

North Wessex Downs

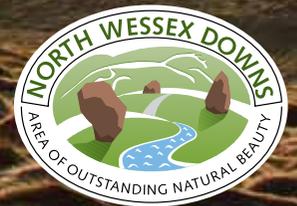
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review **2016 - 2017**

Landscapes
for life
.org.uk



NORTH WESSEX
DOWNS
One of the
AONB Family



Welcome to the Annual Review 2016-2017

This year we made progress with our planned work programme and kicked off a fundamental review of our long term strategy whilst dealing with continued pressure for development within the AONB and uncertainty regarding government priorities and funding following the vote to leave the EU.

This annual review celebrates the highlights of the year and illustrates the way in which we work, tackling the key issues through an ongoing process of:

Making connections - reaching out to new audiences and raising awareness

Supporting and influencing - working to achieve shared goals with like-minded partners

Inspiring - others to consider and act on key issues

Making Change Happen - grants, advice and intervention.

The small team at the North Wessex Downs offices in Hungerford saw several changes during the year. We said a sad farewell to Oliver Cripps (*Projects and Development Manager*) and to Julie

Baldwin (*Partnership Co-ordinator*). Rebecca Davies (*Planning Advisor*) is now on maternity leave and Ian Hepburn joined us to cover until spring 2018. Susan Clarke and Claire McCorquodale joined us at the end of 2016 and are job sharing the Partnership Co-ordinator role.

The AONB Partnership relies on input from a much wider group and includes our funding partners DEFRA and the nine local authorities plus other members of the governing Council of Partners and Management Working Group as well as an army of like-minded groups and individuals.

We are hugely grateful for their continued support.

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Cover image - Marlborough Downs © David White

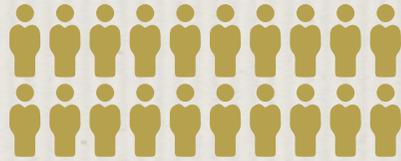


Susan Clarke Ian Hepburn Dawn Hamblin Rose Somerset Rebecca Davies Claire McCorquodale Henry Oliver

The North Wessex Downs AONB Team



More than **500** people at **20 events** heard **The Story of the North Wessex Downs** presentation



20 people in 3 sessions were trained to deliver The Story



£22k

of **SDF grants** were made to 10 projects attracting **£37k** (169%) of cash and in-kind match contributions

The Local Action Group for the **North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme** approved 10 projects with a total of

almost **£300k** grant funding

60 people attended our **Annual Forum** with the theme "Dark Skies"

2016/17 highlights



1500 people

(sponsors, partners and friends) received our **quarterly e-bulletins**

£300k project funding

for events in NWD and 4 other AONBs was secured from the Arts Council through partnership in **Lifestyles and Landscapes project**



18 local farmers

attended the **Farmer Cluster** Facilitation Fund event to encourage conservation in partnership



>50 owners

of under-managed woodland attended a **make your woodland work for you** event



2

New **Icons of the North Wessex Downs** paintings were commissioned

5 new venues

exhibited the collection of Icons paintings



500 sets

of **14 walks leaflets** were reprinted



50,000

visitor guides were distributed via agents across the AONB and beyond



150 new contacts were made at the **Bowood Country Fair**

4

local businesses sponsored our **Photography Competition**



Making Connections

Reaching out to new audiences and raising awareness

Horses on the Gallops in Lambourn by Anna Dillon



The Icons of the North Wessex Downs

The touring exhibition of ten paintings by local artist **Anna Dillon** has been on display at:

- Salisbury Museum
- Cobbs Farm Shop, near Hungerford
- The Cafe at Avebury World Heritage Site
- The Queen's Arms, East Garston
- The Living Rainforest, Hampstead Norreys.

As part of a plan to refresh the series, we commissioned two new works:

- Horses on the Gallops in Lambourn
- A new painting of Savernake Forest.

Did you know...

the **North Wessex Downs** is the third-largest AONB in the country covering **1730 sq km** and yet it has a resident population of only 125,000?

Photo Competition

The North Wessex Downs Photo Competition launched in August 2016 to run for a year with four seasonal rounds. This was part of our promotion of health and well-being and aimed to encourage more people to get out and enjoy the landscape.

Thanks are due to our sponsors who donated prizes: The Bombay Sapphire Distillery in Whitchurch, IKEA Reading, the McNeill Art gallery in Pewsey and Rick Stein's Restaurant in Marlborough.

The competition will run until the **end of August 2017** when an overall winner will be announced.



Winner of the Winter Round - Boxing Day Shoot in Savernake Forest by Stuart Murray

Wiltshire Game and Country Fair - Bowood Autumn 2016

We took a break from our usual attendance at the Royal County of Berkshire Show and took a stand at the **Game and Country Fair at Bowood** in September 2016. We met many new faces. More than 150 people entered our competition and signed up to receive our e-bulletin. Thanks to all those who helped over the weekend.

Working with IKEA to Raise Awareness



IKEA Reading opened in the summer of 2017. The wall facing the North Wessex Downs is grey rather than the

usual blue which was one of the conditions of the planning permission.

IKEA also made a payment for landscape improvements and we have been working with them on ideas for in-store displays and local walks to raise awareness of the AONB amongst staff and customers.

Did you know...

there are **eight landscape types** across the **North Wessex Downs**? Discover more in the **Landscape Character Assessment report** on our website.

Beyond our Boundaries

On a national scale, we continued to make connections through the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) and the South East and East and South West Protected Landscapes Forums. In September we joined other AONBs and National Parks to study the impact of climate change on Protected Landscapes.

At the annual **Landscapes for Life (NAAONB) Conference 2016** in Shropshire we showcased the new Night Blight dark skies mapping led by Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and our Written in the Land Historic Landscape Characterisation website.

(More on dark skies mapping on page 9).

Social Media Project with Oxford Students

Students from **Oxford University** undertook a project to see how we might extend our use of social media to raise awareness of the North Wessex Downs. They used the photography competition to explore the effectiveness of various channels and produced a useful report.

Our thanks go to the students for their hard work and to Dr John Sharp for making this happen.

Great West Way

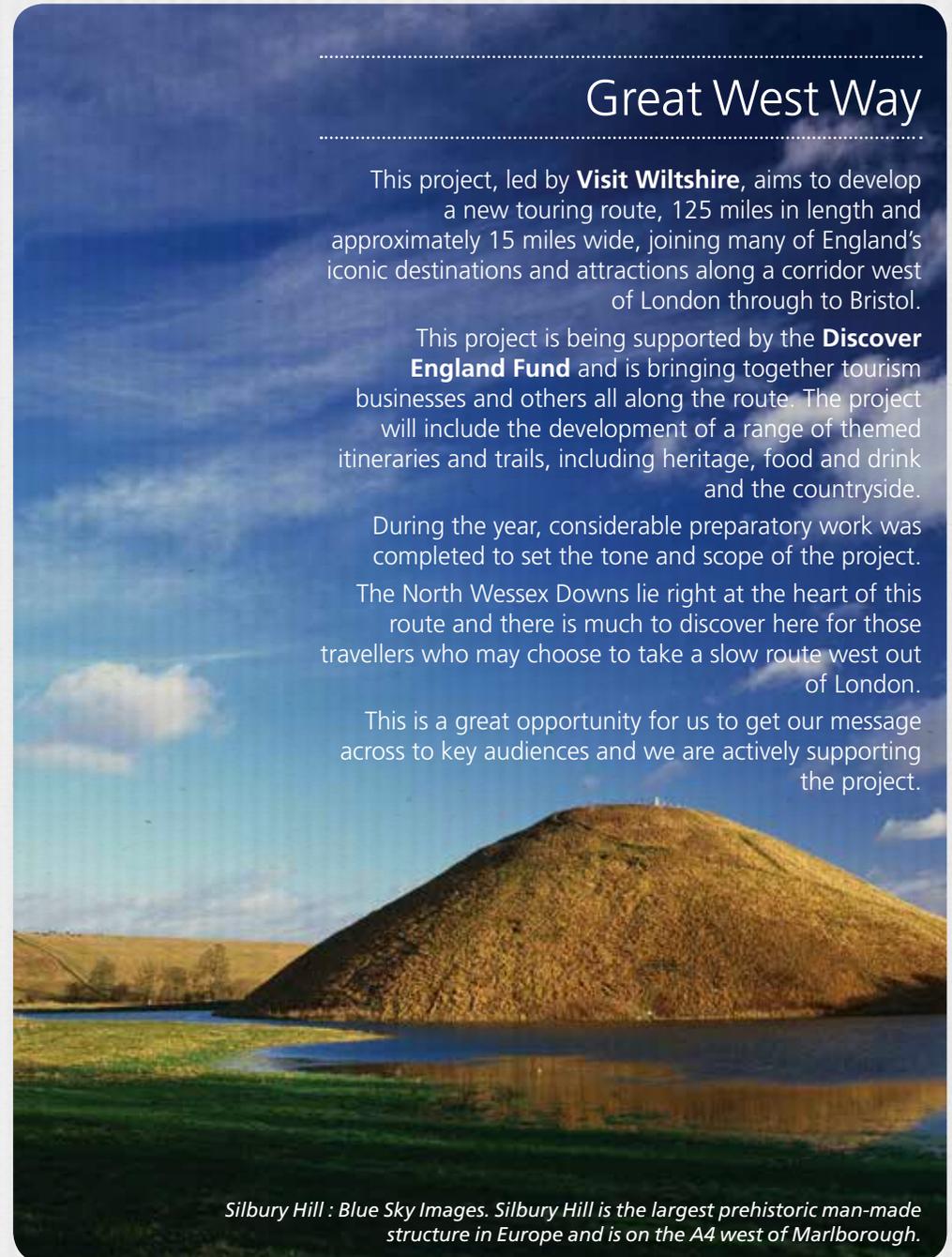
This project, led by **Visit Wiltshire**, aims to develop a new touring route, 125 miles in length and approximately 15 miles wide, joining many of England's iconic destinations and attractions along a corridor west of London through to Bristol.

This project is being supported by the **Discover England Fund** and is bringing together tourism businesses and others all along the route. The project will include the development of a range of themed itineraries and trails, including heritage, food and drink and the countryside.

During the year, considerable preparatory work was completed to set the tone and scope of the project.

The North Wessex Downs lie right at the heart of this route and there is much to discover here for those travellers who may choose to take a slow route west out of London.

This is a great opportunity for us to get our message across to key audiences and we are actively supporting the project.

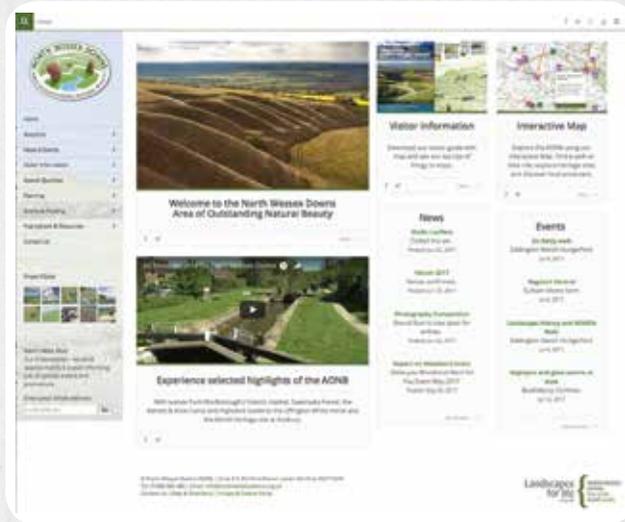


Silbury Hill : Blue Sky Images. Silbury Hill is the largest prehistoric man-made structure in Europe and is on the A4 west of Marlborough.

Supporting and Influencing

Working to achieve shared goals with like-minded partners

The information evening for farmers was held at the Queens Arms in Lambourn



New Website

Our website provides a useful source of information for visitors and partners. In response to the shift to mobile devices we rebuilt our site so visitors and occasional users can view it more easily on tablets and phones. The new site (above) has retained all the specialist information that our partners expect plus there are more sections with easy access for visitors who need local information while they are on the move.

Watercress and Winterbournes

The **Watercress and Winterbournes Landscape Partnership Scheme** bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund aims to secure funding for land management, wildlife conservation, improving water quality, and conserving heritage and skills in the headwaters of the Rivers Test and Itchen. Around half to two-thirds of the area is in the North Wessex Downs. The bid is led by the Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership.

The North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust

During the year we helped establish and register this new charity. The Trust will be raising funds to support AONB activities and encouraging more people to get involved in conserving and enhancing the area's landscape, heritage and wildlife. This is really encouraging news and we look forward to working with the Landscape Trust in the future.

Farmer Clusters

In March 2017, we held an information event with support from Action for the River Kennet (ARK) to explore the potential for "farmer clusters" to take advantage of the new **Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund**.

The fund provides support for farmers to get expert advice on how to achieve conservation-based outcomes.

As a result, at least one new group of farmers is planning to work together across the North Wessex Downs.

Did you know...

that approximately **84%** of the **North Wessex Downs** is classified as farmland?

It is the most strongly agricultural of the South East AONBs.

Equestrian Development - Practical Guidance

We issued new guidance for equestrian development to clarify what is and isn't appropriate and provide further guidance on land management and conserving natural grasslands.

Did you know...



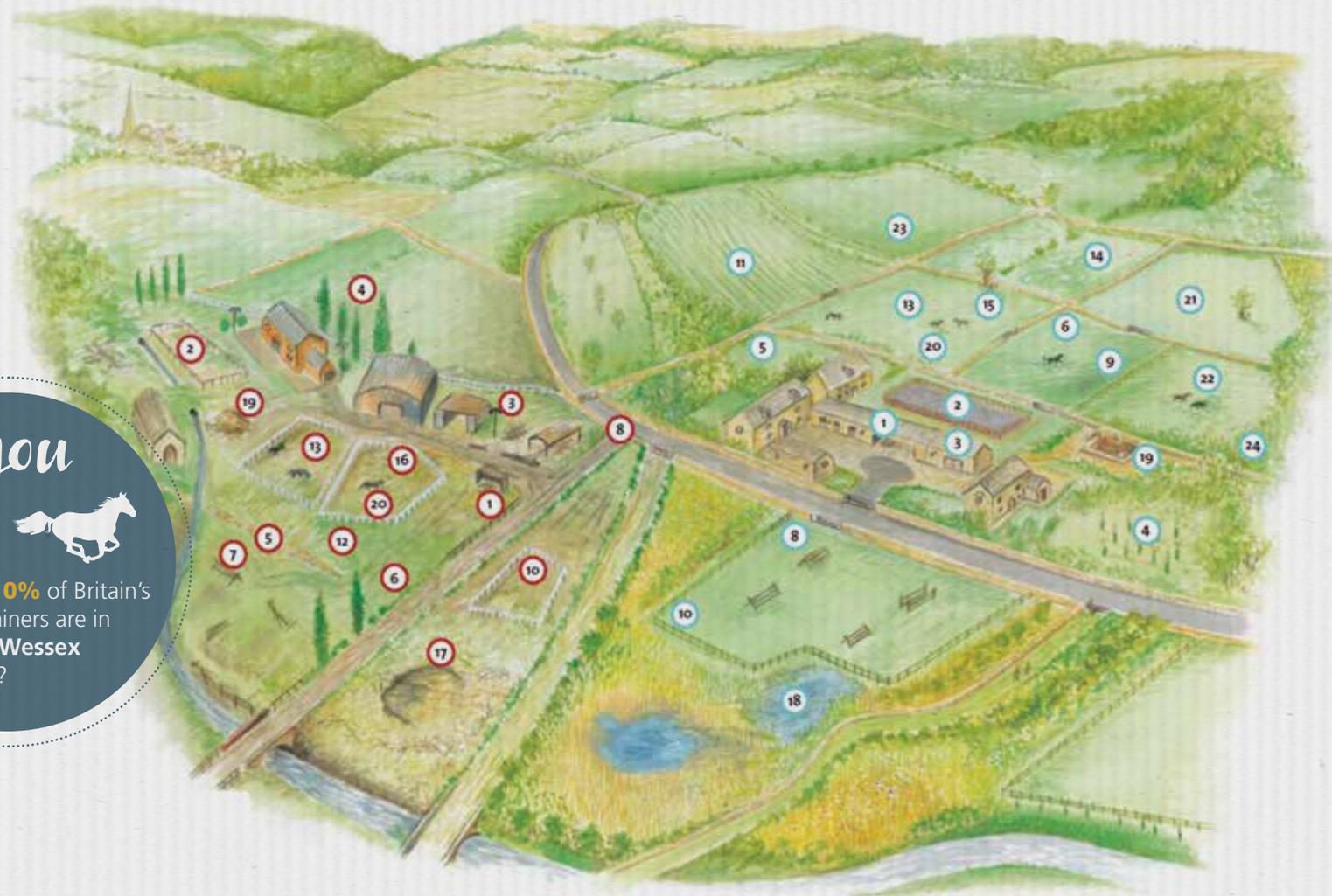
that approx. **10%** of Britain's racehorse trainers are in the **North Wessex Downs**?

London and its Protected Landscapes: a 25 Year Vision

The debate over the future of London as a global city region will profoundly affect the protected landscapes which surround it. In partnership with other AONBs and National Parks in the South East and East of England we commissioned leading private-sector thinkers AECOM and ystudio to produce a vision for the vital part our landscapes will play in that future. This supports our continuing engagement with the Landscape Institute, Green Arc, the campaign to make London a national park city and others involved in the debate.

In brief:

- This year saw the publication of the **"State of Nature report"** from Wild Oxfordshire which highlighted many of the threats facing our wildlife today.
- We helped the **Berkshire Local Nature Partnership** to recruit a new Project Officer. This post is hosted by West Berkshire Council.
- We were delighted to join **Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site** partners to celebrate 30 years since the site's inscription by UNESCO.



An illustration from the guide to Equestrian Development.

Inspiring

Encouraging people to understand appreciate and enjoy the landscape

The Story of the North Wessex Downs

This year we developed and enhanced the presentation that tells The Story of the North Wessex Downs, what makes it so special and what it means to be an AONB. There is now a full set of presentation materials with professional illustrations and input from local wildlife and heritage experts. This presentation is a key weapon in our armoury to raise awareness of the North Wessex Downs. The aim is to have a whole army of presenters who can deliver the presentation and bi-annual training sessions for would-be ambassadors began in September 2016.

More than 500 people heard the presentation during the year at 20 events around the AONB.

Audience feedback has been very positive and has included the following comments:

All very informative and highly enjoyable CPRE meeting

Absolutely fascinating Thank you for a super evening Sustainable Blewbury

A comprehensive explanation of the history, geology and biodiversity issues and challenges Overton Biodiversity Society

Now I appreciate where I live far more Ramblers' Association

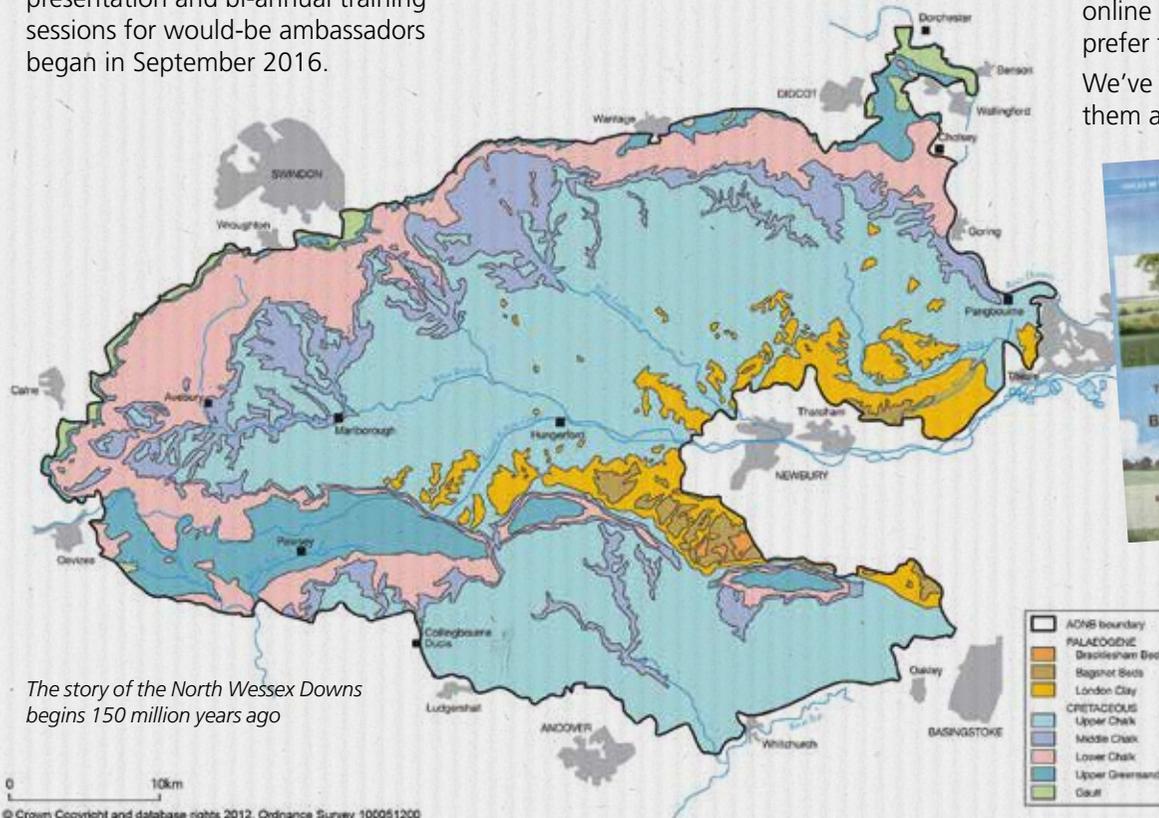
Did you know...

that the **Vale of Pewsey** is the product of **medieval clearance** which created numerous small irregularly shaped fields or assarts?

Walks leaflets

This popular series of 14 walks was reprinted. All the walks are available online but many people tell us they prefer to collect the set on paper.

We've yet to meet anyone who has done them all!



The story of the North Wessex Downs begins 150 million years ago

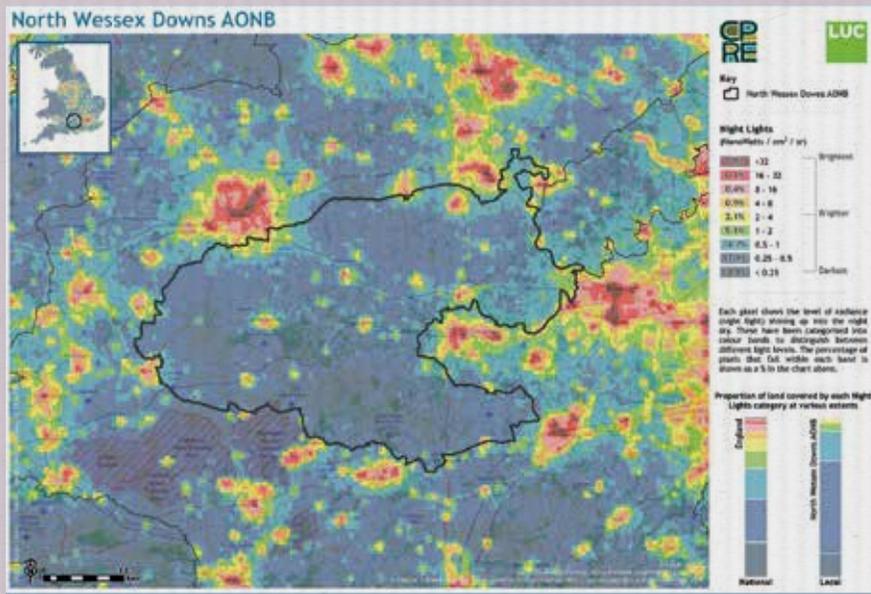
Pewsey walk © Mark Somerville



The Forum - Dark Skies

Our **Annual Forum 2016** was held at Kingsclere with dark skies and light pollution as the theme. Speakers included **Bob Mizon of the Commission for Dark Skies**, who brought his mobile planetarium, and **'dark skies Dan' Oakley from the South Downs National Park**. The **Campaign to Protect Rural England**

(CPRE) presented their Night Blight light pollution mapping, the product of a collaboration involving us and others. The Forum covered aspects of the subject from light pollution measurement and mapping through lighting design and tourism to public engagement and how to become an International Dark Sky Reserve.



The Ash book

Alongside other AONBs, we collaborated with the Woodland Trust and others to commission an illustrated book on the contribution of ash trees to the British landscape. This is to record the role of ash in our landscapes before Chalara, or Ash die-back disease (caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) increases its grip on much more of the country as well as to raise awareness of the enormity of the probable changes our landscapes face, and inspire partners and individuals to become involved in facing the challenge.

Lifecycles and Landscapes

This project brings together Activate (an outdoor arts company) And Now (artists) and five AONBs to explore the Icknield Way as an inspiration for an ambitious new large-scale artistic work.

The project has won £300k from the Arts Council to run events over 2017 and 2018. After touring some fabulous potential locations across the North Wessex Downs

with us in early 2017, the artists settled on a major installation at Basildon House in Berkshire for July 2018. This is a really exciting opportunity for us to understand how art can help to connect people with the landscape and to encourage new audiences to participate in a thought-provoking outdoor event.

Did you know...

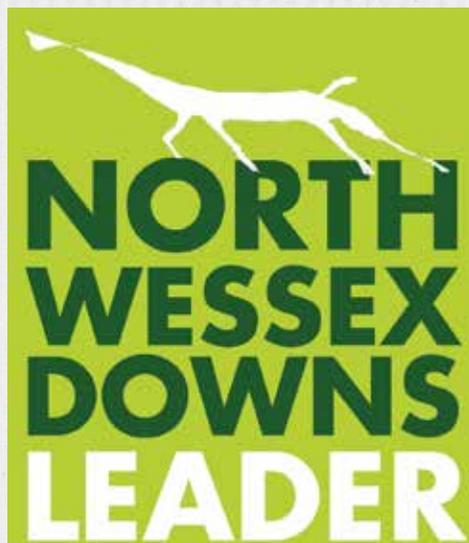
the North Wessex Downs is the **26th darkest district** out of 326 in England?



A recent installation by And Now, Activate and Dorset AONB. © Tony Gill

Making change happen

Direct involvement through grants, advice and intervention



North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme

The North Wessex Downs **LEADER Programme** began in January 2016 but delays were caused by local elections and the EU referendum, the result of which put Programmes on hold until the implications were clarified. LEADER is now "open for business" until the date we leave the EU.

During the year, the Local Action Group (LAG) approved 10 projects with a total of almost **£300k grant funding**. One withdrew, six are in process and three have completed.

Projects supported during 2016-17 have been in tourism, farming, forestry, heritage, food manufacture and health:



Berkeley Farm Dairy

- **Trust for Sustainable Living** - a new sustainable futures exhibition at the Living Rainforest
- **F C Cummins and Sons** - a strip till drill to improve drilling practice on farm
- **Berkeley Farm Dairy** - a variety of new kit to improve animal welfare and improve efficiency
- **Butler Brothers (Avebury) Ltd** - the conversion of an old granary to a new medical unit
- **Grove Brothers** - new equipment to improve the health and welfare of the dairy herd
- **Manor Farm, East Grafton** - a barn conversion to a 2 bed holiday let
- **CoCoChemistry Ltd** - a new chocolate manufacturing facility to allow business expansion

Did you know...

6% of the North Wessex Downs workforce are in agriculture?

The average for the South East is **1.3%**.

- **Wessex Biofuels Ltd** - new forestry equipment to extend the range of timber processed
- **Pewsey Heritage Centre** - external refurbishment of a new education and research space.

Given the reduced timescales to run the Programme, the LAG increased the frequency of meetings to ensure applications are processed as quickly as possible and increased the maximum grant to offer funding for bigger projects.

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Grants

The SDF provides funding for projects that bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the North Wessex Downs AONB.

This year we helped ten projects with grants totalling £22,146 which in turn attracted nearly £38k of cash and in-kind matching contributions.

Since its launch in 2005, the SDF has awarded grants totalling £613k to 209 diverse projects. Match contributions over this period have exceeded £1.2million, bringing a huge benefit to the AONB of almost £1.9 million.

This year's grants included support for:

- A new visitor leaflet to promote the **Kennet and Avon Canal**
- A new section of **boardwalk at East Woodhay** to improve accessibility to the footpath
- A **Forest Schools Programme** in Aldbourne so it can run in all weathers
- **Toollbuzz Travelling Museum** – start-up funding and secure storage for this group who display traditional rural crafts
- **Everybody's River Dun** (above) - a project by Action for the River Kennet (ARK) which encouraged the people of Froxfield to care for the river
- Improvements to the river banks at **Manton Jubilee Field** (below) to conserve the chalk stream and make it safer for children to enjoy its wildlife.



Make your woodland work for you - Woodland event Spring 2017

Buying a small piece of woodland is becoming increasingly popular. Around 500 small wood lots are sold each year, often to people who have never owned woodland before.

Sadly, much of England's woodland is under-managed which is bad for wildlife and wastes an important resource. In response, we organised an event in partnership with Cranborne Chase AONB and the Forestry Commission called "**Make your Woodland work for you**".

The aim of the day was to help woodland owners understand the benefits of good management so as to improve the health of woodland, both in terms of timber production and wildlife conservation.

We were delighted to see so many woodland owners at the event and to hear that they appreciated not only the advice on the day and the chance to see a well-managed wood but also the opportunity to make contacts with the organisations that can help them with woodland management in the future.

Feedback from the Woodland event

plenty of opportunity to rub shoulders with experts

good to see good management by others

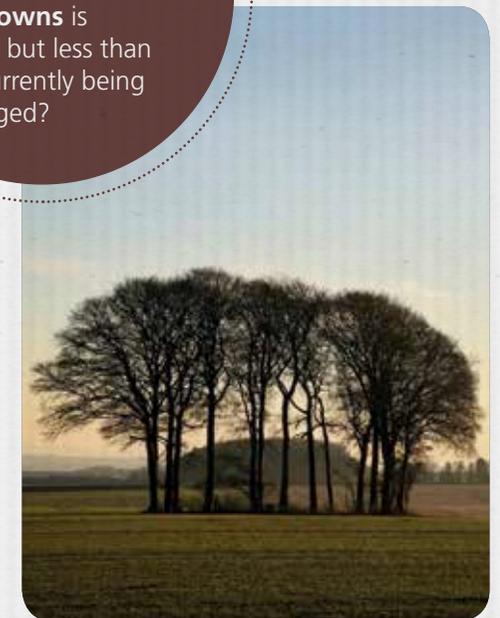
I got useful ideas about a possible market for my timber

I'm going to think about planting for high-value small-scale markets

I will be looking for more collaborative options with my woodland neighbours

Did you know...

that **13%** of the **North Wessex Downs** is woodland but less than half is currently being managed?



Avebury Transport Strategy

We were a lead partner in developing the **Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS) Transport Strategy** in 2015 to reduce the impact of roads, traffic and signage around the Avebury part of the WHS. During the year project partners have been working to develop and bring forward some of the priority schemes identified in the Strategy.



Protecting the Landscape from Harmful Developments

Despite protection in national policy, the pressure for development across the North Wessex Downs is greater than ever and recent changes in planning policy have made it even more difficult to protect the landscape from damaging change. However, we have had some significant success this year and recognition of the setting of the AONB, including specific consideration in local plans.

Sadly some challenges have been particularly persistent. The emerging Local Plan for **Harwell Campus** in the Vale of White Horse included sites for 1400 houses within the AONB. We invested heavily in the public examination and were delighted when the Inspector ruled that the plan was unsound as no exceptional circumstances had been shown to justify development within a nationally protected landscape. However, a few months later we were dismayed to see a very similar proposal submitted, this time for 1000 houses, many of them on greenfield land.



The local community object to the plans for housing at Harwell

Did you know...

the **North Wessex Downs** take in **173 parishes** and straddle the boundaries of **nine local authorities in four counties?**

Notable Successes

Kintbury: 72 houses refused - one of the reasons being "the harm to the character of the AONB"

Blewbury: 35 houses refused due to "significant landscape harm"

East Hagbourne: housing development refused in the green gap between the village and Didcot "in the setting of the AONB"

Stanford Dingley: solar power station refused due to impact on AONB

Chilton: 40 houses refused after we identified concerns

Uffington: 42 houses - appeal against refusal dismissed partly due to "harm to the setting of the AONB"

East Garston: 16 houses withdrawn - impact would have been "visual impact and urbanisation of the village".

A Positive Influence

Overton Hill: we supported this development with its landscape and ecological enhancement corridors

Buttermere Estate near Ham: we worked closely with developers in the design of a new Estate House and associated landscaping resulting in a development which fits well with the AONB

Redlands Airfield: 370 houses, we raised concerns about the urbanisation of open countryside, impact on the setting of the AONB and long-distance views to and from the Ridgeway

Windsor Horse Stables: we supported 6 houses in an appropriate location making a positive contribution to the racing industry

Kingsclere Rd Overton: 165 houses withdrawn after concerns about the impact to the setting of the AONB

Draycott Foliat: we supported change of use from a barn to four dwellings with a positive impact on the landscape

Undergrounding of electric cables: we have applied to SSE to have cables at Winterbourne moved underground.

Disappointments

Despite our efforts some things have not gone as we'd have liked:

Salisbury Road Hungerford: 100 houses approved, even though "the exceptional circumstances to justify major development in the AONB" were not met

East Hendred: we objected to 75 houses on the edge of the AONB, and were supported by the Council's Landscape Officer. The application was refused but sadly overturned at appeal



Network Rail's gantries

Network Rail: huge metal electrification gantries were installed across the Goring Gap without proper consultation and in breach of Network Rail's legal duty to have regard to the AONB. Attempts at alternative designs have been disappointing. We continue to work with Natural England, the Chilterns and Cotswolds AONBs to persuade Network Rail to come up with a better solution.

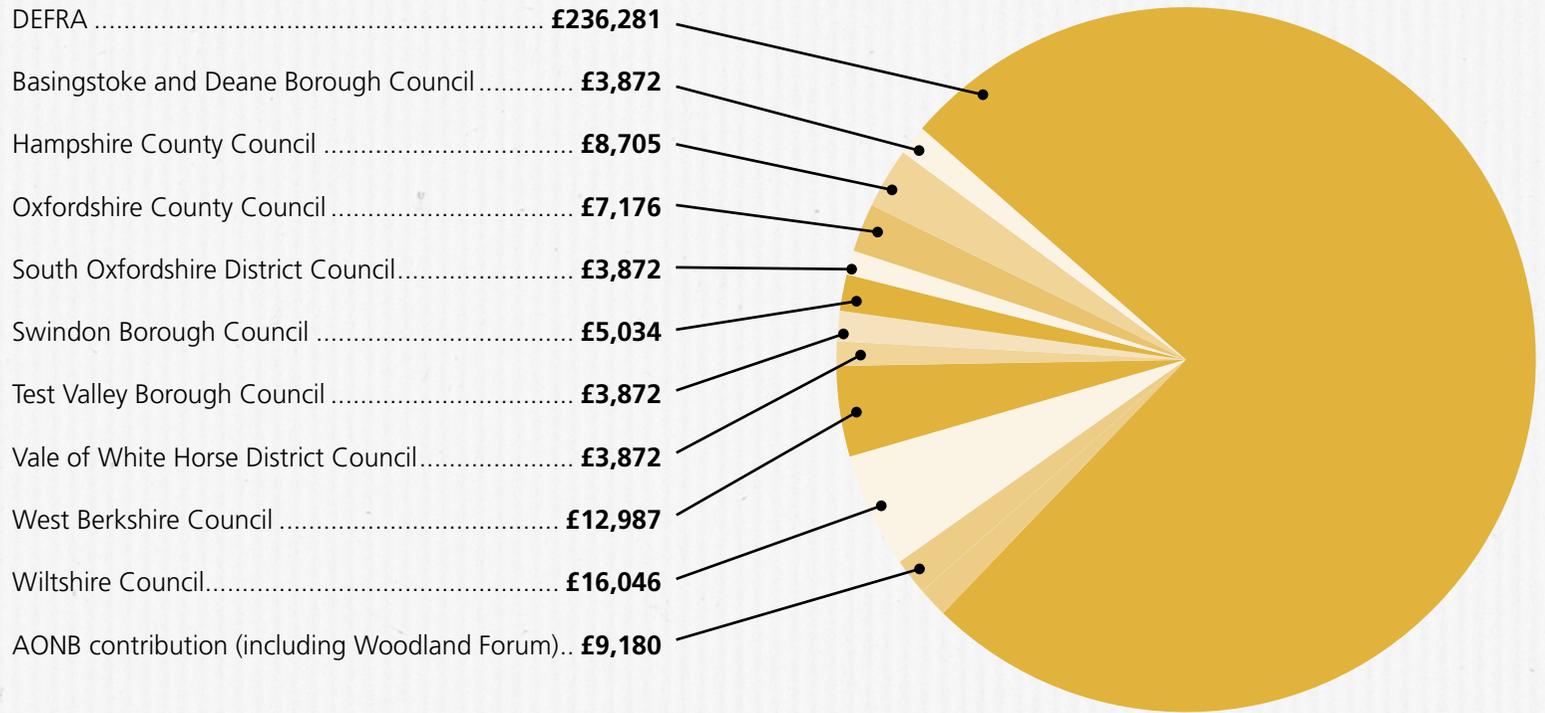
North Fawley sunset ©Edmund Perou

Financial Summary

For 2016-2017

Total Income 2016-2017

Total Income **£310,897**



The new Boardwalk Extension at East Woodhay supported by an SDF grant



Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) projects

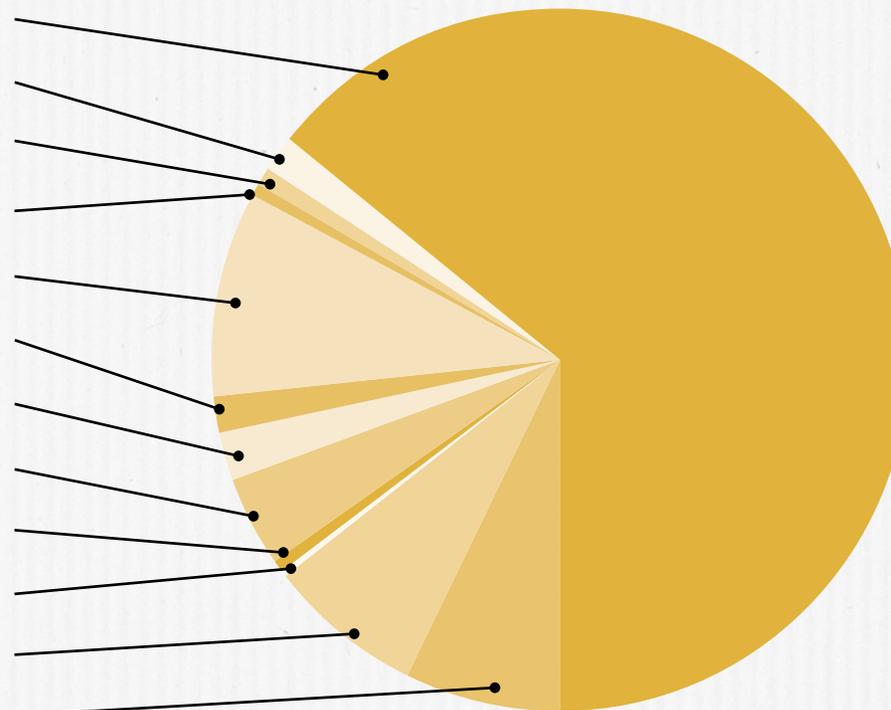
2016-7 SDF Projects	SDF grant	Value Added
Kennet & Avon Trade Association visitor leaflet	£3,476	£6,550
Pewsey Vale Tourism P'ship - Visitor Pass	£818	£533
East Woodhay Parish Council - Boardwalk Extension	£1,500	£6,555
St Michaels School Aldbourne - tipi for Forest School	£2,154	£4,168
PEAT	£260	£300

2016-7 SDF Projects	SDF grant	Value Added
Conservation Volunteers	£1,280	£4,300
Toolbuzz travelling museum	£1,764	£5,120
Everybodys River Dun	£1,750	£1,000
Improving river banks	£2,644	£2,750
Ridgeway strategic links	£6,500	£6,600
Total	£22,146	£37,876

Expenditure 2016-2017

Total Expenditure **£310,897**

Salaries	£199,653
Travel & subsistence	£5,403
Training courses & conferences	£2,450
Recruitment & relocation	£2,266
Accommodation	£28,909
IT	£5,664
Partnership and national working.....	£6,659
Events and publicity	£12,991
Forum and CoP venues	£1,681
Other general office costs	£1,055
Sustainable Development Fund	£22,146
Projects and bid development	£22,021



Adding Value



Every **£1** contributed by the Local Authorities delivered **£5.33 in benefits** to the AONB.

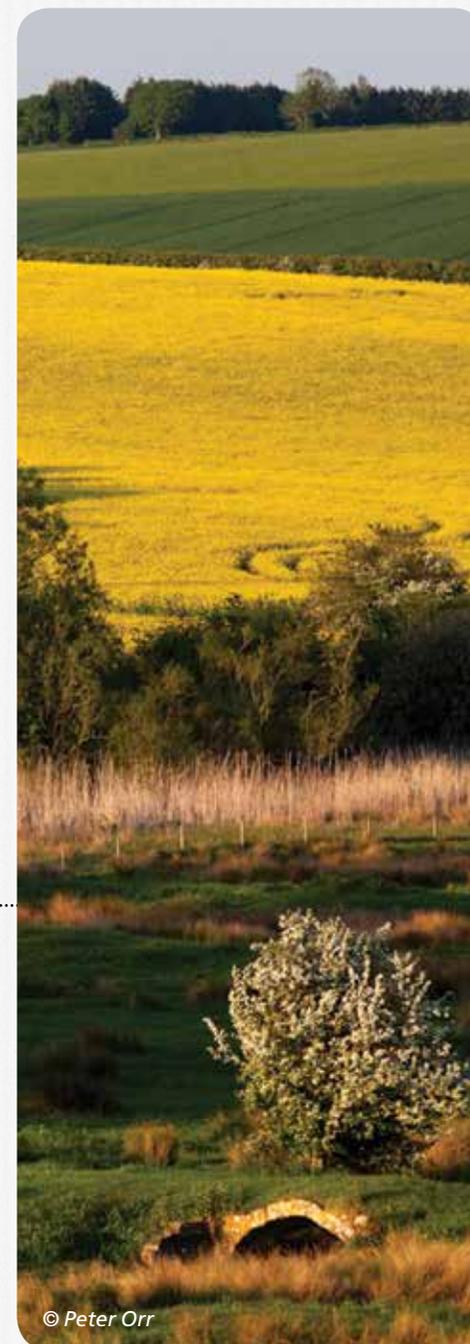


For every **£1 SDF awarded** a further **£1.71 is contributed** by partner organisations towards projects in the AONB.



LA Contribution	Benefit brought into AONB
£65,436	£348,773

SDF grants	Community contribution
£22,146	£37,876



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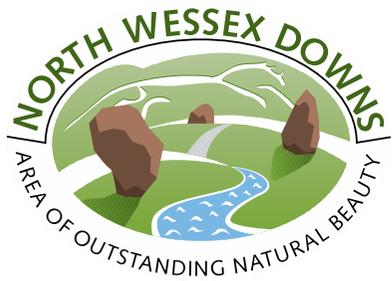
Units 3-4 Denford Manor

Lower Denford

Hungerford

Berkshire

RG17 0UN



Short Eared Owl © David White

