

Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2011/2012

From our chairman

Over the last year, the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have been at the heart of passionate debate about the British countryside. We've heard arguments about planning, habitat regulations, and wind and solar farms.

I believe that to make the case for protecting our special landscapes, it is essential that we enthuse and involve everyone who lives, visits and works in them. This year, the Blackdown Hills AONB team has encouraged local people to take part in wildlife surveys, get hands-on with building and restoration, and enjoy over 100 outdoor events. AONB residents have been able to show their pride in the area with new village road signs and information boards.

We have continued to take a positive position on renewable energy, while seeking to protect the landscape from unacceptable damage. We commissioned an in-depth report into reducing the AONB's greenhouse gas emissions, and were closely involved in advising local planning authorities on the huge increase in planning applications for wind and solar installations.

As new planning laws were drawn up, we helped parish councils to prepare for a greater role in the process.

At a time when the countryside is under the spotlight, I am very proud of all the work that team and all our partner organisations have done to ensure that the Blackdown Hills AONB remains cherished and protected for future generations.



Cllr Paul Diviani, Chairman,
Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership

Landscape



- We provided funding and support for projects to involve volunteers in mapping and surveying wildlife including bats, swifts and waxcap fungi
- We managed an oral history project, funded by Making it Local, which collected scores of reminiscences from local people and made them available at www.harvestories.co.uk
- We took part in an exchange with French woodland owners to learn from each other about managing woods and hedges as part of CORDIALE, a European cross-border project
- We commissioned an in-depth report into the AONB's greenhouse gas footprint to support work on reducing emissions
- We took part in the Devon Landscape Character Assessment which helps people understand the different types of landscape and plan sympathetic development
- We supported projects to better understand our heritage, including digitising Somerset's historic tithe maps, and interpreting an aerial survey of the landscape

Sustainability



- We published the Design Guide for Houses to help planners, homeowners, architects and builders work in harmony with the AONB's heritage
- We brought together local parishes to produce the Blackdown Hills Community Plan, addressing common issues such as severe weather planning, broadband and local transport
- Our Sustainable Development Fund supported 16 projects including school composting equipment, community shops, outdoor classrooms, local information points, forest experiences for families and the Neroche Conservation Volunteers group
- On behalf of the Blackdown Hills Trust, we set up the Force for Nature project with Neroche/Forestry Commission. The AONB developed a one-stop shop for volunteering to be launched in summer 2012
- With Neroche/Forestry Commission and Natural England, we launched the Beef, Butterflies & Trees project which appointed two consultants to work with landowners on managing woodlands and grazing rough marginal land
- We continued to support the Making it Local grants scheme for enterprising projects in the Blackdown Hills and East Devon

Communication



- New maps on our website help people to find wildlife reserves and other places to visit, and a series of eight cycle routes was completed and published online
- Our popular Countryside Events programme promoted 114 events throughout the year
- We took part in Phototrails online, which allows people of all abilities to plan successful trips to the countryside, by photographing two trails in the AONB
- We supported arts projects including a landscape photography tour, a book of folktales and community dance
- We worked with the Highways Authorities to design AONB signs for villages. Ford Street and Corfe installed the first signs

Making it Local and Neroche

This year we have continued to support the Making it Local grants fund and the Neroche scheme.

To find out about what these major projects have achieved in 2011-12 go to:

www.makingitlocal.org www.nerochescheme.org

Financial Information 2011/2012

Income	£	Expenditure	£
2010/11 Income brought forward	2,260	Staffing	130,997
Natural England	191,855	Office costs	22,355
Devon County Council	10,635	Partnership costs	25,820
Somerset County Council	6,000	Partnership Projects	62,740
Mid Devon District Council	12,000	Sustainable Development Fund 11/12	45,696
East Devon District Council	10,116		
South Somerset District Council	6,000		
Taunton Deane Borough Council	12,000		
Rental income	6,500		
Other income	4,933		
External project income	36,352		
Income carried forward to 2012/13	-11,043		
Total Income	£287,608	Total Expenditure	£287,608

Sustainable Development Fund grants 2011/12

Making it Local Development Workers	£6211
Blackdowns Batscapes (Somerset)	£1,500
Culmstock School Composting	£800
Batscapes in Devon	£4,425
Payhembury Provisions	4,732
Where are our Waxcaps?	£2,377
Phototrails for the Blackdowns	£600
Pinhole Pedallers	£500
Uffculme School Outdoor Classroom	£2,000
A Force for Nature	£4,500
The Emerald Dragon	£2,913
Gateway to the Blackdowns	£500
Families into the Forest	£3,280
Churchinford & District General Stores	£3,948
Interpreting LiDAR	£2,710
Kingmead interpretation & Facilities	£956

The Blackdown Hills is one of the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – landscapes protected for the nation because of their exceptional countryside, heritage and wildlife. The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership consists of over 80 organisations with a small, dedicated staff team based in Hemyock. To find out more about the Blackdown Hills AONB, including news, events and walks, go to:

www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk