



Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee

Wednesday, 9th October, 2013 at 2.00 pm in Goosnargh Village Hall, Church Lane, Goosnargh, Nr Preston, PR3 2BH

Agenda

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- **Attendees for 'projects tour' by coach to convene at Goosnargh Village Hall from 10.15am. Please note due to the Village Hall being in use for another group in the morning, refreshments will not be available prior to the coach tour.**
- **Coach to leave at 10.30am for tour in surrounding areas, including Bowland Visitor Centre at Beacon Fell.**
- **Coach returns to Goosnargh at approximately 12.45pm. Buffet lunch to be served in The Grapes Pub.**
- **Committee meeting to commence in Goosnargh Village Hall at 2pm.**

1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

The Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee are asked to appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for the municipal year 2013/14. Nominations have been received for County Councillor Albert Atkinson (as Chair) and County Councillor Mrs Susie Charles (as Vice Chair).

2. Welcome, introductions and Apologies for Absence

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interests

Members are asked to consider any Pecuniary Interests they may have to disclose to the meeting in relation to matters under consideration on the Agenda.

4. Constitution, Membership and Terms of Reference (Pages 1 - 4) Report attached.

- 5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 26 April 2013** (Pages 5 - 10)
The Committee are asked to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2013.
- 6. Matters Arising**
To note any matters arising from the previous meeting.
- 7. AONB Partner Updates**
(All Partners – Verbal Update)
- 8. Budget Update** (Pages 11 - 16)
Report attached.
- 9. AONB Unit Report** (Pages 17 - 26)
Report attached.
- 10. AONB Management Plan Review Update** (Pages 27 - 34)
Report attached.
- 11. Landscape Partnership Scheme - Scoping Report**
Report tabled on the day.
- 12. 50th Anniversary Update**
Verbal update
- 13. Any Other Urgent Business**
An item of Urgent Business may only be considered under this heading where, by reason of special circumstances to be recorded in the minutes, the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion that the item should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency. Wherever possible, the Chief Executive should be given advance warning of any Members' intention to raise a matter under this heading.

 - (a) Europarc Charter for Sustainable Tourism Update**
Verbal update.
 - (b) National Association for AONBs - Value of AONBs Partnership report** (Pages 35 - 50)
Verbal update with accompanying NAAONB report.
- 14. Date of Next Meetings**
To note that the next meetings of the Committee will be held on:-
Tuesday 22 April 2014 in Craven. (Venue TBC)
Thursday 9 October 2014 in Ribble Valley

A Milroy
Principal Executive Support Officer

Lancashire County Council
County Hall
Preston

Agenda Item 4

Membership and Terms of Reference of the Advisory Committee 2013/14

Issue for Consideration

The Constitution, Membership and Terms of Reference of the Advisory Committee for 2013/14.

Information

It is reported for the information of the Committee that the Constituent Authorities of the Advisory Committee have informed the Secretary of their representatives appointed to serve on the Committee for the year 2013/14. The Constitution and Membership of the Advisory Committee for 2013/14 is, therefore, as follows:-

Lancashire County Council

County Councillor A Atkinson
County Councillor S Charles
County Councillor K Ellard

North Yorkshire County Council

County Councillor R Welch

Craven District Council

Councillor L Barrington

Lancaster City Council

Councillor J Pritchard

Wyre Borough Council

Councillor R Brooks

Ribble Valley Borough Council

Councillor Mrs R Elms

Preston City Council

Councillor J Browne

Pendle Borough Council

Councillor J Starkie

Lancashire Association of Parish and Town Councils

Mr M Helm

Yorkshire Local Councils Association

Councillor C Price

United Utilities

Mr I Grindy

Environment Agency

Ms H Dix

Natural England

Mr N Clark

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

David Morris

Forest of Bowland Landowning and Farming Advisory Group

Mr A Taylor

Mr T Binns

Ramblers Association

Mr D Kelly

Bowland Tourism Environment Fund

Jonty Collinson

Bowland Experience Limited

Jon Beavan

Friends of Bowland

Geoff Morries

The Committee and its constituent bodies are responsible for the implementation of the AONB Management Plan. The role of the Committee and its Terms of Reference, is as follows:-

The Joint Advisory Committee supports and encourages an active partnership between all of the agencies involved and co-ordinates management over the whole of the AONB. The aim is to:

- promote the AONB at national, regional and local level,
- ensure that the landscape of the AONB is conserved and enhanced appropriately through the implementation of the AONB Management Plan,
- work to assist the social and economic well being of the AONB commensurate with the conservation of its special qualities,
- provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas,
- consider any issues likely to affect the area adversely and agree appropriate action
- make recommendations for new initiatives

A range of organisations with interests in the AONB is eligible for membership. Members include local authorities and the key organisations and interests, including representatives of local people, whose involvement will assist in implementing the Management Plan. Membership is kept under review and is at the discretion of the local authorities. Ideally there should be between 10 and 20 members and, where it is not practicable to include all of the represented interests, regular consultation mechanisms should be established.

Brief for the Joint Advisory Committee:

- co-ordinate the preparation and implementation of strategic plans for the AONB, including the preparation of the statutory Management Plan
- advise local authorities preparing structure plans, local plans or other plans covering all or part of the AONB, to ensure that policies and practices (including those for development control) are co-ordinated and consistent with the statement of commitment and AONB Management Plan
- advise local authorities and other agencies on the level of resources required for effective AONB management
- lobby to influence organisations that are not members of the JAC in the delivery of their services and programmes in order to benefit Bowland communities, businesses and the environment

- advise on, and co-ordinate the actions of the constituent organisations to achieve the objectives of the AONB and, in particular, ensure that the statement of commitment and Management Plan are implemented and reviewed. This includes:
 - receiving monitoring reports from the partners on progress and achievements in implementing the Management Plan, reviewing the Management Plan every five years and producing an annual report,
 - agreeing an annual work programme for the AONB to be delivered by the partners and the AONB Staff Unit,
 - carrying out special studies of key issues, as they arise, for example by setting up working parties or conducting research
 - advising the appropriate local planning authority about any developments within or adjacent to the AONB that are likely to affect significantly the landscape character of the area,
 - acting as forum for the discussion of major issues affecting the character of the AONB
 - promoting other action that is necessary to further the objectives of the AONB designation



Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 26th April, 2013 at 2.00 pm in Barley Village Hall, Cross Lane, Barley, Nr Burnley. BB12 9JU

Present:

Chair

County Councillor Albert Atkinson, Lancashire County Council

Committee Members

Councillor Lin Barrington, Craven District Council
Councillor Roger W Brooks, Wyre Borough Council
Helen Dix, Environment Agency
Councillor Mrs Rosemary Elms, Ribble Valley Borough Council
Michael Helm, LAPT
David Kelly, Ramblers Association
Councillor Colin Price, Yorkshire Local Councils Association
County Councillor David Smith, Lancashire County Council
Councillor James Starkie, Pendle Borough Council
Barrie Tyrer, Bowland Experience Limited
Janet Sharp, Champion Bowland (formerly Bowland Tourism Environment Fund)

Officers

Hetty Byrne, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
Cathy Hopley, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
Elliott Lorimer, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
Nick Osborne, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
David Padley, Lancashire County Council
Mike Pugh, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
Sandra Silk, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit
Martin Putsey, Preston City Council
Gavin Thomas, RSPB Bowland Wader Project

Apologies

County Councillor Mrs Susie Charles, Lancashire County Council
Councillor John Browne, Preston City Council

Neil Clark, Natural England
Ian Grindy, United Utilities plc
Councillor Roger Sherlock, Lancaster City Council
Mr Andrew Taylor, Bowland Land Managers Forum
County Councillor Richard Welch, North Yorkshire County Council
Graham Megson, North Yorkshire County Council
Dave Oyston, United Utilities plc
Alison Boden, Wyre Borough Council

Presentation

The Committee received a presentation from Gavin Thomas from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Gavin gave a presentation on the RSPB's Bowland Wader Project and highlighted work being undertaken to encourage and promote various wader species to return to the Forest of Bowland, the work has included aspects such as:

- Habitat creation.
- Landscape maintenance and restoration.
- Focusing resources on specific "wader hotspot" areas.
- Working in partnership with all relevant organisations.
- Working with farmers and landowners.
- Volunteer tasks such as wader surveys and habitat management work.

Resolved: The Committee noted the presentation.

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

The Chair, County Councillor Albert Atkinson, welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were noted as above.

2. Appointment of Additional Committee Member

The Committee considered a request to appoint a new Committee Member – Friends of Bowland.

Friends of Bowland was established as an unincorporated association in 2012, agreeing a governing document and appointing officers following its launch at Newton-in-Bowland village hall in October 2012.

Friends of Bowland aims are:

- to promote practical conservation in Bowland;
- to promote environmental knowledge and training - in particular to benefit Bowland flora and fauna;
- to promote historical and local research relating to the landscape of Bowland;
- to hold educational and social events likely to be of interest to Friends;
- be a means of getting advice and recruiting volunteers for projects;
- raise funds to promote these aims, in particular where funds may be inaccessible to the AONB unit;

- work with the AONB unit and other relevant groups/organisations to avoid duplication and waste of resources.

Resolved: The Committee approved the appointment to the Joint Advisory Committee of a representative from Friends of Bowland.

3. Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None disclosed.

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 January 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2013 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. Matters Arising

None.

6. Budget 2013/14 Update

Elliott Lorimer presented a revised and updated Budget report which detailed at Appendix 'A' the agreed 5.38% reduction made to the Defra grant for 2013/14. An estimated reduction in accommodation costs and reduced budgets for the AONB Sustainable Development Fund will help absorb the reduction in Defra grant.

The updated budget figures were presented and showed that the grant for 2013/14 from Defra allows £208,303 against core costs and contribution of £16,000 towards the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

This allows £87,378 for the annual programme of projects to deliver the AONB Management Plan and AONB Unit business plan. SDF will be supplemented with additional funds from the annual projects programme to provide a total pot of £26,000.

It remains important to emphasise that 'projects funding' will continue to be used as match-funding to attract additional income to the AONB Partnership to better deliver the AONB Management Plan.

Resolved: The Committee noted the revised budget for 2013/14.

7. AONB Partner Updates

Updates were provided by partners on a Hen Harriers project and the Brennand & Whitendale river project project to increase the numbers of Salmon in the rivers.

The Committee also took the opportunity to commend the Parish Lengthsman Scheme.

The Committee raised the issue of the risk of ragwort weeds in Hodder Valley and the potential for it to spread. Officers discussed the Lancashire County Council invasive species project and agreed to raise the issue with the Ribble Rivers Trust.

8. Delivering the AONB Management Plan

Elliott Lorimer introduced each of the items under Item 8 as follows:

a) AONB Unit activity report

This report is a summary of some key AONB projects developed and delivered by the AONB Unit over the last six months.

b) Draft AONB Unit business plan 2013/14

An annual review of the AONB Unit Business Plan is now complete and a draft of the plan is attached for JAC members to view.

c) AONB Management Plan Review update

Updates were provided as detailed in each of the relevant sections of the minutes.

8a. AONB Unit Report

The Committee received the AONB Unit Report which provided updates, as detailed in the full report on the following projects / work areas:

- Hedgelaying in Bowland
- Moorland Restoration
- Bowland Hay Time Project
- Haytime Appeal
- Undergrounding for Visual Amenity programme – Roeburndale
- Champion Bowland
- Electric Bicycle Network
- Sustainable Development Fund
- Wild about Bowland
- Training for Tourism Businesses
- Bowland Land Managers Forum
- A Leap in the Park
- Lancashire Witches Walk
- Bowland Rambler Bus Service
- Access for All
- 50th Anniversary
- Gisburn Forest Hub
- Festival Bowland 2013
- St. James' Church Archaeology Project
- Communications
- The National Association for AONBs – Future Landscapes Collaboration Project

Resolved: The Committee commented on the various projects and noted the report as circulated.

8b. AONB Unit Business Plan 2013/14

The draft AONB Business Plan for 2013 to 2016 was presented to the Committee as circulated in the full report.

The business plan set out the strategic priorities for 2013 to 2016 and how they will be implemented each section of the plan was presented and discussed in detail with the Committee.

Resolved: The Committee noted and endorsed the draft AONB Business Plan for 2013 to 2016 as presented.

8c. AONB Management Plan Review Update

It was reported to the Committee that following the additional special meeting of the Committee held in January 2013 in Grindleton a Management Plan Review timetable has been put together which was circulated to Committee members. The Management Plan Review timetable set out key stages and a timeline for completion.

Resolved: The Committee noted and endorsed the Management Plan Review timetable as presented.

9. AONB Fundraising Strategy

Cathy Hopley, Forest of Bowland AONB Unit, presented the report. Cathy explained that in April 2012, the AONB JAC approved the AONB Unit to progress the development of a Fundraising Strategy for the Partnership. This strategy sets out a number of ways in which the Partnership can compensate for likely reductions in future funding, including:

1. reducing expenditure from staff, projects or SDF budgets;
2. seeking gifts from individual or corporate donors;
3. developing alternative income streams.
4. applying for grants from non-governmental bodies.

Resolved:

The Committee resolved to:

- i. Note the report and approve the adoption and implementation of AONB Fundraising Strategy by the Partnership.
- ii. Approve for the AONB Unit to implement the transfer of the Sustainable Development Fund to Champion Bowland, subject to approval by the SDF Panel and trustees of Champion Bowland.
- iii. Approve for the AONB Unit to develop a draft proposal for an Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Stage 1 bid (to be tabled again for further discussion at the AONB JAC meeting in October 2013).

10. AONB 50th Anniversary Update

It was reported to the Committee that a bid for some additional funding for the 50th Anniversary had been unsuccessful. However it was also reported that a meeting had been scheduled with interested parties to look at organising a series of events within existing resources, including Festival Bowland, walks, arts programme and lots of other projects with publicity and promotion.

Resolved: The Committee noted the updated on the AONB 50th Anniversary arrangements.

11. Date of Future Meetings

Following a discussion around potential clashes of dates it was agreed that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday 9th October 2013 in the Preston area, with the following Committee meeting to be held on Tuesday 22 April 2014 in the Craven area.

Andy Milroy
Principal Executive Support Officer

Lancashire County Council
County Hall
Preston

Agenda Item 8

FOREST OF BOWLAND AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Revised Estimates 2013/14 and Revenue Budget 2014/15

(Agenda Item 8a refers)

Issue for consideration

- a) Revised Estimates 2013/14
- b) Revenue Budget 2014/15

Background

The budget provision for the Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee is funded by eight constituent local authority partners and grant from Defra and is enhanced by additional contributions from partner organisations, e.g. United Utilities. A core team of 4.4 full time equivalent posts is established from this budget provision, to assist in the delivery of the statutory AONB Management Plan on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee and the local authorities. The AONB Unit is now working to a 3-year business plan (2013- 2016), on which partners are consulted to ensure it reflects local priorities for the AONB.

a. Revised Estimates 2013/14

The costs of the Partnership are managed as part of the Lancashire County Council's Environment Directorate's Devolved Financial Management scheme. Since the Joint Advisory Committee in October 2012 approved the 2013/14 estimates and sought support for the contributions requested from funding partners, the full requested contributions have been met.

Defra advised in December 2012, that the grant offer for 2013/14 was £225,116 a reduction of £14,446 (or 5.38% reduction based on 2010/11 grant funding levels).

The net effect of these changes allows a programme of projects (including Sustainable Development Fund) to be delivered in 2013/14, totalling £103,378. In addition, to date during this year, the AONB unit has been successful in obtaining the following additional funding to support delivery of projects within the area:

Project	£	Organisation
Lancashire Witches Walk	c.25,000	Lancashire Environment Fund
Bleasdale Fells Moorland Restoration	c. 16,000 <i>(part of £130,000 grant to AONB)</i>	Environment Agency
Leap in the Park	£10,200	Heritage Lottery Fund and Lancashire Gardens Trust
Dunsop Bridge Village Footpath Improvements	£10,000	Ribble Valley Strategic Partnership
Gisburn Forest Mountain Bike Trails Leaflet	£600	Forestry Commission

The 2012/13 Revised Estimates take account of any changes (see Agenda Item 8a Column 3) in comparison with the Original Estimates in Column 2, against which the funding partners were asked to provide funding in October 2012.

The core contributions advised by the constituent local authorities for 2013/14 were as follows: -

	£
Craven District Council	6,800
Lancaster City Council	6,800
Pendle Borough Council	6,800
Preston Borough Council	6,800
Ribble Valley Borough Council	6,800
Wyre Borough Council	6,800
Lancashire County Council	40,800
North Yorkshire County Council	6,800

b. Revenue Budget 2013/14

This section sets out in Appendix 'A' column 4, the costs associated with the Committee's projects and management service in 2014/15, including estimated pay and price levels. The estimates are based on a continuation of the level of service agreed by the Committee at the October 2012 meeting.

Provision reflects the core team of 4.4 full-time equivalent posts, operational budgets for core activities and projects:

- AONB Manager [0.2FTE]
- Principal AONB Officer [0.8FTE]
- Development and Funding Officer
- Sustainable Tourism and Website Development Officer
- Projects and Events Officer
- Business Development Officer [0.4FTE]

Total Committee income from contributions has been included in the budget for 2014/15, based on estimated contributions from funding authorities, equivalent to maintaining the requested contribution for 2013/14, with a continuation of the contribution from United Utilities matching the requested district/borough council level of contribution.

Income in respect of grant support from Defra towards core costs, projects costs and sustainable development works has been included on the basis of a further 5.38% reduction in 2014/15. Advice from Defra is that the grant for 2014/15 will continue to be a single grant offer to be used in ways which the Joint Advisory Committee considers will deliver the best performance in achieving the aims of the Management Plan, without restrictions placed on the percentage of grant to each area of supported activity.

Thus, the level of provision for projects is based on the resources estimated to be available to the Committee after providing for the staffing of the AONB Unit at Dunsop Bridge, plus related core activities costs, assuming that all partners make the requested contributions.

The attention of the Committee is drawn to the following: -

1. Gross Expenditure

It is proposed that total expenditure be £366,671 in 2014/15, which is £14,446 lower than in 2013/14. This expenditure results from providing for the effect of increased pay and prices, staff increments, employers national insurance and superannuation contributions, along with general price increases, and reflecting a level of provision for projects after taking account of the estimated level of resources being sought from funding partners.

2. Income

Defra grant towards core costs, projects costs and a programme of sustainable development works of £210,671 reflects a further reduction of 5.38% based on 2010/11 grant funding levels.

A contribution of £6,800 from United Utilities has been included, on the basis that the company will maintain a level of contribution equivalent to that of the district/borough councils.

3. Net Expenditure

The £366,671 net cost of management services is based on maintaining the level of contributions from the funding authorities requested for 2012/13. It is essential that the funding authorities are notified of the approved expenditure and requested to make due provision in their own estimates.

4. Additional Resources

It should be noted that resources from local authorities/individuals/other bodies for projects in AONB will be sought during 2013/14 (e.g. Lottery Funds, EU and Lancashire Environment Fund), which are over and above the Joint Advisory Committee budget provision and this will continue in 2014/15.

Furthermore, the service contributes to the generation of additional schemes and projects in liaison with services operating in the area such as the various local authority Countryside Services.

Decision Required

The Committee is requested to:

- i) note the 2013/14 Revised Estimates.
- ii) approve the 2014/15 Revenue Budget as set out in the report,
- iii) subject to the approval of (ii) above, to request the funding authorities to make appropriate provision in their revenue budgets

AGENDA ITEM 8a - AONB Budget

1	Estimated 2013/14 (Out-turn Prices) 2	Revised 2013/14 (Out-turn Prices) 3	Estimated 2014/15 (Out-turn Prices) 4
	£	£	£
<u>Expenditure</u>			
<u>Core Costs</u>			
Salary, N.I. and Superannuation	168,238	168,238	172,932
Out-based premises	20,000	20,000	20,000
Travel and subsistence	8,900	8,900	8,900
Central, Departmental & Tech. Support	60,800	60,800	60,800
Core Activities	19,800	19,800	17,800
 Sub total of Core Costs	 277,738	 277,738	 280,432
<u>Non Core Costs</u>			
Employees	0	0	0
Travel and subsistence	0	0	0
Projects/Information	103,378	103,378	86,239
 Sub total of Non Core Costs	 103,378	 103,378	 86,239
Total Expenditure	381,116	381,116	366,671
<u>Income</u>			
Defra Grant	225,116	225,116	210,671
<u>Contributions</u>			
United Utilities	6,800	6,800	6,800
Other Project Contributions	0	0	0
<u>County Councils</u>			
Lancashire	40,800	40,800	40,800
North Yorkshire	6,800	6,800	6,800
<u>District Councils</u>			
Craven	6,800	6,800	6,800
Lancaster	6,800	6,800	6,800
Pendle	6,800	6,800	6,800
Preston	6,800	6,800	6,800
Ribble Valley	6,800	6,800	6,800
Wyre	6,800	6,800	6,800
Total Income	320,316	320,316	305,871
Contrib to support costs (LCC in kind)	60,800	60,800	60,800
	381,116	381,116	366,671



FOREST OF BOWLAND

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

An outstanding landscape of natural and cultural heritage

Moorland Restoration

The AONB's involvement in peat restoration and access work on the Bowland Fells SSSI is continuing. Tarja Wilson has been assisting moor owners Len and Mary-Beth Morris with their HLS plans to restore the bare peat on Wolf Fell. Using the same techniques as used previously in the Environment Agency funded work on Bleasdale, the contractors are already on site re-profiling the eroding peat hags, in preparation for the area to be limed and re-seeded in the spring time. Whilst the contractors are on site, they will also be tackling the eroding access route desire line along the ridge of Wolf Fell between Parlick and Totridge, creating a clay path away from the hazardous areas of eroding peat.

During May and June this year over 40 'employee volunteer' days were provided by Environment Agency staff who joined Environmental Project Officers and local volunteers on Bleasdale fells. Over the past 2 years the eroding exposed peat has been re-profiled, stabilised and reseeded. The volunteers helped to revegetate the peat by planting a total of 3000 cottongrass, crowberry, bilberry, heather, cowberry plug plants and relocating sphagnum. The volunteers also set up monitoring transects which are been used for data collection over the next few years to help measure how successful the restoration work has been.

For further information contact tarja.wilson@lancashire.gov.uk or sarah.robinson@lancashire.gov.uk

Bowland Hay Time Project

One of the highlights from May this year was a call from Plantlife asking for assistance in nominating the Coronation Meadow for Lancashire. In conjunction with the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, who were coordinating the nominations, Bell Sykes Meadows, Slaidburn were accepted. The Coronation Meadows project, initiated by HRH Prince Charles, has listed 60 meadow sites to become donors for further restoration work. The sites need to be species rich, open to the public and the owners need to be willing to take part in restoration schemes. Bell Sykes fits the bill perfectly, with 4 SSSI meadows and 1 BHS meadow covering a total of 12 hectares, a network of footpaths across the farms, a downloadable meadow walk which we have developed as part of the Hay Time Project, as well as 6 hectares of meadows where we spread green hay last August – this is now stuffed with yellow rattle and eyebright. Peter Blackwell from Bell Sykes Farm went to Highgrove for the launch of the Coronation Meadows, his impressions of the day were that the meadows at Highgrove were 'not a patch' on his, and that the weather was far too hot, compared to Slaidburn.

This summer we had a target of restoring 20 hectares of meadows, as well as a further 3 to make up for being a bit short last summer. So far this summer we have worked on a total of 25.3 hectares on 8 sites, ranging in size from 7.6 ha down to 1.3 ha. These schemes have been green hay schemes, and in the main have been funded by HLS agreements. However, a welcome development this year has been the interest in the project from people outside of the scheme willing to pay for restoration themselves – for example at the Inn at Whitewell, where the owner was keen to restore a meadow specifically to help feed his new bees.

We have a further 10 ha of restoration and enhancement work to complete in September and October, smaller sites where vacuum harvested seed will be broadcast by hand onto pre-prepared sites and where plug plants will be planted, with the help of volunteers. If all that goes to plan, we will have worked on a total of 35.3 ha this summer, well in excess of our target of 23 ha.

As well as the restoration work on site, keeping the donors and recipients informed and up to date with progress, we've been busy collecting seed using the vacuum hoover, and now have well in excess of 15kg seed ready for the first of our enhancement schemes which happened on 12th September. This is a really exciting scheme, where together with the year 4 class from Higham Primary School, the owners at Height Top Farm and project officer Sarah Robinson broadcast seed in a 0.48 ha meadow. More schemes will follow, the last being the plug planting days which are due for the middle of October. These plug plants have been growing in pots outside the office at Dunsop Bridge, having been planted in pots with the help of the Bowland Outreach pilot project from seed collected by volunteers last summer.

The seed propagation leaflet has now been completed, we are very pleased with the result, and it will be used with the seed collecting work here in Bowland.

The project has had some really good press coverage this summer, a two page spread in Lancashire Life, two features in the Craven Herald and a page article in Rural Life to name a few. The Coronation Meadows project has really helped to raise the profile of meadows and the need for restoration.

Over the coming months we will be collating all the information we have within the project sites into a GIS layer, as well as putting together funding bids to enable the work to continue into next summer and beyond, there is still a lot to do!

For further information contact sarah.robinson@lancashire.gov.uk

Undergrounding for Visual Amenity Programme

As part of the £5.4M OFGEM Undergrounding for Visual Amenity (UVA) programme running from 2010-2015, Electricity North West has been working with the Forest of Bowland AONB to identify visually intrusive sections of overhead lines for undergrounding.

Further to the schemes in Littledale and Roeburndale reported at the last JAC meeting, the fourth and final scheme from Winder to Deep Clough commenced in September 2013 and is scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

In addition two further schemes are still in pre-construction stages:

1. Beacon Fell Country Park – wayleaves and permissions have been granted and awaiting pre-construction release from ENWL. Construction is scheduled for completion in early 2014.
2. Laund Wood to Middle Lees, near Whitewell – still with ENWL Wayleaves.

For further information contact elliott.lorimer@lancashire.gov.uk

Resilient and sustainable rural communities

Champion Bowland

As well as a new name, Champion Bowland, now also has a new logo and website, have a look at www.championbowland.org.uk

Recent supported projects include a grant to help to set up a new Flower Festival in St. Peters' Church, Scorton as part of the village's "Bikes and Barrows" weekend May 4/6th 2013. This event featured local wildflowers and information about the Forest of Bowland AONB. The Festival was a great success, attracting many visitors and it is hoped will be repeated in future years.

Champion Bowland contributed match funding to a Forest of Bowland Sustainable Development Fund grant to produce promotional and marketing materials for The Bowland Electric Bicycle Network. The network offers visitors a brand new way of discovering the beauty of the Forest of Bowland countryside. Hire electric bikes from the hire-stations with the option to recharge the battery at one of the charge points.

For further information contact mike.pugh@lancashire.gov.uk

Sustainable Tourism Annual Forum

This Sustainable Tourism Forum was held at the Stirk House Hotel, Gisburn on 17th September and was attended by 40 tourism partners, including businesses, officers and councillors. The forum included a packed agenda covering discussions around training, the AONB anniversary, the management plan review, European Charter status and business monitoring. The event highlighted numerous opportunities in which partners & businesses could be involved in future AONB projects, and this was welcomed by the group. Paul Caddy, owner of the Stirk House kindly welcomed everyone to their business and delegates were treated to some fantastic food, tour and an insight into the hotel's green practices.

For further information contact hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk

Gold Star Green Businesses

The 2013 Green Tourism GoldStar Awards had 2,400 contenders nationally, which were whittled down to a shortlist of 63 businesses nominated for 15 awards.

The awards event will be held on 8th November in Bristol, as part of Green Tourism week where the winners will be announced. We are delighted that 4 of the 63 shortlisted businesses are operating in the Forest of Bowland AONB; very well done to them and we wish them well for the awards event. They include Malkin Tower, Blacko (self catering), Caldertop Cottage, Calder Vale (self catering), Waddow Lodge Gardens, Waddington (visitor attraction) and our AONB office at Dunsop Bridge (corporate office).

Also new for 2013 is a Green Destination Award, for the destination which can demonstrate the most progress in raising awareness and delivering change in green tourism. As this is the first year for this award GTBS decided to invite a select number of destinations to be on the shortlist that have been working with Green Tourism over the past 5 years, and we were delighted that the Forest of Bowland AONB is one of those selected destinations. We also find out the winner of this at the conference in Bristol on 8th November.

For further information contact hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk

Sustainable Development Fund

This year the SDF grant scheme has £26,000 available for projects, and to date the panel has awarded £17,716 to six projects. These are:

- the development of the Bowland Electric Bicycle Network
- a young people's art project called 'Farming Then and Now'
- renewable energy at Bleasdale parish hall, and energy efficiency work at Dunsop Bridge village hall
- a community outreach project
- a community energy efficiency programme

This means that there is around £7500 remaining to be committed, and the next closing date for applications is the end of October.

This year the grants are being distributed to projects via Champion Bowland. We have set up this arrangement so that the panel can offer grants for 12 month projects no matter what the start date, and also any unallocated grant can be rolled forward into the next financial year. This will allow us to get around the awkward situation we can face at the end of March when we have to quickly find worthy projects which can spend their grant immediately. A Memorandum of Understanding has been drawn up between the AONB Unit and the Trustees of Champion Bowland: the AONB Unit will continue to manage the fund, and the panel makes decisions on awards; Champion Bowland acts as the banker and is paid a 3% fee (ie £780) to administer the finances.

The grants panel has also been pleased to welcome Chris Dobson (head chef and green team leader at Stirk House Hotel in Gisburn) to join the panel as a local business representative. He joins Colin Price (chair), Kay Hopkinson (community rep), Pete Wilson (biodiversity rep), and John Miller (heritage rep) on the panel.

For further information contact cathy.hopley@lancashire.gov.uk

Bowland Community Outreach Pilot

The AONB has been working with the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT) and colleagues within Lancashire County Council to facilitate the running of a pilot community outreach project, similar to the People and the Dales initiative organised by YDMT.

The project aims to work with people who perhaps do not regularly visit the AONB, for example, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME communities), refugees and asylum seekers, urban disadvantaged residents, young people and people with disabilities. Principally, the aim of the project is to help support the health and wellbeing of people on the periphery of the AONB who are facing disadvantage, by inviting them into the Forest of Bowland to discover and enjoy the landscape and find out more about the protected area, the people who live and work here and the work of the AONB Unit and our partners.

Following a successful application to the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund, the pilot project itself will involve four groups and will run during September and October. In advance of this, as part of YDMT's People and the Dales dissemination work, we hosted two groups from Blackburn, principally homeless people and refugees/asylum seekers. In July, a group of people from the YMCA visited Gisburn Forest where we helped Sarah Robinson with some Hay Time seed sowing and then went on to find out about Stocks Reservoir and the community archaeology project from Dave Oyston at United Utilities, followed by a visit to the bird hides and a walk through the forest.

Two days later the ARC group came to New Laund Farm above Whitewell where we had a tour of the farm and a sheep shearing demonstration courtesy of farmer, John Alpe, and his son followed by a felt making session with Tracy Ankers from Slaidburn.

For further information contact sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

St. James Church Community Archaeology Project

A booklet recording the community archaeology project carried out at the site of the original St. James' Church in Gisburn Forest has now been produced. The publication follows the work of the volunteers and the professional archaeology team in their quest to uncover the foundations of the church which was demolished following the construction of Stocks Reservoir.

Copies of booklet: "Stocks. The Rediscovery of a Lost Hamlet," are available from Slaidburn Village Archive, with proceeds from sales being shared between the Archive and Champion Bowland.

For further information contact sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

Bowland Land Managers Forum

Since April 2013, the Forum has met twice (in June and September) to discuss a range of farming and land management issues.

In June, Rural Futures/Rural Solutions reported back to the Forum on their work to provide an analysis of the economic profile of the AONB. It is anticipated that this evidence base will help in the review of the AONB Management Plan and inform the development of future rural development funding programmes affecting the AONB.

In September, the Forum hosted Phil Warren from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust to report on the findings from a feasibility study on restoring Black grouse to the Bowland Fells. This was an interesting and thought-provoking presentation. The conclusions were that the habitat is all in place in numerous sites in Bowland, but the nearest lek sites are still too distant to support a sustainable population. United Utilities and the Forum plan to work with Yorkshire partners, including the Yorkshire Dale National Park to support efforts to expand the range of the Black grouse population southwards closer to Bowland.

The next meeting of the Forum is planned for November 2013, where members have been invited to Bleasdale Estate to view the recent moorland restoration work managed by Lancashire County Council and the AONB Unit and supported by the Environment Agency and Natural England.

For further information contact elliott.lorimer@lancashire.gov.uk

A strong connection between people and the landscape

A Leap in the Park

This Heritage Lottery Funded project is beginning to draw to a close by producing a number of interpretation materials for the medieval deer parks at Leagram and Radholme. These will include our first digital mobile 'app' with audio trails; a suite of downloadable walks; webpages; education resources; and interpretation panels. The project has worked with around 25 volunteers undertaking a number of activities (training in archaeological survey techniques; visits to the Harris Museum and art gallery and Lancashire Archives; and classroom sessions with Brabin's school) and a number of walks and talks. For details see the blog <http://www.leapinthepark.blogspot.co.uk/> and www.forestofbowland.com/deerparks

For further information contact cathy.hopley@lancashire.gov.uk

Lancashire Witches Walk Launch

In May the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy launched this new long distance walk starting in Barrowford, Pendle District through Ribble Valley and Lancaster District to Lancaster City. The route explores the heritage of the Lancashire Witches and commemorates the 400th anniversary of their trials in 1612. The route takes in locations considered to be linked to the Lancashire Witches and the trials and based on the existing public rights of way/concessionary path network. The project has been led by Green Close Studios working with local volunteers, representatives from Clitheroe and Lancaster Ramblers, a local historian, artists and County Council Environmental Project Officers. Over the winter months work on this project focused on access improvements and associated way marking including the installation of 10 milestone tercets each inscribed by sculptor, Stephen Raw, with one stanza of Carol Ann Duffy's poem, 'Lancashire Witches'. From April to July 2013 a series of 7 guided walks along the route was organised and promoted through Festival Bowland.

For further information contact tarja.wilson@lancashire.gov.uk

National Disabled Ramblers

During June we hosted a visit from the National Disabled ramblers, photo's of which can be found here <http://disabledramblers.co.uk/photos-this-years/> the first day was spent exploring Pendle and the area around Barley and the second was spent in Burnley taking in Towneley Park and the Burnley Forest Park. Participants were a mixture of members of the National Disabled Ramblers group and local residents with mobility problems. The idea is to showcase Bowland and Lancashire as a visitor destination for people with disabilities whilst at the same time improving and publicising routes in our local area for the benefit of our local residents. We have been carrying out these rambles since 2006 and as a result have built up the area's reputation as being one of the best places in the UK for disabled ramblers. It has also had the benefit of exposing Lancashire residents to the work of the National Disabled Ramblers Group and the support network they can offer.

For further information contact tarja.wilson@lancashire.gov.uk

50th Anniversary Calendar

We are delighted to launch a quality, A4 (folds out to A3) 2014 calendar to celebrate 50 years of the Forest of Bowland AONB. All proceeds from the calendar are being donated to Champion Bowland.

A special thank you to all the local photographers who contributed to the calendar, they have all kindly donated their fantastic photographs free of charge.

The calendar was launched at the Sustainable Tourism Forum on 17th September. Orders from businesses and Tourist Information Centres are now being taken and we will highlight outlets where the calendars can be bought by mid October.

For further information contact hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk

Festival Bowland 2013

During the spring and summer months Festival goers have been transported back several hundred million years with geologist Paul Kabrna, walked along the line of the medieval deer park "pale" at Leagram with Graham Cooper and Nigel Neil and imagined the seventeenth century Italian-inspired walled garden at Browsholme Hall with Lancashire Gardens Trust's Ruth Thurnhill - historic Bowland brought to life!

Poetry on the move, hen harrier safaris and the Lancashire Witches Walks, along with bumble bee forays, bluebell tea strolls and map and compass training, has meant that there has been something for everyone.

On a creative theme the programme offered open studios, art workshops and an exhibition of paintings inspired by Bowland and the surrounding area.

Ecologists, Geoff Morries and Jon Hickling, lent a distinctly flowery theme to June and July, hosting several opportunities to brush up on plant ID, or simply wander through some of the AONB's marvellous hay meadows finding out about Bowland's Hay Time project.

A children's Gruffalo walk at Beacon Fell proved extremely popular with younger visitors as did a bug hunt at Whalley Abbey.

Thanks to the generosity of garden owners, Peter Foley and Liz Dean, Champion Bowland benefited from a wonderful donation of £413 following an open afternoon at the Waddington Road garden as part of the Festival programme. Over 100 visitors enjoyed strolling around the beautiful site, which has delightful views towards Pendle Hill and the Forest of Bowland.

As this year's programme comes to a close, look out for our final Festival events which include wildflower planting, an autumn photo walk and a second chance to learn the basics of map and compass work, all taking place in October.

For details of all the events within the Festival Bowland programme take a look at the calendar or download a booklet at www.forestofbowland.com

For more details contact sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

Walks Monitoring

In the spring we recruited 20 volunteers to help with the monitoring of the AONB's promoted web routes. The volunteers - including Lancashire County Council's volunteer rangers and Friends of Bowland volunteers - attended one of two workshops held to provide information about the monitoring procedure and guidance on safety. We'd like to thank the volunteers for giving up their time to ensure that the routes that we promote are kept in a good condition and can be enjoyed by all.

For further information contact hetty.byrne@lancashire.gov.uk

A dynamic and effective AONB partnership

National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) update

The 'Future Landscapes' Collaboration Project being delivered by the NAAONB is reaching the conclusion of its first phase. It has addressed improving leadership skills of AONB Lead Officers/Managers and initiated collaborative working between AONBs to address key issues for Partnerships in the challenging years to come, such as future funding and finance arrangements, communications and raising AONBs public profile.

In addition, members of the AONB Unit variously:

- Attended the NAAONB Annual 'Landscapes for Life' Conference hosted by South East AONBs in Ipswich from 16th – 18th July 2013.
- Contributed information to assist in the report on 'The Value of AONB Partnerships' to assist in NAAONB discussions with Defra on future funding levels for AONBs post-March 2015.
- Contributed to NAAONB responses to consultation on national policy and strategies affecting AONBs.

For further information contact elliott.lorimer@lancashire.gov.uk

Annual Report

The latest Annual Report for the Forest of Bowland AONB is now available to download from our website. The report covers the financial year from April 2012 to March 2013 and highlights the work of the Unit and our partners. The articles reflect the wide variety of projects which are carried out for the purpose of protecting, enhancing and celebrating the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and are brought to life with some wonderful images.

Many thanks to all those who contributed.

For further information contact sandra.silk@lancashire.gov.uk

University of Chester Work Placement Student

Jen Duckworth first volunteered for the Forest of Bowland AONB team as part of her second year University work placement, joining us for 5 weeks in May 2012. Jen decided to then take a year-long industry placement as part of her degree to join us from September 2012 to August 2013. Her enthusiasm and positive approach to the role have meant that her contribution to the team was invaluable. Jen took a lead in developing the Social Media communications for the team, using Twitter to promote events and setting up a Facebook page to enable us to interact more effectively with communities, businesses and visitors, while promoting the AONB as a sustainable tourism destination. Jen's positive attitude, willingness to learn and friendly and outgoing approach, have made it a pleasure to have her as part of the team, she left us in August and we wish her all the very best with her studies and future career.

Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee Meeting Wednesday 9th October 2013

AONB Management Plan Review Update

Issue for consideration

In January 2013, the Joint Advisory Committee agreed to carry out a review of the statutory AONB Management Plan. The report and appendices summarise progress made towards delivery of the business plan, alongside plans for the coming year:

Background

Key stages completed to date:

- Confirmation of agreement from local authorities to progress with the review under the auspices of the Joint Advisory Committee
- Four community consultation workshops held (with the assistance S Robinson Consulting) in June 2013 Downham, Dunsop Bridge, Hornby and Tosside, with almost 40 attendees across the four workshops. A summary report of the consultation is available.
- Four thematic or topic consultation workshops (meeting notes are available) held in July 2013 involving members of relevant organisations and interest groups to on:
 - Landscape and Biodiversity
 - Access, Recreation, Information and Events
 - Planning and Development
 - Farming and Land Management (through meetings of the Bowland Land Managers Forum)
- Working draft Plan tabled at Management Plan Review Group for discussion at meeting on 5th September 2013
- Scoping report for the Strategic Environmental Assessment sent on 11th September to statutory agencies (English Heritage, Environment Agency and Natural England) for comment.

a) AONB Management Plan – Outcomes, Visions and Objectives (Agenda Item 10a refers)

This report is a summary of the AONB Management Plan Outcomes, Visions and Objectives. This provides the framework for the AONB delivery or action plan and is currently nearing completion.

A full draft Plan, containing background, context and actions for the Plan, will be made available to the Committee in late October 2013, when formal consultation commences.

b) Revised AONB Management Plan Review Timetable (Agenda Item 10b refers)

This timetable sets out both completed and remaining stages/milestones of the review process and estimated dates of completion for each stage.

Decision to be taken

The Committee is asked to:

- i.** note the report and offer comments on AONB Management Plan review.
- ii.** provide formal comments on the full draft plan when made publicly available in late October 2013.

Agenda Item 10a

AONB Outcome 1

An Outstanding Landscape of Natural and Cultural Heritage

Vision

An unspoilt and unique landscape of the highest quality; richness and diversity of cultural and natural features; a landscape where tranquillity can be found.

Objectives

Landscape

- 1.1 Recognise the founding principles of the European Landscape Convention and implement the AONB Landscape Character Assessment as an integrated approach to managing landscape change.

Biodiversity

- 1.2 Conserve and enhance biodiversity within the AONB, supporting the delivery of 'Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services'.

Geodiversity

- 1.3 Conserve geodiversity and increase awareness and understanding of the importance of geology in shaping the landscape of the AONB.

Historic environment

- 1.4 Support the conservation, appropriate restoration and management of the historic environment and wider cultural landscape.

Planning and development

- 1.5 Influence development planning policy- and decision-making to ensure the statutory purpose of AONB designation, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, is upheld.

AONB Outcome 2

Resilient and Sustainable Communities

Vision

Sustainable communities and businesses that are strongly linked to their localities and actively involved in AONB projects and management.

Objectives

Farming and Land Management

2.1 Promote and implement sustainable land management practices that conserve and enhance natural beauty and support the rural economy of the AONB.

Local economy and rural services

2.2 Promote and support the socio-economic development of the area, particularly where such activity helps to conserve and enhance the AONB's natural beauty.

Community engagement

2.3 Work closely with local communities and businesses to help them to be actively involved in AONB projects and management.

Sustainable tourism

2.4 Develop, co-ordinate and effectively promote sustainable tourism activity within the AONB

AONB Outcome 3

A Strong Connection between People and the Landscape

Vision

Wide-ranging opportunities provided within the AONB; to enable a diverse range of people to enjoy and keep special this outstanding landscape.

Objectives

Countryside Access

3.1 Develop and promote 'access for all' routes (e.g. bridleways, tramper trails), seeking to meet the needs of all users wherever possible.

Public Rights of Way and Access Land

3.2 Support the establishment and maintenance of well-managed Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and Access Land, which meets the needs of users, conforms to national standards and is consistent with the conservation and enhancement of the AONB's natural beauty.

Visitor management

3.3 Co-ordinate and support the sustainable management of popular visitor (or 'honeypot') sites.

Information and publicity

3.4 Provide high quality and inclusive information (including website, print, on-site interpretation, social and digital media) to raise awareness of the AONB designation and the special qualities of the AONB landscape.

Audience development

3.5 Help a diverse range of people connect with the AONB landscape through a co-ordinated programme of events and activities.

Branding and identity

3.6 Maintain a distinctive and appropriate brand identity for the AONB and ensure consistency in how the special qualities of the AONB are portrayed, helping to promote the area as a sustainable tourism destination.

AONB Outcome 4

Working in Partnership

Vision

A well-organised and inclusive Partnership, with partners taking active responsibility for the delivery and ongoing maintenance of high quality services.

Objectives

Delivery of the Management Plan

4.1 Maximise the involvement and commitment of all partners in delivering the objectives of the AONB Management Plan.

Funding

4.2 Secure and maintain long-term funding to support the work of the AONB Partnership.

Monitoring

4.3 Effectively monitor and report on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan.

AONB Partnership Communications

4.4 Establish and maintain effective communication channels with all partners to publicise successes and achievements of the AONB Partnership.

AGENDA ITEM 10b

Forest of Bowland AONB Management Plan - Revised Review Timetable (09/10/2013)

Review Stage	Timetable	Comment
Agree outline Review methodology	Complete	AONB Funders Group
Launch of Management Plan Review	Complete	Extraordinary AONB JAC meeting
Agree extent of the Review	Complete	Preliminary consultation with AONB JAC at meeting
Write to the local authorities to agree terms of reference for the preparation of the Review	Complete	AONB Unit
Issue statutory notice regarding the Review	Complete	MP Review Working Group
Outline Plan structure agreed	Complete	MP Review Working Group
Public consultation events	Complete	AONB Unit and S Robinson Consulting
Draft Plan produced	Complete	MP Review Working Group
Technical consultation events	Complete	AONB Unit Partnership
Full Draft Plan produced	End October 2013	AONB Unit & MP Review Working Group
Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)	October 2013	AONB Unit and LCC
Initial SEA Review of the Plan	October 2013	AONB Unit
Public on-line consultation on Full Draft Plan and SEA/AA/SA	Commences late October 2013	AONB Unit
Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	November 2013	AONB Unit and LCC
Natura 2000 sites Appropriate Assessment (AA)	November 2013	AONB Unit and LCC
Revision of the Full Draft Plan	November – December 2013	AONB Unit
Final Management Plan produced	January 2014	Final version of the Plan MP Review Working Group
Environmental Report consultation	January 2014	AONB Unit
Final Management Plan to Local Authorities for adoption	January - March 2014	Plan adopted by LAs after confirmation by Defra/NE that plan satisfies statutory requirements
Presentation to Minister/Defra of approved plan	March 2014	Plan forwarded to Defra

The Value of AONB Partnerships

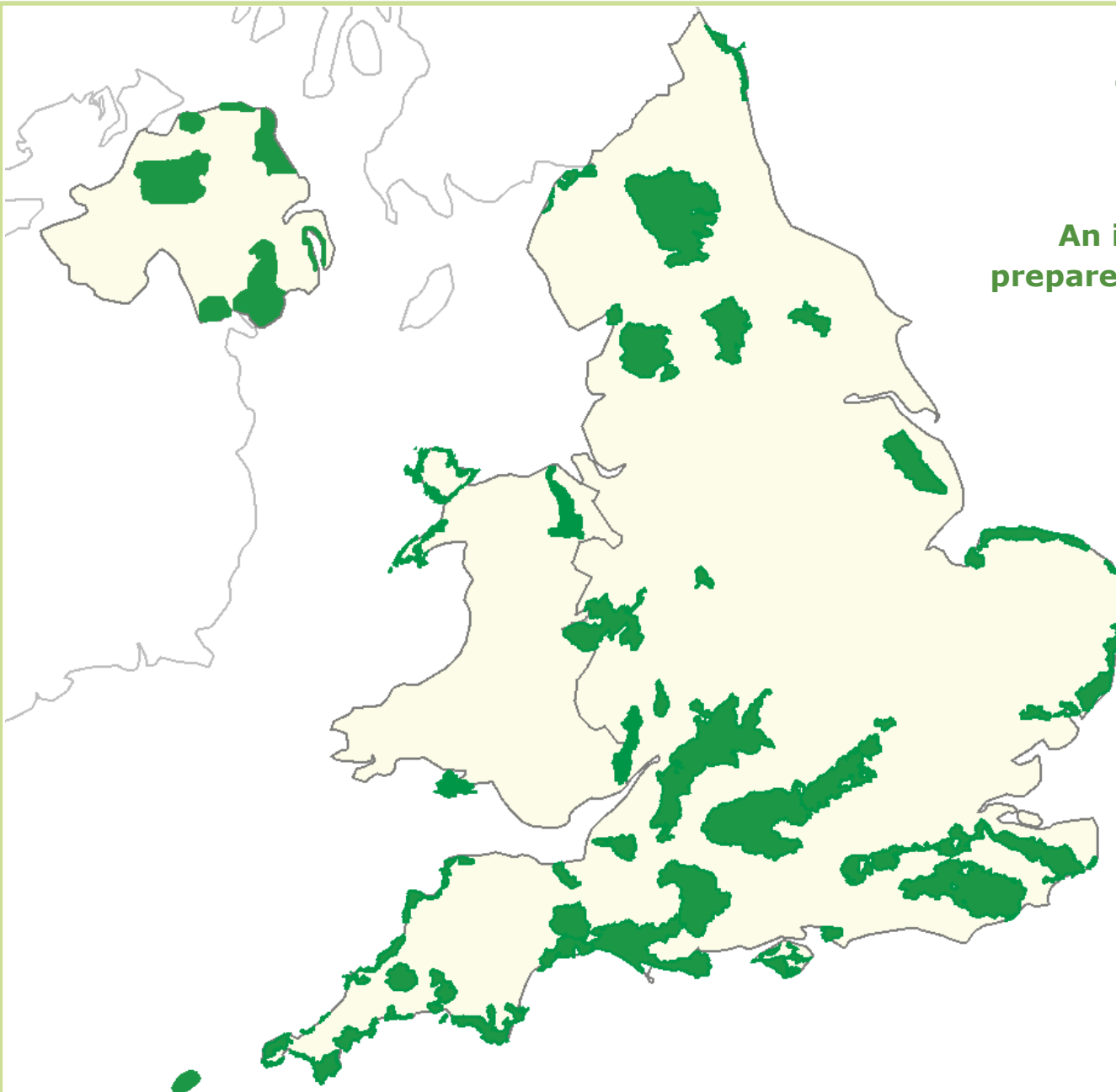
An independent assessment prepared for AONB Partnerships

Final report

July 2013



www.landuse.co.uk



The map shows the extent of AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are none in Scotland.

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Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnerships, under the auspices of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB), to contribute impartial evidence to the dialogue that is taking place with national and local Governments over the funding and operation of AONB Partnerships.

The report was prepared during a period when the role and work of protected landscapes is coming under scrutiny in the run-up to the UK Government's announcement of its Spending Round 2013 and during the current programme of expenditure reductions across government departments and local authorities.

The work was conducted by LUC during May and June 2013. It has involved analysis of financial data provided by Defra and NRW, a review of recent reports and selected AONB Business Plans, and assessment of responses to a questionnaire sent to AONB lead officers in England and Wales.

The paper is split into four sections, as follows:

- Section 1 briefly introduces AONB Partnerships and their structure
- Section 2 examines how AONB Partnerships are responding to national and local policy priorities and describes their work at both a strategic and delivery level
- Section 3 assesses the way in which AONB Partnerships use the resources they are given and considers the impact of funding cuts on their operation
- Section 4 draws out key conclusions and offers suggestions for future consideration.

1. AONB Partnerships today

Location

The UK's 46 AONBs are spread across the landscapes of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, from the remote uplands of the North Pennines to the urban fringes of Cannock Chase and coastal areas such as the Gower and Antrim Coast and Glens.

In England, the 34 AONBs cover 15% of the country and, although the designated landscapes themselves tend to be relatively sparsely populated (with about 2% of the population), over two thirds of England's population live within a half an hour's drive of an AONB¹. Likewise the five AONBs in Wales cover 5% of the country and are home to about 2.5% of the population, with 57% of the population of Wales living within half an hour's drive of the AONBs.

Governance

The designation is of an equal status to that of National Parks² (NP) although the governance arrangements are very different. With the exception of the two Conservation Boards (for the Chilterns and Cotswolds AONBs) which were established under the powers introduced in Section 86 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, it is for the constituent Local Authorities to agree how they collectively, and with other partners, should deliver the statutory purpose of the AONB designation (See **Box 1**).

Although there is considerable variation in the detailed composition of AONB Partnerships, the most common governance

model is one of Local Authority appointed members providing a majority, supplemented by staff from the national countryside agencies (such as Natural England and Natural Resources Wales) and local representatives of environmental, cultural, amenity, land management and other business organisations. This structure has been shown to offer the dual benefits of local accountability through elected members and access to specialist expertise from officers and local interest groups.

Box 1. The purpose and core functions of AONBs. The statutory purpose of the AONB designation is to "*conserve and enhance the Natural Beauty of the AONB*", with complementary aims that recognise the importance of public recreation and the economic and social needs of local communities. AONB Partnerships have a set of core functions to deliver this purpose. These core functions are focussed on the preparation and implementation of the statutory Management Plan for the AONB, providing advice to partners on their work in the AONB (such as planning) and providing a mechanism for joint working by partners including local communities.

Staffing

The AONB Units that provide the staff resource to deliver the AONB purpose are generally small at around five full-time equivalent posts (but are as few as one in a few Units), of which two are frequently employed to run fixed-term projects.

The funding arrangements that sustain AONB Partnerships are described later in this paper.

¹ The population in 2001 living within 15 miles of English AONBs was 34.3 Million people which is 70% of all people in England. Equivalent figures for Wales are 1.6 M people within 15 miles, out of a total population of 2.9 M

² The complementary role of the two designations was clarified in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Both designations are Category V landscapes under the IUCN classification of protected landscapes.

2. AONB Partnerships' contribution to key policy outcomes

The purpose of the AONB designation (**Box 1**) anchors AONB Partnerships in the preparation and implementation, with partners, of the statutory Management Plan to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of each AONB. Most Management Plans are now due for their 5-yearly revision and this will be a focus for activity by AONB Units over the coming 12 months.

Through their Management Plans, AONB Partnerships and their staff are actively involved in a range of delivery projects, often taking responsibility for leading projects where there are gaps in the capacity of partners to do so. This is seen as a key strength of the AONB Partnership approach and is increasingly relevant to the way most Local Authorities are operating more as commissioning bodies, placing the delivery of work with organisations which can be most effective in taking it forward. Examples of key policy areas in which AONB Partnerships are active are described below.

Landscape-scale environmental conservation and restoration

The provision of landscape-related advice to planning authorities has been a core function of AONB Partnerships for many years. The National Planning Policy Framework in England and Planning Policy Wales confirmed the status of AONBs and NPs (which have the same level of protection) and this work continues, with all AONB Partnerships engaging positively with the development of Local Plans and policies, lending their expertise on issues such as landscape sensitivity where required.

Many Partnerships have also run or supported projects giving landscape-related advice to farmers and landowners and this work

continues, often attached to externally funded projects or working in partnership with third sector bodies such as The Wildlife Trusts.

The landscape approach to ecological restoration, signalled in England's Natural Environment White Paper 2011 and given practical application with the launch of Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) in England later that year, has been adopted by many AONB Partnerships. Many Partnerships were early advocates for the approach prior to the White Paper. Several, such as the Kent Downs, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley, Shropshire Hills and Dedham Vale AONBs, have used the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) Landscape Partnership programme to effect significant investment in land management (**Box 2**). Others, such as the Llŷn AONB Partnership, have used EU structural funds.

Box 2. Valley of Visions Project. This initiative, which is administered by the Kent Downs AONB Partnership, is a landscape-scale project working with communities, landowners and local organisations in the Medway Gap. In 2007, the Valley of Visions Landscape Partnership Scheme received £2.5 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This has enabled chalk grassland restoration, an extensive events programme, new community trails, the conservation of important heritage sites and engagement with schools. The AONB Partnership was the only body with the structure and expertise to be able to take on this ambitious project.

A number of AONB Partnerships, such as the Mendip Hills, are supporting Living Landscape Projects run by their local Wildlife Trust. Several AONB Partnerships in England were involved in bids to run NIAs and two were successful. The Dorset AONB Unit manages the Wild Purbeck NIA and the Arnside and Silverdale AONB Partnership is leading several projects in the Morecambe Bay Limestones & Wetlands NIA.

AONB Partnerships are ideally placed to take on this area of work because of the well-developed working relationships they have

with landowners and farmers and with third sector environmental bodies. In addition, their Local Authority base provides an efficient way of taking on new externally-funded project staff, supplementing existing skills within the AONB Unit.

In England, the Natural Environment White Paper heralded another important development in the form of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs). Almost all of the LNPs that have received recognition from Defra have adopted administrative, rather than natural landscape-related, boundaries and many AONBs have found themselves providing input to several LNPs. A notable exception is the Northern Upland Chain LNP which encompasses the North Pennines and Nidderdale AONBs and the Northumberland and Yorkshire Dales NPs.

Membership of LNPs covers the same range of interests present on AONB Partnerships, but often with additional representation in areas such as green infrastructure planning. At the moment, LNPs have a primarily strategic focus with neither the desire nor resources to get involved in delivery on the ground, other than by supporting partners' work. The strategic priorities provided by AONB Management Plans and the staff resource present in AONB Units provide LNPs with these resources. Many LNPs are currently going through the process of appointing executive Boards and there are valuable lessons to be learned from the structure and governance of AONB Partnerships. As LNPs 'bed down', it will be important that the potential synergies between the two types of Partnership are developed, avoiding duplication and deadweight.

In Wales, AONB Partnerships have an important role to play in testing and achieving a more sustainable way of living, in particular through their functions in relation to delivering ecosystem services across the three threads (social, economic, and environmental) of sustainable development. In practice, this role is being developed primarily within the policy framework of

their respective Local Authorities, often with less evidence than in England of a distinctive AONB Partnership agenda.

Economic recovery and growth

For over 20 years AONB Partnerships have had a role in fostering the economic and social needs of local communities and businesses³. The practical manifestation of this role has become increasingly evident in the work of the Partnerships. This is probably due to the increasing acceptance in society of the principle of sustainable development (a core tenet of the AONB designation) and also to the growing track record shown by AONB Partnerships in supporting rural enterprise. As described below, Partnerships are now keen to play their full part in the drive for economic recovery in their rural economies.

Most Partnerships have made use of successive Rural Development Programmes (RDP) to implement the relevant parts of their Management Plans. Many (such as the Blackdown Hills, Chilterns, Dorset, High Weald, Surrey Hills and South Devon AONB Partnerships in England) were influential in shaping their local Leader Programme⁴ in the current RDP and are represented on their Local Action Groups. This has enabled AONB Partnerships to actively support key sectors of the rural economy such as tourism.

Many AONB Units have managed RDP-funded projects which encourage high quality tourism and recreation. The Our Land project is a particularly successful case in point (see **Box 3**) which is growing beyond its initial focus on the South East of England to cover projected landscapes in other parts of the UK. Other European funding programmes have been accessed by AONB Partnerships to support their tourism sectors. For instance the

³ This was specified in England in the Countryside Commission's 1991 Policy Statement on AONBs (CCP 356). Equivalent guidance exists in Wales.

⁴ Leader is the fourth of the four Axes of the Rural Development Programme 2007 to 2013.

Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Unit is co-ordinating the UK element of an EU transnational (Interreg) project that will help the tourism sector grow in ways that strengthen the environmental quality that is a key draw for visitors.

Box 3. Our Land. This project was launched by the AONB Partnerships and now also involves two National Park Authorities in the South East of England. It is a public/private partnership with responsibletravel.com. It promotes the development of sustainable tourism businesses in the protected landscapes and helps them to celebrate and draw economic benefit from operating in special landscapes. Through an online directory visitors are encouraged to stay and experience the protected landscapes. During 2012/13 the project recruited over 800 tourism businesses and generated over 11,000 overnight stays in the nine protected landscapes. This success has attracted other protected landscapes in the UK, including the Shropshire Hills and Ring of Gullion AONBs, to join the initiative.

Viable woodland economies are important to many AONBs, especially those with high woodland cover, such as the Quantock Hills, East Devon, High Weald, Surrey Hills and the Kent Downs. The Kent Downs AONB Partnership has used EU and Forestry Commission funding to support the woodfuel industry and the uptake of biomass heating. Through the NAAONB, eight AONB Partnerships are involved in a Defra and EU funded pilot supporting woodland social enterprises that seek to integrate woodland management, job creation and addressing fuel poverty.

Investment in broadband speed to assist rural businesses has been identified as a priority by many Partnerships, such as the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Partnership, who have led or strongly supported local initiatives to improve IT infrastructure.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) operated by AONBs (**Box 4**) has provided AONB Partnerships with significant resources

to engage proactively in support of key business sectors. An evaluation of the first three years of the fund in England⁵ showed that a third of supported projects delivered economic objectives (almost all of them also delivering environmental and/or social benefits) in sectors such as tourism, food and rural crafts.

Box 4. Sustainable Development Funds. The use of a dedicated grant fund to further the purposes of AONBs was started in Wales in 2001 and extended to England in 2005. Each AONB Partnership was given flexibility over how to administer and target its Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), within the overall objective of supporting *“the achievement of AONB purposes by encouraging individuals, community groups and businesses to co-operate together to develop practical and sustainable solutions”*. In England during the period to March 2009, a total of £10.7 M was allocated to local community groups, environmental bodies and businesses, with the annual amount declining from £3.5 M in the first year to £2.1 M in the fourth. During this period, it is estimated that the scheme drew in around £32 Million in matched funding. Although many Partnerships retain SDF schemes, the value of these schemes is expected to fall to just over £1 M in 2013/14.

The evaluation of English SDF schemes found that grants to businesses were usually relatively small (around £5,500) and contributed around 40% of project costs. The SDF was successful in forging stronger connections between many local businesses and the AONB designation. The reduction in funding of the SDF now risks reducing the scope for AONB Partnerships to positively influence the small business sector in their areas.

Some AONB Partnerships have invested time in becoming well networked with local businesses. For instance, the North Pennines AONB is a member of the North East Chamber of Commerce and

⁵ LUC (2009). Three year evaluation of the Sustainable Development Fund for AONBs in England. Report to Natural England.

employs a Corporate Relationships Officer to build links between business sectors and the Partnership. The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership helped set up and has supported a local business association, which now has over 200 member and supporter businesses. The Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership has developed a Sustainable Tourism Network of 120 members which has led to the formation of Bowland Experience Ltd which provides business-to-business support for tourism development. In Wales, the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Partnership has established a Sustainable Tourism Business Group.

All AONB Partnerships are keen to use their influence to support the current drive for economic recovery and growth. The high landscape quality of AONBs, articulated in terms of their natural beauty, is now recognised as a key economic driver (**Box 5**) and the greatest opportunities for AONB Partnerships are likely to lie in those sectors that manage or derive their business from this natural beauty such as food, drink, forestry and tourism. In England, Defra's recent commitment in the Rural Economy Growth Review to use AONB Partnerships to support sustainable rural tourism will provide a boost to this area of work, as will the joint accord between AONBs, Visit England and Defra, to be launched in July 2013.

Many Partnerships in England are keen to engage with their Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP). For instance, Dorset AONB Partnership is represented on the Food and Drink group of the Dorset LEP and the North Pennines AONB Partnership is preparing a prospectus for the North East LEP on future joint working. Other Partnerships report that dialogue is at an early stage with LEPs now turning more of their attention to the rural economy after an initial focus on urban areas and issues.

Box 5. The economic value of the AONB designation. A number of studies have looked at the contribution that protected landscape designations make to local economies. A large proportion of the added value is derived from raised levels of inward investment that occur from the recognition of the area as a desirable place to live, work and visit. Coming up with a meaningful figure is notoriously difficult. A study for the Countryside Council of Wales in 2009 into the proposal to extend the Clwydian Range AONB estimated that the value of the socio-economic impact on GDP of the designation and all that is associated with it could be around £10 million to £20 million per annum for an area of 48,584 ha with a population in 2001 of 33,883.

Community development and social health and well-being

The long standing role of AONB Partnerships in addressing the social needs of local communities has already been referred to. For many years, work in this area focussed on supporting outdoor recreation and promoting understanding of the qualities of the AONB to local communities and visitors, both of which are objectives in most AONB Management Plans.

However, in recent years, the same funding opportunities that have enabled AONB Partnerships and their Units to deliver projects with economic benefits have been used to deliver direct engagement with communities on a wide range of initiatives.

The reliance of their rural communities on car transport and the opportunity to promote more sustainable modes of travel for residents and visitors is a common theme in many AONB Management Plans. In the Gower AONB, the BayTrans Gower Explorer Bus Public Transport Partnership supports a year round service benefiting locals and visitors, with use having grown by 40% since its inception in 2004. The Dorset AONB Partnership has developed a joint project with the Jurassic Coast Partnership to promote coastal waterborne passenger transport and the Forest of

Bowland AONB Partnership has used funding from the Local Transport Plan to develop long distance recreational routes.

The training and skills opportunities arising from countryside and recreation management are being addressed by many AONB Partnerships. For instance the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Partnership works with Llysfasi Agricultural College to provide apprenticeships for rural skills such as dry stone walling. The High Weald AONB Partnership works with forestry skills training providers to network and share wood working skills and has used its SDF to offer short term apprenticeships in the coppice industry.

AONB Partnerships are keen to emphasise the improved health outcomes that have been shown to arise from access to a high quality natural environment, with the Cotswolds Conservation Board promoting the AONB as the 'Natural Health Service'. Partnerships such as the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB, which has many years' experience of supporting the Lincolnshire Wolds Walking Festival, have opened a dialogue with their local NHS on extending these opportunities to improve health outcomes. The Isle of Anglesey AONB Partnership helps provide walks for mothers with prams and toddlers. Other Partnerships such as the Quantock Hills and Wye Valley AONBs have used their SDF schemes to connect people who have mental health issues with the creative outdoors environment. To date there has been little contact between AONB Partnerships and the newly formed Health and Wellbeing Boards in England or Health Boards in Wales but, with many of these Boards recognising the natural environment as a key determinant of health, there is an opportunity for fruitful joint working.

3. AONB Partnerships' use of resources

In the current economic climate, it is essential that publicly funded bodies are able to demonstrate that they are using their resources wisely, achieving the highest levels of benefit to their local area and the country as a whole. The following section examines how AONB Partnerships are funded and how they use their money. It describes the steps being taken by AONB Partnerships to respond to falling budgets and considers what the impact of future cuts might be.

Sources of funding and income generated by Partnerships

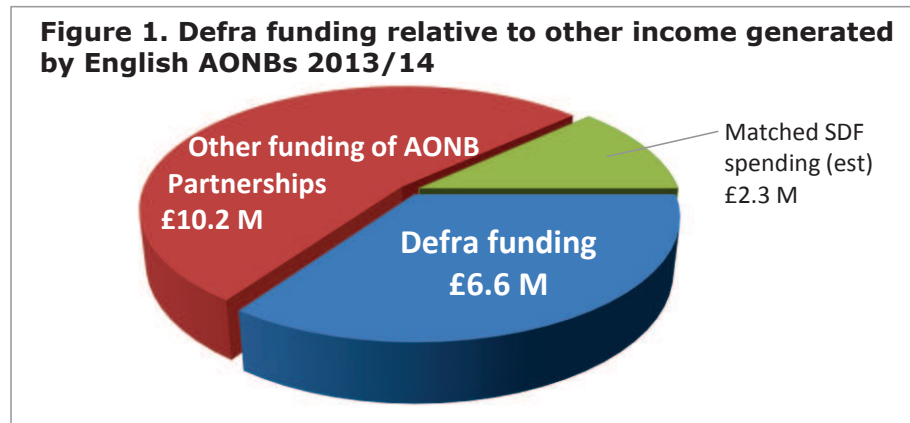
AONBs are reliant for their core funding on direct grants from Defra (in England), Natural Resources Wales, and with similar in Northern Ireland, to match contributions from their constituent Local Authorities (**Box 6**). In England in the current year, the 34 AONB Partnerships will receive £6.6 M as core funding from Defra which is used to underpin the employment of staff and other core operational costs (**Figures 1 and 2**).

Box 6. Funding mechanisms for AONBs in England: Financial assistance to AONB Partnerships is made under S.98 of the NERC Act 2006 (or, for Conservation Boards, S.91 of the CRoW Act 2000) and is discretionary. The level of funding available for each individual AONB is dependent on the needs of the area and the actual costs incurred. Since 2008, funding has been distributed as a 'single pot' leaving Partnerships free to move funding between core, project and SDF budgets. Defra has funded AONBs directly since 2011/12 (previously via Natural England). Defra funding is intended to provide 75% of funding for core functions, matched 25% by Local Authorities.

This level of funding is dramatically smaller than that received by National Park Authorities (for instance the South Downs National

Park Authority alone will receive a National Park grant of over £10 Million this year).

Defra’s core grant to English AONBs equates to an annual contribution from central government of 19 pence per person for the 34.9 M people who live within half and hours travel of AONBs in England, or 14 pence for England’s population as a whole. Equivalent figures for Wales are 20 pence per person for the 1.6 M people in Wales who live within half and hours travel of AONBs, or 11 pence for all of Wales’ population.



Data collected by Defra’s protected landscapes team shows that Defra’s direct grant to AONB Partnerships in England of £6.6 M is used to generate a further £10.2 M of income to the Partnerships from other sources. This figure includes the matched funding from constituent Local Authorities and other non-exchequer funding such as the HLF, EU programmes and business sponsorship.

The work of the AONB partnerships also generates further income to the AONB in the form of economic activity generated by supported projects. The additional income generated from the SDF scheme can be estimated from the findings of the independent evaluation of the first three years of the SDF in

England⁶ and from similar analysis in Wales⁷. This suggests that the SDF grant funding in the current year is likely to generate an additional £2.3 M of spending by supported projects.

Taking these figures together (illustrated in Figure 1), this suggests that the direct grant by Defra has a gearing ratio of 2.88 (or put another way, every £1 of Defra funding generates nearly £1.88 of additional income to the AONB). It is understood that this level of gearing compares favourably with other public bodies including NPAs.

These figures do not include the value generated from other sources such as the use of volunteers and grants administered by other bodies but secured by the AONB unit. A detailed assessment by the Cotswolds Conservation Board showed that in 2012/13, the Board converted core grants from Defra of £490,000 and from Local Authorities of £155,000 into a total income to the AONB from Board activity of £2.8 Million (a gearing of Defra and LA funding of 4.3 times). In Wales in 2012/13, the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB Partnership used its £110,000 of core funding from the Countryside Council for Wales and £80,000 SDF from Welsh Government to acquire a total budget spend of £1.12 million, providing a gearing of central government funding of 5.9 times.

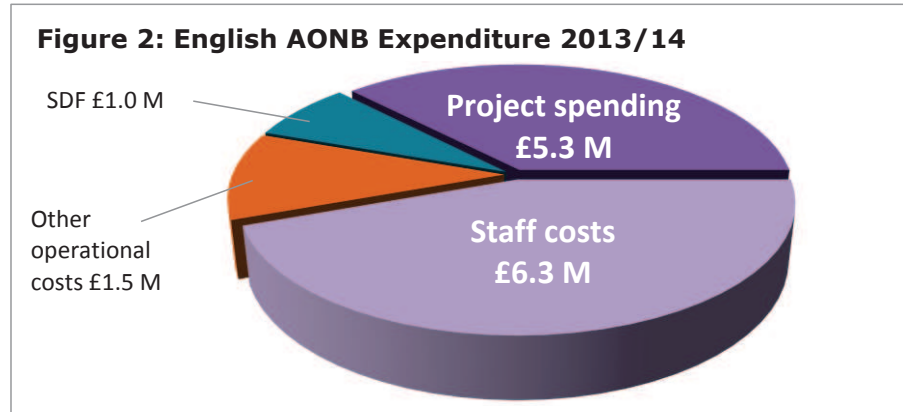
This shows that AONB Partnerships are highly successful at using the core funding they receive from central government and constituent Local Authorities to lever other income. The diversity of AONB Partnerships’ membership gives them the ability to turn small individual contributions, which would on their own achieve little, into significant shared endeavours.

⁶ LUC (2009) as previous footnote. This found a gearing ratio of 1:3.

⁷ In the Isle of Anglesey AONB every £1 of SDF grants draws in £4 of matched funding.

Expenditure by AONB Partnerships

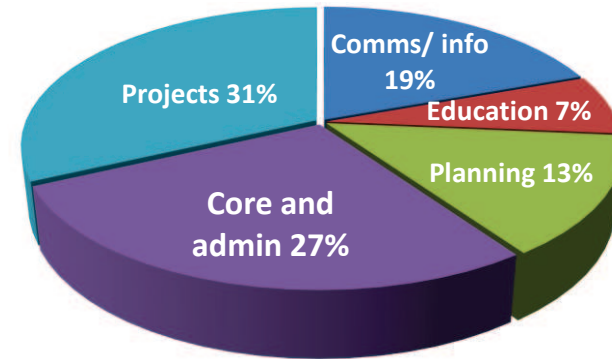
The largest category of expenditure by AONB Partnerships is on the staff in the AONB Unit (**Figure 2**). As noted earlier, AONB Units typically involve five full time equivalent posts covering the roles of the AONB manager or lead officer, an administration assistant, a communications and information post and a partnership support / external funding post. Some Units employ a planning officer and some support countryside rangers or wardens.



The acquisition and management of external funding, principally acquired from non-exchequer sources, has been a significant achievement for many of the AONB Units, providing large amounts of project funding relative to the core operational costs (or 37% of total expenditure – **Figure 2**), and accounting for around 31% of staff resources (**Figure 3**).

As noted earlier, the HLF and EU funding streams have been significant in recent years. In the current year, a number of AONB Partnerships in England, such as Arnside and Silverdale, Dedham Vale and Dorset are running projects which are significantly larger than the value of their core work.

Figure 3. Staff resources of English AONBs 2012

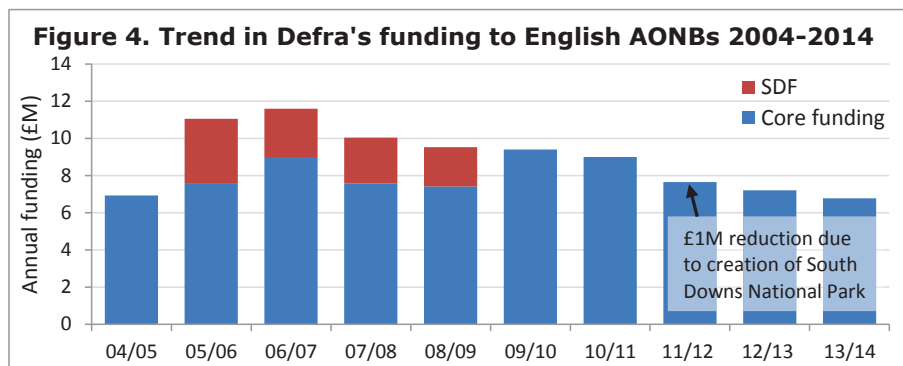


Recent responses to tightening budgets

Like all publicly funded bodies, AONB Partnerships have faced cuts in their funding in recent years. Following significant rises in central government funding of English AONBs in the three years from 2004/05 to 2006/07 (which included the introduction of the SDF), the value of this funding has been falling (**Figure 4**), matched by equivalent falls in the contributions from Local Authorities⁸.

In Wales, AONB Partnerships have benefited in the last five years from the maintenance of similar levels of core funding from the Countryside Council for Wales (now Natural Resources Wales) but have been affected by reductions in Local Authority spending.

⁸ Part of the reduction since 2011/12 has been due to the creation of the South Downs National Park which replaced the Sussex Downs and East Hampshire AONBs, resulting in a loss of £1M funding from AONBs.



During this period, AONB Partnerships have looked hard at how they can increase their operational efficiency and many have had to focus their activities, dropping non-priority work. For many AONB Units this has meant that officer posts have been shed in areas such as planning advice and education, involving redundancies or reductions in employed hours. Several AONBs in England report that their staff resources have fallen by around a fifth in the last two years.

Co-operation with neighbouring protected landscapes, and sharing their resources, has been a route followed by several AONB Partnerships in England.

- The Dedham Vale and Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Units effectively combined forces in 2011, creating two shared posts and are now considering moving to a single AONB Unit and lead officer in anticipation of further reductions in funding. This is concern from some partners who fear a loss of the distinctive local identities of the two AONBs.
- The Malvern Hills and Wye Valley AONB Units have a shared arrangement to acquire planning advice from a consultant on a call-off basis.
- AONB Units in the North of England have developed close working with their neighbouring NPAs. The Howardian Hills

AONB has a shared woodland officer post and a joint SDF Panel with the North York Moors NPA; and staff from the North Pennines and Nidderdale AONBs work with the Yorkshire Dales and Northumberland NPAs on a peatland restoration project.

During the last year, The NAAONB has played a valuable role in facilitating networks of self-organising and decentralised AONB teams through the Future Landscapes Programme (**Box 7**).

Box 7. The Future Landscapes Programme. In January 2013, a programme of 'action learning' for AONB lead staff in England and Wales was launched with support from Defra and the Welsh Government. During the period to mid-May, 10 days of workshops were delivered to 36 members of AONB staff. The workshops covered topics including the key leadership behaviours which are critical to the future success of the AONB Family; the ways in which these can be applied collaboratively; and improving the effectiveness of team working and maximising performance across the AONB Family. Five Action Learning Sets have been established covering Funding AONBs and understanding our Assets; Staff working in AONBs; Understanding the Relevance of AONBs to Society; Making the most of AONB Partnerships; and Identity & Profile.

AONB Units that are not directly serviced by Local Authorities have been able to negotiate costs savings on facilities management (such as premises, vehicles and IT equipment) and some have found it beneficial to share offices with other partners such as Natural England or the RSPB.

Several AONB Partnerships have sought to diversify their workforce by involving volunteers, local support groups and students. This is an activity that requires significant investment in core staff time but can pay dividends. Examples of this work include the following:

- The Chilterns Conservation Board works closely with The Chiltern Society, an independent charity with over 7,000 members that supports the AONB designation.
- The Cotswolds Conservation Board estimates that the value of work undertaken by its volunteer force in 2012/13 amounted to £300,000.
- The Surrey Hills AONB Partnership has recently established a Surrey Hills Society which undertakes public-facing promotional and educational work, including the publication and distribution of the Surrey Hills newsletter.
- The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership has provided a work placement to an MSc student from Plymouth University's environmental consultancy course.

A few AONB Partnerships are exploring the effectiveness of new charitable and commercial structures for delivering different aspects of the AONB purpose.

- The Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership has established a charity, Champion Bowland, as a way of raising funds and other support for the AONB. A trading subsidiary of the charity, Bowland Experience Ltd, has been created to undertake commercial activities in support of the charity and AONB.
- The Surrey Hills AONB Partnership has established a Community Interest Company, Surrey Hills Enterprises and a Surrey Hills Trust Fund, to support staff work on marketing and communications.

It is significant that most of these steps that AONB Partnerships have taken to mitigate the impact of funding cuts and better deliver their purpose have required innovative and proactive action which is outside the normal procedures of Local Authorities and other public sector bodies. AONBs Partnerships, and particularly

the staff who have been instrumental in leading these initiatives, have been willing to take risks in trialling new and untested ways of delivering the AONB purpose.

The likely impacts of further budget cuts

As noted above, AONB Partnerships, particularly those in England, have several years' experience of restructuring their Units, cutting costs and developing new ways of working. All AONB Partnerships are aware of the pressure on their core grant from central governments and the matched funding from their Local Authorities. Many Partnerships have made forward projections of their operating costs based on different funding scenarios. For instance the four AONBs in Devon have prepared an Adaptation Report examining future options for new income generation, evaluation of other delivery mechanisms, procurement of services and sharing of staff and services.

A common conclusion from AONB Partnerships' forward projections is that any reduction in central governments' funding would be matched by equivalent reductions from Local Authorities. So far, most Local Authorities in England have met their commitment to the 75:25 core funding formula (Box 6) and it is likely that most would seek to continue this.

For the majority of AONB Partnerships that have maintained their SDF scheme, this is an obvious choice for further reductions in costs. However, ending their SDF would remove a mechanism that partners and local communities have come to value as a dedicated means for delivering the AONB purpose and the objectives of their Management Plan, drawing down a high level of matched funding (see Box 5).

All the AONB lead officers who provided information to this review emphasised the critical importance of their core funding, without which they would be unable to acquire money and in-kind support

from other sources. Preparation of the AONB Management Plan and administering the Partnership are not activities likely to attract external (non-exchequer) funding. Applying for project funding, such as from HLF or EU programmes, and managing volunteers require a core investment of 'seed corn' funding.

AONB lead officers also reported that there is a minimum 'critical mass' of staffing below which it will be unviable to operate an effective AONB Unit. If this 'tipping point' is reached, the necessary restructuring incurs further costs (such as compulsory redundancy or office relocations). At this point it is likely that the dedicated AONB Unit would be dissolved and the core functions of delivering the AONB purpose (principally the preparation of the Management Plan – see Box 1) would be absorbed within Local Authority structures. It should be noted that this is not an option that is immediately open to Conservation Boards.

There is no precedent for this having taken place so it is difficult to predict what the outcomes would be. The ongoing restructuring and reduction in size of Local Authorities' countryside and environment departments, which in many cases has involved deeper cuts than those experienced by AONB Units, would be an important factor in the way they would react to this change. The authors of this report consider the following outcomes for the AONB designation to be likely:

- With a reduced administrative resource, engagement between AONB partners would probably be less frequent and less effective. Local Nature Partnerships (where they exist) might take on some of this responsibility in England, but without a dedicated focus on the AONB area or purpose.
- There would probably be a reduction in externally funded project work, for three reasons. Firstly a weaker partnership would be less attractive to funders such as HLF,

secondly there would be less core staff time to bid for funding and thirdly there might (arguably) be less of a culture of innovation and risk taking within Local Authority structures.

- The combination of these two factors would almost certainly result in a reduced focus on delivery of the AONB Management Plan (the priorities of which would be competing with other Council priorities). It is likely that many of the wider activities described in Section 2 of this report would be scaled back or stopped.

The level at which this tipping point in the critical mass of AONB Units would be reached varies between AONBs. Lead officers of some of the larger AONBs, that have secured higher central government funding and have a number of constituent Local Authorities, report that they could continue to deliver their core functions (but little else) on a declining budget for several years.

A few AONBs have built up capital reserves⁹ or have assets such as property that can be sold, providing them with a small cushion. As noted above, most AONBs still operate SDF schemes which are discretionary rather than core spending.

A number of AONB lead officers, particularly those from smaller AONBs have stated to this review that any further reductions in central government funding (greater than around 5%) would put them beyond the tipping point referred to above, incurring additional costs of restructuring that would make the operation of the Unit unviable. As noted above, there is no precedent for the way in which, without an AONB Unit, Local Authorities would fulfil the core purposes of the AONB designation and their statutory requirements to prepare the AONB Management.

⁹ Conservation Boards are able to hold their own funds whereas other AONB Partnerships must rely on Local Authorities being willing to carry forward to annual budgets.

4. Overall conclusions

The following findings from this review are offered as a contribution to the debate on the future role and funding of AONB Partnerships in the UK.

A. The effectiveness of the AONB Partnership structure

The partnership structure that has evolved in AONBs, particularly those in England, can be said to have come of age. Notwithstanding the variation in detailed arrangements between AONBs, the overall model is well-suited to the way in which the delivery of national policy, and the development and delivery of local strategic priorities, are now undertaken. The mix of locally accountable elected members with officers from national agencies and local interest groups provides an effective structure for deciding local priorities and co-ordinating shared programmes of action.

AONB Partnerships provide good models for the executive boards now being formed by many Local Nature Partnerships in England. There are also opportunities for LNPs and AONB Partnerships to develop stronger synergies that avoid duplication and use AONB Partnerships to deliver LNP objectives in AONBs.

In Wales, AONB Partnerships are more firmly rooted within their Local Authority structures. There may be merit in Welsh AONB Partnerships adopting the higher levels of partnership working and more independent approaches being used in English AONBs.

B. The relevance of AONB Partnerships' work

The work being undertaken by AONB Partnerships is of growing relevance to national and local policy objectives. Concepts such as sustainable development, the ecosystems approach and the environment as an economic driver and determinant of health and

wellbeing, all of which are core tenets of the AONB purpose, now have widespread acceptance in national and local policy. This has meant that the work of AONB Partnerships is of mainstream interest to many partners in a way that would not have been the case ten years ago.

The acquisition of external project funding and use of the SDF has meant that AONB Partnerships are involved in activities that, ten years ago might have been considered beyond their remit, but where partners clearly believe that AONBs now have a role. Examples of this are the work that the Partnerships are doing to support sustainable tourism, healthy communities and take forward landscape scale ecological restoration in the light of pressures such as climate change.

The localism agenda, now given force in England through the Localism Act 2011, is also of great relevance to AONB Partnerships, particularly in relation to their engagement with local communities and their recognition of the special qualities of their AONBs.

AONBs have long been recognised by Government as potential 'test beds' for new ways of working that can subsequently be applied outside AONBs. Based on their previous experience, there may be new 'test bedding' opportunities for AONB Partnerships in the next round of Rural Development Programmes and in the integrated planning of natural resources and ecosystem delivery.

Several AONBs are exploring the effectiveness of new ways of working with the private and voluntary sectors (such as through community interest companies, charitable trusts and friends groups), taking advantage of the different mix of skills and resources that these institutional models can offer. The long term effectiveness of these as vehicles for local policy delivery has yet to be proved, but they appear to offer great potential to move into the spaces left by a smaller public sector.

In England, the National Policy Statement on AONBs (published by the Countryside Commission in 1991) now looks out of touch with current priorities. The Welsh Government is consulting on a new Policy Statement for Protected Landscapes that will refresh and re-energise the work of AONB Partnerships and NPAs in Wales¹⁰. There is an opportunity for Defra to lead a similar debate in England that more fully recognises (compared to the 1991 Statement) the contribution that AONB Partnerships can make to the delivery of national and local policy, and looks to extend their role as innovators of new ways of working.

C. The role of AONB Units

Dedicated Units of AONB staff have proved to be an effective means of achieving the purpose of the AONB designation and contributing to broader policy priorities. These Units, whether based within Local Authority structures or in Conservation Boards, give AONB Partnerships long term credibility and local expertise. They give Partnerships the means to react quickly to opportunities and fill gaps in the capacity of other organisations. AONB Units are well suited to applying for and managing large externally funded projects, allowing Partnerships to 'punch well above their weight'.

There is a strong risk that further reductions in core funding to AONB Partnerships will result in the closure of some AONB Units. There is no precedent for this and the impact on these AONB's designations and purposes is unclear. If this change proves unavoidable, it will be important that the relevant Government departments or their agencies guide transitional arrangements with the Local Authorities concerned.

D. The benefits of collaboration

This review has shown the range of experience and different approaches that are available from amongst AONB Partnerships. The potential for sharing best practice and using a collaborative 'action learning' approach to build the institutional capacity of AONB Units has been shown through the Future Landscapes Programme (Box 7) and the 36 Lead Officers that participated in the Programme continue to work together at a national level to address key issues facing AONBs.

If, as seems likely, the resources available to individual Partnerships are set to decline further, there will be even more benefit from continued collaborative and collective working at a senior staff level. Smaller AONB Units will mean that staff time will be an even more precious commodity. Taking time away from local AONB business to exchange experience, share skills and develop smarter ways of working must not be seen as an unnecessary luxury. On the contrary, pulling back from this work will lead to the much greater risk that AONB Partnerships will become more isolated from each other and miss out on the benefits of collaboration and cross-fertilisation.

LUC
July 2013

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/cultureandsport/landscape/?lang=en>

