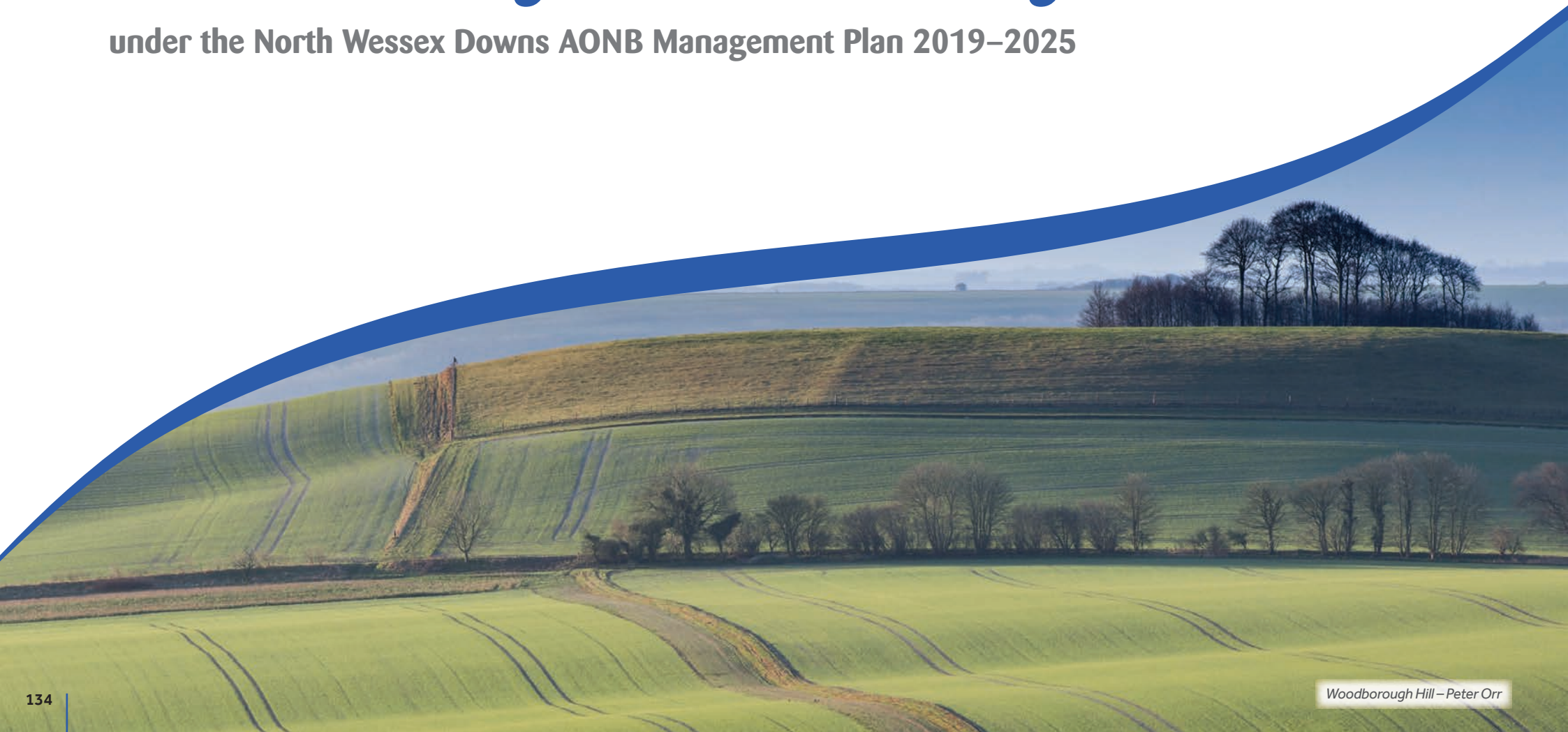


Summary of Activity

under the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2019–2025



North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) Partnership

- The Partnership's governing Council of Partners was chaired by Ted Hiscocks (2015–2021), Sarah Nichols (2021–2025) and Gill Haggarty (2025–).
- Continued Partnership meetings and activity throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Committed to becoming the first UK candidate protected area to achieve the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Green List standard.
- Undertook a comprehensive governance review, including a revised Partnership Agreement, new Partnership Goals and Strategic Objectives, and a new Business Plan.
- Supported 20 community projects with grants from the Sustainable Development Fund, managed on our behalf by the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust.

Value for Money

- Delivered an increase in the annual value of benefits to the NWDNL levered by each £1 of local authority partners funding contributions from £4.82 (2019–20) to £22.46 (2023–24).

National and Regional Collaboration

- Hosted field trips and visits for the National Landscapes annual conference (twice); DEFRA Environment Bill, 30by30 and Landscapes, Access and People teams; the Protected Landscapes Partnership; and the Minister responsible for protected landscapes.
- Supported National Landscapes Association activities.
- Participated in the *Big Chalk* calcareous landscapes nature recovery initiative as a board member, including hosting a field trip at the inaugural *Big Chalk* Conference.
- Participated in the SE and E Protected Landscapes Lead Officers' Group and the SE, E and SW Protected Landscapes Planning Officers' Group.
- Collaborated with other protected landscapes on FiPL projects such as Pasture and Profit in Protected Landscapes.
- Chaired the Avebury World Heritage Site Steering Committee.

Communications

- Commissioned an entirely new web site focussed on public access in light of experience during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Celebrated the 50th anniversary of the designation of the North Wessex Downs as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Rebranded ourselves as a National Landscape and published a new visitor guide leaflet.
- Produced regular newsletters and social media posts and grew our general and targetted mailing lists, social media following and website.

Access, Recreation and Tourism

- Ran annual walking festivals 2022–24 with delivery partners.
- Delivered access improvements using DEFRA's Access for All Fund.
- 22 projects supported.
- £414,000 in project grants to make new or existing rights of way more accessible, replace styles with gates, create permissive paths, install publicly available lavatories on or next to rights of way, add way markers and other improvements to recreation across the NWDNL.
- Promoted the NWDNL as a Designated Ambassador for the Great West Way tourism initiative.



Credit: Visit Hampshire

Dark skies and Lighting

- Published a Good Lighting Guide and leaflet to help minimise light pollution in the National Landscape and its setting.
- Partnered with Marlborough Town Council and Marlborough College to hold the first Marlborough Dark Skies Festival, with 30 events attracting more than 4,500 people.
- Offered dark skies training to our partner local authorities.
- Supported local astronomy groups with grants and community-led light level monitoring.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme

FiPL is a national DEFRA programme of advice, guidance and grants for farmers and land managers. It is focussed on four pillars of nature, climate, people and place, viewed through the prism of each protected landscape's Management Plan. In the first four years 2021–25:

- Over 200 grant applications received.
- 176 projects awarded grants.
- £3,073,638 in grant funding given to environmental projects.

Major projects:

Some of the highest value projects supported (all over £50K):

- Pond creation at Englefield Home Farms.
- Restoration of Manor Farm Barn, Old Burghclere.
- Pasture cropping trial to assess landscape-scale change to farming system.
- Hedgerow dormouse project within the Wessex Farm Conservation and Southern Streams Farmer Groups.
- Micro-scale vegetable tannery for cattle hides and an education hub at Great Cotmarsh Farm.
- Regenerative farming and re-introduction of livestock at Manor Farm, Wilton.
- Cactus guards, fencing, farm surveys, bird boxes, a short educational film, bridleway access gates and automatic magnesium chloride water dispenser at Yatesbury House Farm.
- Dew ponds on the Pewsey Downs.
- Saving England's Lowland Junipers – revitalising populations in the North Wessex Downs (Plantlife).

Other projects and support:

- Also supported river enhancement and wetland creation, scrub removal, arable reversion, access improvements, fenceless collars to aid conservation grazing, a sheep dairy, deer management / venison initiatives (training, diversification scheme), public access, including toilets and information, repair and restoration of historic listed barns, and re-introduction of the large blue butterfly in collaboration with Natural England and other partners.
- Helped establish eight new farmer-led groups.
- Convened regular meetings of the facilitators of all farmer-led groups in NWDNL.

Education:

- Training for farmers to host schools, e.g. LEAF collaboration.
- Knowledge-sharing for farmers and the public, e.g. Pasture for Life, FiPL events, equine events.
- Equipment and facilities, e.g. trailers, classrooms, to enable improved visits.
- Support for local community gardens to feed and educate local groups.

Going Underground at Roundway Hill

Under the £500m Visual Impact Provision agreed with Ofgem, NWDNL is benefitting from one of four National Grid projects to reduce the impact of overhead electricity transmission lines on protected landscapes. The route runs across the site of the Battle of Roundway Down (1643), a Registered Battlefield, and close to Roundway Down and Covert SSSI and the Devizes Millennium White Horse. On completion, 4.5km of overhead electricity line will be buried underground, removing 13 pylons from the National Landscape. We have:

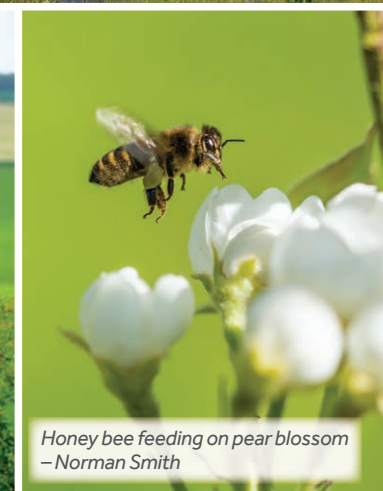
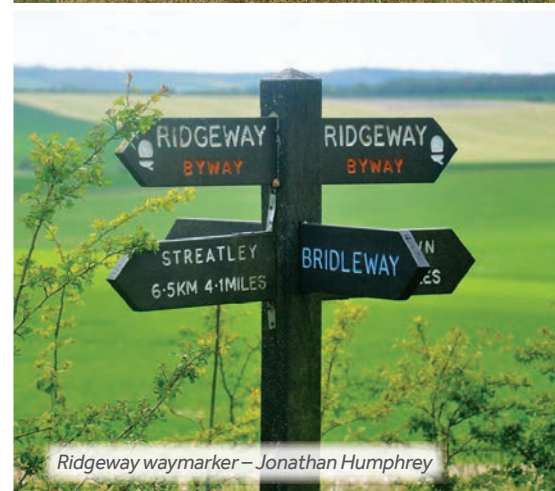
- Engaged closely with National Grid from the project's inception. The scheme received consent in 2023.
- Worked with National Grid and the Pewsey Downs Farmer Group to identify associated opportunities for nature recovery and landscape enhancement along the route.

Historic Ridgeway

- With partners we helped develop, match funded and supported delivery of the Ridgeway Partnership project. Supported by Historic England, the project has recruited volunteers to survey scheduled and unscheduled monuments along the Ridgeway National Trail and identify conservation, access, interpretation, and nature recovery needs and opportunities.

Landscape Character

- Commissioned an Environmental Colour Assessment and published Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development. Designed to minimise potential negative impacts of development on the character of the National Landscape by providing advice on colour selection and material use to help integrate development into the landscape.
- Held a training session for local authority partners.
- Commissioned the first comprehensive review of the NWDNL Landscape Character Area Assessment since 2002 to provide an up-to-date evidence base for the new Management Plan.



Mend the Gap

- Mend the Gap is a joint initiative between the North Wessex Downs, the Chilterns National Landscape and the Railway Action Group to soften and heal the landscape harm caused by electrification of the Great Western mainline between Reading and Didcot. It is funded by Network Rail. The programme has delivered:

Landscape Enhancement:

- Softened the impact of the overhead wires and gantries with over 4km of hedge planting and over 600 trees so far.

Communities:

- Worked with eight parish councils to help them support nature recovery in their communities, including a new management plan for Pangbourne Meadows.
- Worked with over 6,000 children to support them to better understand the landscape and nature around them, with over £200,000 committed to school grounds projects.

Wildlife:

- Levered over £700,000 in nature recovery projects so far to enhance chalk and wetland habitats, for example working with farmers and expert botanists to restore chalk grassland and raise awareness of the Goring Gap's importance for wild plants.
- Delivered a Joint project with Partnerships for Nature to fund a new wetland with grassland and arable plant conservation on the Sulham Estate.

The Arts:

- Worked with two artists on the Springline Project at Aston Tirrold and Cholsey to commission artwork to communicate the special wildlife of the Cholsey and Mill brooks.

Nature Recovery Plan

- Fulfilled our commitment under the Colchester Declaration (2019) by developing a Nature Recovery Plan for the NWDNL, sent to over 115 consultees in addition to the online consultation.
- Launched at our Nature Recovery-themed Annual Forum in October 2023.
- Contributed to the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.

Partnerships for Nature

We secured £1.75m from DEFRA's Species Survival Fund with match funding for our Partnerships for Nature programme of habitat creation and restoration involving nine partners across seven sites in NWDNL.

- Restoration / enhancement of 2.5 km of chalk stream habitat and regrading of 2.36 km of riverbank habitat.
- Restoration and enhancement of 26 ha of existing lowland heathland, 31 ha of newly created heathland and 200 ha of wood pasture, with a ranger service and reintroduction of grazing by non-breeding, native breed cattle.
- 26ha arable field demonstration site for regenerative farming including agroforestry, with wildlife-rich habitats alongside food production.
- Restoration / enhancement of 20 ha of chalk grassland.
- Creation of 0.5ha of wetland habitat.
- Restoration / enhancement of two coppice plots (1.6 ha and 2 ha).
- Restoration / enhancement of two dew ponds.
- Creation of ten hibernacula.
- Recruitment and training of project volunteers.
- A series of activities including organised site walks, workshops for local farmers and landowners, practical advice for farms on how to introduce species and nature recovery into their longer-term business models, and habitat interpretation materials.



Planning and Design

- Engaged with Local Plans, Core Strategies, Minerals and Waste Plans and other policy documents for Basingstoke and Deane, Hampshire, Vale and South Oxfordshire, Test Valley, West Berkshire and Wiltshire Councils.
- Prevented major harm to the setting of the National Landscape from a large commercial Science Park development on the edge of Swindon. We worked alongside Council officers during the application and at appeal.
- Screened over 5,000 applications and commented on approximately 2,000.
- Collaborative working with Natural England and West Berkshire Council which resulted in a landscape-led local plan review and the formulation of a standalone National Landscapes policy.
- Supported Swindon Borough Council at an Enforcement Inquiry against unauthorised change of use and development at Wroughton Airfield. The appeal was dismissed and the enforcement notices upheld.

Sparkling Streams

We secured a £401,000 grant from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund for the Sparkling Streams Project: a catchment approach, working with Action for the River Kennet (ARK), the Southern Streams Farmer Group and the Town and Manor of Hungerford to improve the condition of the River Kennet chalk stream and its Shalbourne and river Dun chalk stream tributaries, increasing wildlife and connecting people with nature.

- 1.1 km of new or enhanced chalk stream and a fish pass created at Eddington Mill.
- 3 km of enhanced in-river and riparian habitat work carried out on eight sites on the river Dun and the Shalbourne.
- 1 km hedge (5,025 plants) and 6 ha woodland (3,400 trees) planted on six sites.
- 64 volunteer tasks held.
- 145 people (94 new volunteers) gave over 1,600 hours of their time.
- Rain garden created at Shalbourne Primary School.