

Annual Review

2015 - 2016

Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the Annual review for 2015-2016, a year in which much progress has been made.

There was good news for all protected landscapes in the government's autumn statement at the end of November 2015 with the announcement that the national contribution to core funding for National Parks and AONBs would be protected. This good news owes a great deal to the work of the National Association for AONBs on our behalf. It is very welcome national recognition, at the highest political level, of the much-valued work of AONB Partnerships across the country.

However we cannot afford to be complacent. The North Wessex Downs is positioned right in the centre of a growth corridor crossed with major transport routes including the M4 and A34. The pressure for new development is constant and our role in protecting the landscape from harm has never seemed more important or urgent.

Network Rail's failure to have regard for AONB purposes before starting work on electrification of the Great Western main line is an example of the huge challenges protected landscapes currently face. In partnership with the Chilterns AONB and local residents, we are now working with Network Rail to help them fulfil their Duty of Regard under s.85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of our AONBs. This work has national implications for other AONBs and National Parks where future electrification is planned.

This year we have focused on the rich heritage in the area. A Sharing Heritage grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund made it possible for us to make our historic landscape characterisation data more accessible.

Raising awareness and building understanding of how everyone can help to conserve and enhance this special landscape have been at the core of our work this year. A new presentation has been in development that tells the Story of the North Wessex Downs, what makes this area so special and why it needs to be protected and we have also produced a new film that lets the landscape speak for itself. The film is available for all partners and local businesses to use to promote the area.



Ted Hiscocks (third from left) at a Council of Partners meeting 2016

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The North Wessex Downs AONB is not the small partnership team based in Hungerford, it is the 668 square miles of outstanding landscape outside our windows. Our work in conserving and enhancing this special place is only made possible with the help of our many partners and allies and we are very grateful for their continued support.

Ted Hiscocks Chairman
North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership

2 Development

Meet Rebecca Davies – our new planning advisor



Rebecca Davies : Planning Advisor

Rebecca joined the North Wessex Downs team in November 2015 from South Derbyshire District Council where she was Area Planning Officer. Her role is primarily to provide landscape-related advice on development plans and proposals affecting the AONB.

Rebecca was raised in Wiltshire and has a strong interest in the rural environment having lived within or on the edge of an AONB since childhood, and being Welsh, it's in her genes to love the countryside. After studying Geography she completed a Masters Degree in Town and Country Planning and then started her career with Bath and North East Somerset Council as a Conservation and Planning Officer.

Significant Housing proposals

The draft of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan had included a new housing site in the AONB for an initial 1,400 houses with a reserve site for an additional 2,000 houses on greenfield sites adjacent to the Harwell Campus. We objected strongly to the proposal along with other countryside groups.



Harwell Site

An outline application was approved by Wiltshire Council for up to 220 dwellings on greenfield land off Salisbury Road outside Marlborough. The Crown Estates development approved by Wiltshire Council extends substantially further southwards up the hill than the allocated site area, higher than was previously deemed by the authority's own landscape officer to be acceptable. We objected to this extension.



Salisbury Road Marlborough site

Local Plan Consultations

The Test Valley Revised Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in July and we took part in hearings which took place in June.

We responded to the West Berkshire Housing Allocation Development Plan Document (DPD) highlighting the threat to AONB landscapes from some of the proposed sites, in particular major sites within the AONB contrary to national planning policy, the AONB Management Plan and the Housing Position Statement.

Housing Position Statement.

The Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document ('the Plan') was formally adopted by Wiltshire Council on 20 January 2015. The informal consultation carried out on the Wiltshire Council Housing Allocations DPD raised a number of concerns for the AONB including several sites previously discounted in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) process and new areas for housing in Marlborough and a number of villages within the AONB

Reducing the Impact of the Electricity Network

The SSE undergrounding scheme across Hungerford Common was completed, delivering a major landscape improvement in a well-used open space. Other schemes at Barbury Castle/The Ridgeway and West Kennett Long Barrow are progressing.



Cables being moved underground at Hungerford Common

We were successful, as one of only four AONBs, in making it to the shortlist for the £500 million Visual Impact Provision scheme led by National Grid to underground high-voltage cables across AONBs. Unfortunately the proposal was not selected but all 12 sections of line remain under consideration for future work to reduce the impact under the project Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

Other significant issues in brief:

We objected to proposals for significant solar array developments on the North Wessex Downs boundary within Basingstoke and Deane and at Stanford Dingley in West Berkshire.

We supported a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund by the Kennet and Avon Canal Trust for funding to conserve and restore the buildings that house the historic Crofton beam engines, and improved site interpretation.

Planning permission for a 120 berth marina west of Hungerford was controversially granted 10 years ago and some work had been started. New owners consulted us on a much more modest proposal and new conditions will help to improve the impact of the development on Freeman's Marsh SSSI, and water quality of the River Dun.

3 Heritage

Sharing Historic Landscape Character

We received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund 'Sharing Heritage' programme for a project to share the Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) of the North Wessex Downs. The mapping and character information produced by HLC is important because it allows us to identify what characteristics make each place special and distinct. This allows us to better enjoy and look after our own local area, and to help create a sense of identity in the community. HLC shows the development of the landscape through time.

The total value of the project to the North Wessex Downs was £24,377, made up of £8,427 cash (£3,127 AONB funding matching a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £5,300) and volunteer engagement valued at £15,950. Among the project outputs were:-

- a new interactive HLC web site, Written in the Land : www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk;
- 98 volunteer days;
- 4 workshops;
- inaugural North Wessex Downs Heritage Forum; and
- 1 new leaflet: Written in the land: archaeology and history in the North Wessex Downs



A Heritage workshop at the Annual Forum

The new website provides interactive web mapping of HLC for the North Wessex Downs with descriptions, statements of significance, time-slice mapping and links, to help local authorities, developers, landowners and the general public to find information about, and read, the history of the present-day landscape, and why it matters.

www.historicnorthwessexdowns.org.uk



The Sharing Historic Landscape Character project has been supported by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to provide this resource.

4 Grants News

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

It has been another successful year for the SDF which supports a range of projects that bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the North Wessex Downs AONB. SDF grants of £15,862 across 12 projects attracted £33,032 in matching contributions in cash and kind, delivering benefits to a total value of £48,894 through local projects. Since 2009, 134 SDF-supported projects have now delivered £953,049 in benefits to local communities.

Recently completed projects include :



Repair of Ramsbury Lych Gate

The Lych-gate at the entrance to the churchyard at Ramsbury church has been restored to its former glory. It was built in 1910 as a family memorial and it is a focal point in the village used by the whole population

Mapping the Marlborough White Horse

This project brings together methods to accurately map the white horses so as to contribute to a fuller understanding of a hill figure's construction and history and to inform new methods for conservation.

Pewsey Train Station Mural

Visitors to Pewsey railway station will have noticed a new mural designed and installed with support from the AONB and Great Western Railway.

Local resident Sylvia Clayden working with Pewsey Vale School, a college with arts status, held a competition for ideas which was won by Natasha Verdeti-Peters and further graphic artwork was carried out by fellow student Brigit Graystone. The resulting mural was unveiled by local MP Claire Perry.

Eastbury Chalkstream Restoration



The local community get involved in restoration work

The Eastbury Village Flood Prevention Association (EVFPA) was set up in 2012 to mitigate the effects of the Lambourn flooding within the village and has now expanded its remit to encompass the restoration and conservation of this unique chalk river. A SDF grant was awarded for materials to complete the bank restoration project in the heart of the village.

Also,

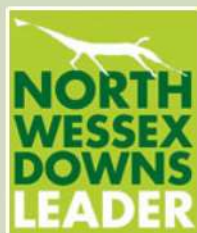
Andover Trees (supported by a North Wessex Downs SDF grant in 2014) has been shortlisted for the 2015 Observer/Guardian Ethical Awards, in the Ecover Young Green Champions Category.

LEADER

The North Wessex Downs Local Action Group secured 2.132m Euros from Defra to run a new LEADER Programme between 2015 and 2020. The boundary for LEADER funding was extended and there are six priorities for investment:

- Farming productivity
- Micro / small businesses and farm diversification
- Tourism / the visitor economy
- Forestry productivity
- Rural services and connectivity and
- Culture and heritage.

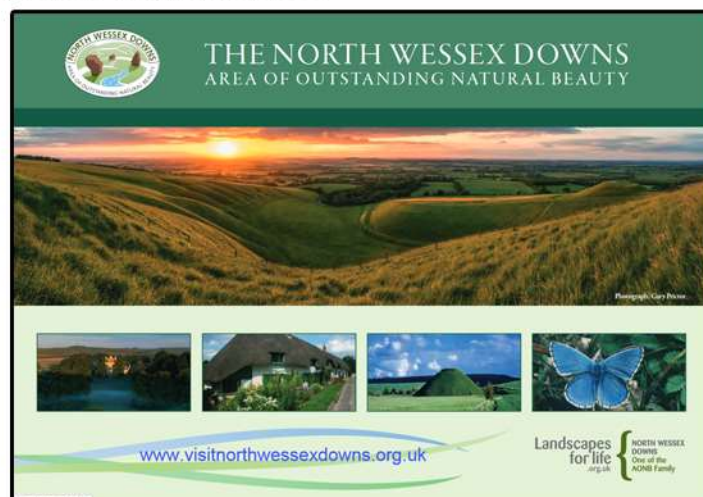
Funding is available for farmers, foresters, land managers, community enterprises and rural-based businesses. The Programme "opened for business" in December 2015.
www.northwessexleader.org.uk



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Tourism

Visits to local businesses



The tourism toolkit is available on our website

We have continued to visit tourism businesses across the North Wessex Downs to inform them of the tools available to help them promote the landscape as part of their own marketing. We offer a visitor guide, the tourism toolkit, walking maps and guides as well as the new film of the North Wessex Downs.

www.visitnorthwessexdowns.org.uk

The A4 project with visit Wiltshire

We supported an initiative led by Visit Wiltshire and partners interested in promoting the A4 route from London to Bath. Visit Wiltshire are proposing a pilot project with support from the towns along the route. We look forward to supporting this idea with itineraries focused on the heritage and landscape along the route.

Our Land

The Our Land website was set up in 2011 to help generate bookings for small-scale properties located in a number of protected landscapes in the south and south east of England.

The project ran for 5 years supported through an agreement with Responsible Travel which came to an end in March 2015.

During the course of the programme Our Land provided support to almost 1,000 businesses, generating 25,000 bed nights for members. Although the additional business was more limited here in the North Wessex Downs we were successful in providing training and product development support worth £35k.

The legacy is a network of small businesses who engaged with the project and with whom we will continue to work in the future.

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Working with Partners

The Ridgeway Partnership was launched on 19 June 2015 to manage, develop and promotes the Ridgeway National Trail and its wider corridor and environment. We supported the Partnership by helping to organise its first conference in October 2015 with the theme "Supporting Businesses along the Ridgeway."

The new Joint Management Plan for Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Sites was launched in May 2015. For the first time there is a single plan for both parts of the world heritage site. The North Wessex Downs AONB was closely involved in the development of the plan and we look forward to working with a range of partners to deliver the plan.

Action for The River Kennet (ARK) working in partnership with the Renewal project, carried out river restoration work on the River Lambourn in Newbury.

North Wessex Downs Annual Forum 14 October 2015, Pewsey



A Walk to the Pewsey White Horse : Annual Forum 2015

The theme for 2015 was Heritage and it was wonderful to welcome over 60 people to the day. Presentations were given by the Director on the layers of heritage that surround us and by Emma Rouse of Wyvern Heritage, who has led our work on Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC). Four workshops then enabled participants to identify their preferred outcomes from our HLF-supported Sharing HLC project.

The afternoon saw some participants join a tour of historic Pewsey and visit to the Pewsey Heritage Centre led by Mike Asbury, while others walked to the White Horse above the village to hear from Richard Giles of the Pewsey Vale Local History Research Group.

Raising the Awareness of the North Wessex Downs

The Story

To promote awareness of the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs AONB we developed a presentation that tells the story of the landscape, what makes it special and what the designation means for the people who live and work here. It includes information and graphics showing how it was formed, man's influence on the landscape and why it is such a special place for wildlife. During the year we gave the presentation to groups in Newbury, Pewsey, Marlborough, Hungerford and in Goring and Streatley.



Filming Avebury for the North Wessex Downs Film, June 2015

The presentation includes a professionally designed set of powerpoint slides with illustrations and photographs supported with a detailed script and a short film. We hope that our partners will use the presentation to inform an even wider audience.

Photographing the Landscape

At the end of March 2016, we ran a course in partnership with Visit Wiltshire, kindly hosted by the Ramsbury Brewery. The one day workshop is designed to help local businesses take better photos of the landscape that surrounds them and to include these in their promotional materials. After a morning covering ideas and theory we set off in the afternoon to put it all in practice.



Photographing the Landscape Workshop: Ramsbury, Spring 2016

The Icons Exhibition

The Icons of the North Wessex Downs, an exhibition of ten contemporary paintings by local artist Anna Dillon went on display at Newbury Library in May 2015 and then at Pewsey Heritage Museum during the summer of 2015.

The touring exhibition for 2016 began in March at the Queens Arms in East Garston and to mark the event, the new owners of the Queens Arms, Freddie and Sue Tulloch invited producers from the within the AONB to showcase their fine food and local produce



Queens Arms owners

So much more than a view

England's finest landscapes contribute more than £20bn each year to our economy – similar to that of Birmingham, according to a new report.

So much more than the view... was published jointly by the National Association for AONBs and National Parks England and presented to incoming ministers following the 2015 general election. It highlights the wide range of benefits that AONBs and National Parks provide to society.

Friends of the North Wessex Downs

The Partnership has been keen to establish a friends' group for some years. A project group made progress in 2015 but further development work in early 2016 was unfortunately delayed by ill health.

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Out and about in the North Wessex Downs

Open Farm Sunday was on 6 June 2015. WE attended the event in Wroughton as part of our commitment to the Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership. Around 1000 people attended and had a great day out in the sunshine celebrating the joys of farming and the countryside.

The Royal Berkshire Show

We attended the Royal Berkshire Show in October 2015 and were grateful for the support from many of our partners who helped us on the stand. The show is a good opportunity to meet new people and explain about the AONB. More than 300 new people signed up to receive our regular newsletter.



Royal Berkshire Show 2015

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Land Management

Marlborough Downs

As the pilot Nature Improvement Area programme came to an end, the Marlborough Downs project became the Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership. Following a successful bid to become a 'Facilitation Fund' group under Countryside Stewardship, we helped the project to set priorities for the future. This included expansion to include catchment and water quality objectives and collaborative woodland management.

Managing Woodland



We supported the development of a new good practice guide, in partnership with the Organic Research Centre at Elm Farm, Hamstead Marshall. The guide demonstrates the benefits of managing hedges for woodfuel and contains guidance regarding wildlife, techniques, machinery and legal aspects of management.

Making Local Woods Work

Making Woodlands Work, launched in July 2015 and funded by an award from the Big Lottery Fund to the Plunkett Foundation, is designed to help people to create social enterprises in local unmanaged woodland. We helped to support a bid to the scheme which unfortunately was unsuccessful. We also contributed to the development of other Facilitation Fund bids in the North Wessex Downs.

Forestry Commission Event : Pasty and a Pint

We supported the Forestry Commission in holding informal evening events to discuss the grants available and the kinds of projects they might support.

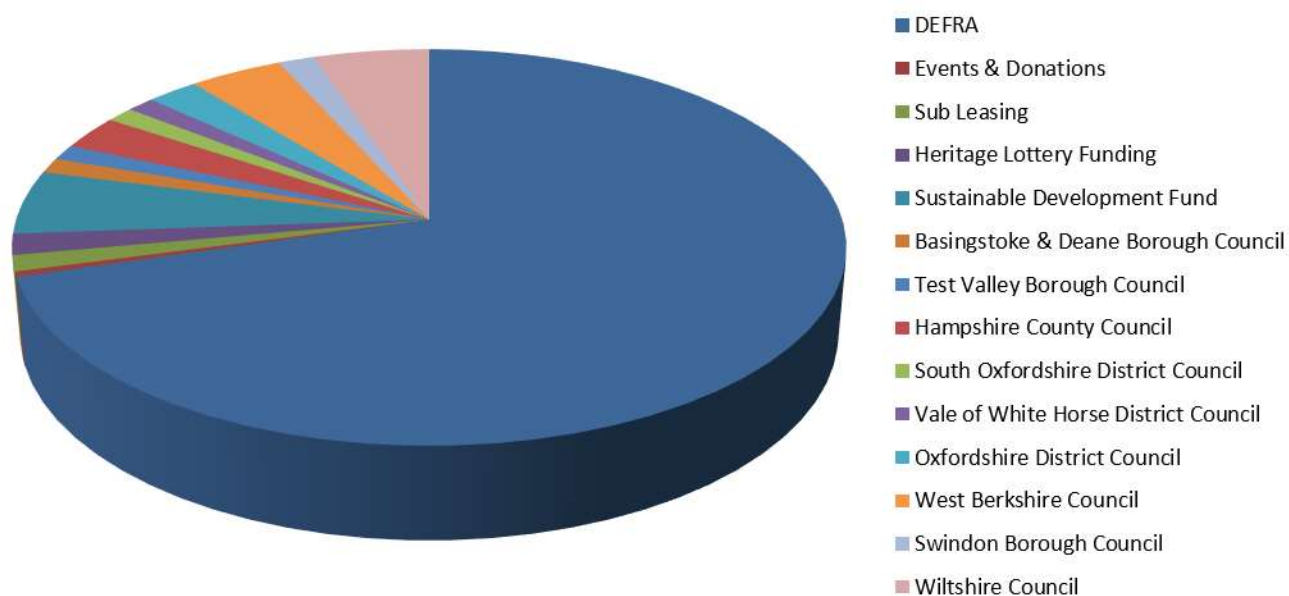
ConFor show

In September 2015, we attended the ConFor Woodland Show, held bi-annually at the Longleat Estate in Wiltshire. The show featured stands, presentations and demonstrations by equipment suppliers, woodland managers, agents, industry bodies and representatives of the Forestry Commission.

The show was a good opportunity to find out about new developments in woodland management – a key area of interest for the North Wessex Downs AONB partnership.

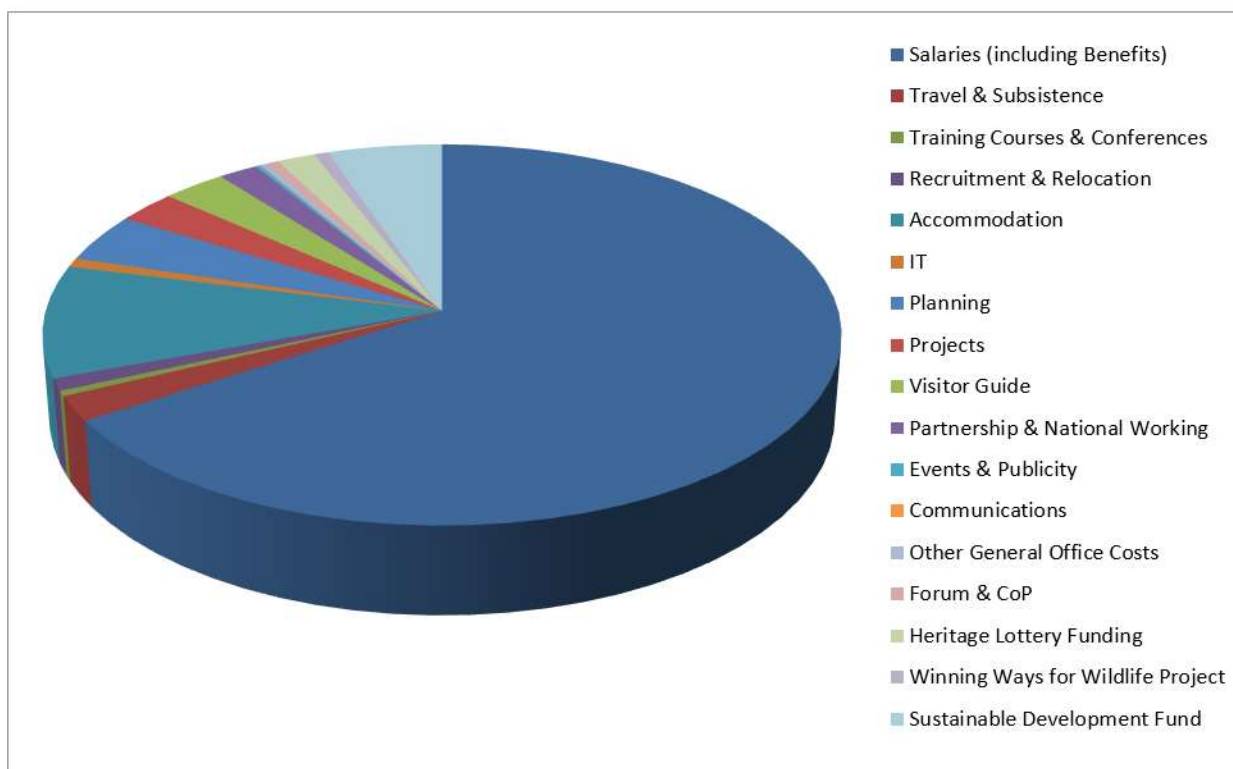
Income 2015-2016

DEFRA	£	216,310.55
Events & Donations	£	1,296.21
Sub Leasing	£	3,940.93
Heritage Lottery Funding	£	5,300.00
Sustainable Development Fund	£	15,974.43
Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	£	3,806.59
Test Valley Borough Council	£	3,806.59
Hampshire County Council	£	8,557.77
South Oxfordshire District Council	£	3,806.59
Vale of White Horse District Council	£	3,806.59
Oxfordshire District Council	£	7,054.23
West Berkshire Council	£	12,767.67
Swindon Borough Council	£	4,949.28
Wiltshire Council	£	15,774.75
Total	£	307,152.18



Expenditure 2014-2015

Salaries (including Benefits)	£ 200,003.80
Travel & Subsistence	£ 6,397.36
Training Courses & Conferences	£ 1,378.00
Recruitment & Relocation	£ 3,087.00
Accommodation	£ 28,936.71
IT	£ 2,308.84
Planning	£ 12,522.00
Projects	£ 8,365.85
Visitor Guide	£ 8,849.00
Partnership & National Working	£ 5,533.39
Events & Publicity	£ 605.17
Communications	£ 100.00
Other General Office Costs	£ 953.30
Forum & CoP	£ 1,712.58
Heritage Lottery Funding	£ 5,266.45
Winning Ways for Wildlife Project	£ 2,000.00
Sustainable Development Fund	£ 15,862.00
Total	£ 303,881.45



Sustainable Development Fund Grants Awarded 2014- 2015

2014-15	Total (Requested)	£17,862.00	
	Total (Approved)	£15,862.00	
	Match Funding		£28,272.00
	In kind contributions		£4,760.00
	Volunteer time (days)		174
	Total Project Costs - cash & match	£48,894.00	
	Admin Costs	0	
	Number of projects	12	
	Average Grant	£1,322	