and NE provides a strong base from which to deliver an effective, efficient and responsive sponsorship of the individual AONB Partnerships.

1SW Off- Road Cycling project – this project is working to develop and promote off-road cycling in the South West to benefit all the protected landscapes. Funded (£4.6 million) through the Rural Development Programme for England the project runs until 2013. Contractors are currently surveying and producing draft route maps.

NAAONB branding – it was agreed at the National AONB 2010 conference that a cohesive brand for the 47 AONBs was a priority. This family brand 'Landscapes for Life' is being incorporated into the Mendip Hills publicity.

The AONB Unit would like to thank all the people they've worked with, notably the following;

Volunteers

Rob Spraggon	Assisted with range of projects including fixed post photography, surveys and information gathering.
John Freeman	Assistance with Young Ranger programme
Diana Newington	Administration and assistance with the Young Ranger programme
16 Rangers	Assistance with range of activities including events, Young Rangers, patrols, surveys, litter picks

Sustainable Development Fund Panel

Nicola Epps (Chair)	Mendip District Council Arts Officer
Sheila Petherbridge	Farmer, local resident
Martin Grass	Private business (tourism), Priddy Folk fair, local resident
Chris Head	CEO Community Action, local resident
Rachael Clark	Local resident, Priddy Folk fair
John Coote	Hutton Parish Council, business and wildlife experience
Sarah Jackson	Mendip Hills AONB Unit

Black Down Advisory Group

David Wills	Landowner
Nick Croxson	English Heritage
Chris Westcott	Natural England
Chris East	Somerset County Council ROW
Francis Wilson	Burrington Conservators
Chris Webster	Somerset County Council Heritage Services
Andy Mallender	Mendip Hills AONB Unit

Futures Working Group (formed January 2011)

Clr Dawn Hill	Partnership Chairman
James Small	NFU
Barry Lane	Wells and Mendip Museum
Michele Bowe	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Chris Head	SWAN and SDF Panel member
Sarah Jackson	Mendip Hills AONB

Partnership Committee meetings held:

19th July 2010, 30 September, 2010, 16 March 2011

Officer Support Group met:

18th May 2010, 7th September 2010, 8th January 2011, 8th March 2011

Sustainable Development Fund Panel met:

31st March 2010, May 26th 2010, September 8th 2010, November 18th 2010, 8th March 2011



New signage on Black Down and Burrington Ham Commons

Partnership Committee

Somerset County Council	Cllr Dawn Hill (Chairman) and Barry James (Officer)
North Somerset Council	Cllr Ann Harley, John Flannigan (Officer)
Bath and North East Somerset	Cllr Shirley Steel, Sue Murtagh (Officer)
Mendip District Council	Cllr Roy Wills, David Clark (Officer)
Sedgemoor District Council	Cllr David Joslin, Julie Cooper (Officer)
Mendip Hills AONB Unit	Sarah Jackson
Natural England	Pat Lehain
Forestry Commission	Dick Gossling (Until July 2010)
Mendip Society	Paul Harley (also representing CPRE)
NFU	James Small
National Trust	Andy Mayled
Somerset Wildlife Trust	Michele Bowe
CLA	Mark Shaw
South West Area Network for Rural Communities	Chris Head (also representing Community Council for Somerset)
Somerset Parish Rep	Nigel Taylor (Priddy, Cheddar, Compton Bishop Axbridge, Westbury sub Mendip, Rodney Stoke, Wells, St Cuthbert Out, Shipham, Litton, Chewton Mendip
Bath and North East Somerset Parish Rep	Richard Curry (Compton Martin Chew Stoke, Stowey Sutton, West Harptree, Ubley, East Harptree, Hinton Blewett, Nempnett Thrubwell)
North Somerset Parish Rep	Don Kinsey (Loxton and Christon, Banwell, Bleadon, Hutton, Winscombe and Sandford, Churchill, Burrington, Blagdon, Butcombe)

The Partnership Committee agreed new Terms of Reference in July 2010. Hosted by Somerset County Council, the Unit in 2010-11 was jointly funded by Natural England, Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council, Mendip District Council and Sedgemoor District Council.

AONB Unit

Manager	Sarah Jackson (F/T)
Development Officer	(F/T) post frozen
Planning Liaison Officer	Jonathan Richards (P/T 18hrs)
Project Officer	Andy Mallender (F/T)
Support Officer	Norma Newby (F/T)

AONB Unit core income

Natural England	136,386
Somerset County Council	22,000
North Somerset Council	22,000
Bath and North East Somerset	22,000
Mendip District Council	13,517
Sedgemoor District Council	11,430
Sub Total	227,333

AONB Unit - other income

Natural England Sustainable Development Fund	55,000
Natural England Access Grants	7,800
Parish Councils	1,730
Wild Walks sales	968
Vehicle Sale	5,451
Sub Total	70,949
Total	298,282

AONB Unit core expenditure

Staff costs	112,432	(salaries, travel, training)
Host costs	12,648	(Rent, ICT, management fee, insurance)
Office costs	10,993	(stationery, telephones, postage, furniture, cleaning)
Vehicle costs	8,043	(vehicle purchase, fuel, maintenance)
Partnership costs	10,247	(Meetings, Mendip Times, consultancy fee, membership fees)
Core Projects	64,024	(SWT and AWT Living Landscapes, Black Down, Young Rangers, volunteer costs, Visitor Guide)
Total	218,387	

Sustainable Development Fund

Grants awarded	54,032
Admin claimed	968
Total	55,000

Note: Figures are rounded to nearest pound



We hope you have found this report informative.

For a chance to win one of the very popular 'Wild Walks' books please email mendiphills@somerset.gov.uk with your feedback by July 31st 2011

Let us know what interested you most:

- Black Down Project
- Young Rangers
- Volunteering
- SDF
- Other – if so please specify.....

Did you learn something new about our work?

If you would like to receive our Monthly Email Update let us know.

Alternatively send your thoughts, name and address to:

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