

# Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Annual Review 2016-2017

## FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Last year marked the **25th anniversary** of the designation of Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural (AONB). It was excellent to see so many people enjoying the year's special programme of activities. Highlights for me were the anniversary launch at the heritage day at Churchinford where we were reminded how partnerships, so vital to the success of the AONB, have developed and improved since those early days. Then there was the cutting of the magnificent birthday cake at The Candlelight Inn, Bishopswood; and the grand finale, with Rebecca Pow MP, at the carols under the stars at the Wellington Monument.

I was delighted that we were able to work with local businesses, Otter Brewery, Otter Valley Ice Cream and Corrymoor Mohair socks, who each created special anniversary products to raise money for the **Blackdown Hills Countryside Fund** which supports community projects that help care for the AONB.

Our **Blackdown Hills Natural Futures** project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has delivered far beyond its targets, engaging community groups, young people, schools and individuals in the wildlife on their doorstep. It has spread the word of the importance of maintaining and

enhancing the rich mosaic of habitats in the AONB so there are places where plants and animals can continue to thrive.

This brings me back to the all-important AONB partnerships, particularly those with farmers and other landowners who, by entering into Countryside Stewardship, are key to maintaining the qualities that make the Blackdown Hills special. I was pleased to note that we are in the top five AONBs when it comes to the number of agreements in the Mid Tier element of Countryside Stewardship.

I'm also delighted that our £1.6 million **Making it Local** programme across the Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONBs, which provides support to the rural economy, is the top performing LEADER programme in the country.

As we embark on the next 25 years we face a time of change, both nationally as Brexit is implemented and locally as a new AONB manager takes up the reins. But I am confident that in the Blackdown Hills we have demonstrated how we can benefit from the opportunities that change brings, and that our strong partnership working will ensure the future of this very special place.

I can't finish a review such as this without recognising the stunning and enduring performance over the last nine years of

Linda Bennett who has done so much to ensure our special landscape is always at the forefront. We have been blessed over time with an abundance of talents but Linda will always stand out in my mind for the diligence and love she afforded the Blackdown Hills and for that she has my sincere thanks. As does her trusty cohort, David, who has been indefatigably there in all weathers!



**Cllr Paul Diviani**  
Chairman, Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership

## LANDSCAPE

Heritage day at RAF Culmhead



- CPRE's Night Blight report into dark skies and light pollution showed the Blackdown Hills to be the fifth darkest AONB in England.
- The WW2 Scheduled Monuments at RAF Culmhead have been cleared of vegetation and brickwork stabilised. Two fighter pens and a pill box have been converted to bat hibernation sites.
- Hembury Hill Fort, Payhembury, one of the most impressive Iron Age sites in Devon, is now off the national Heritage at Risk Register, thanks to management work funded through an agri-environment scheme.
- Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project continued in its second year to encourage individuals and local communities to discover more about the AONB's wildlife. 40 sites were surveyed by the trainees; notable finds were a black dormouse, first for the UK, and Boeninghausen's sedge, first for Somerset.



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Training day for Community Nature Projects

- Our nature and wellbeing officer worked with groups and organisations in Chard, Taunton and Wellington, to provide volunteer opportunities and nature-based activities to help people benefit from getting out in the Blackdown Hills.
- We made substantive responses to 60 planning applications, offered advice on pre-application enquiries and commented on five neighbourhood plans. Stockland was the first neighbourhood plan to be adopted in the AONB.
- We made a significant contribution to developing and consulting on Devon County Council's proposals for the A30 between Honiton and Devonshire Inn, with a view to limiting the impact of the scheme on the AONB's landscape, wildlife and other special qualities.
- The Making it Local programme approved 12 projects in or close to the Blackdown Hills, including new visitor facilities at Ferne Animal Sanctuary, with eight more either in appraisal or working up full applications.
- Our Sustainable Development Fund supported 11 projects, including six Natural Futures Community Nature Projects which created wildlife friendly gardens, improved ponds and woods, and encouraged community involvement.
- The Blackdown Hills Parish Network continued to focus attention on superfast broadband, highways and planning matters, and produced a leaflet for parish councils on planning.

## COMMUNICATION AND MANAGEMENT



Rare black dormouse

- Heather Stallard and David Allen, who have served many years as AONB Partnership Management Group members, were honoured with Landscapes for Life awards for long-standing service to the Blackdown Hills AONB.
- The discovery of the UK's first black dormouse generated significant media interest and provided an opportunity for us to publicise our work nationally.
- We worked with the South West Heritage Trust to prepare a programme of events to complement a major exhibition of the Camden Town group of artists who depicted scenes around Clayhidon and Luppitt in the early part of last century.

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2016/2017

AONB Income	£
Income brought forward from 2015/16	54,130
Defra	159,917
Devon County Council	9,274
Somerset County Council	5,676
Mid Devon District Council	10,000
East Devon District Council	9,323
South Somerset District Council	6,000
Taunton Deane Borough Council	10,000
Rental income	2,461
Other income	1,045
Income carried forward to 2017/18*	-36,453
<b>Total income</b>	<b>231,373</b>

AONB Expenditure	£
Staffing	129,372
Office costs	21,077
Partnership costs	17,168
Heritage Lottery Fund Project Natural Futures	19,747
Partnership projects	25,400
Sustainable Development Fund	18,609
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>231,373</b>

\* Monies received for Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project and funds for other projects.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND GRANTS 2016/2017

Projects	£
Tatworth Village Pond	567
Project Splash	1,590
Core sites for Butterflies	1,215
Offwell Woods Management Plan	1,200
Ferne's Community Garden	1,986
History Wagon	3,000
Wild about Ashill	1,741
Neroche Volunteering - 10th Anniversary	1,822
Celebrating 10 years-Swains Lane Nature Reserve	1,259
Buckland St Mary School Wildlife Garden	3,266
Naturally Healthy Campaign Project 2017 Devon & Somerset	963
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,609</b>

Photos: Liam Marsh, Rob Grimmond,  
Rob Jones, Blackdown Hills AONB





## BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP 2016/2017

Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers  
Blackdown Hills Business Association  
Blackdown Hills Hedge Association  
Blackdown Hills Parish Network  
Blackdown Hills Rough Grazing Association  
Blackdown Hills Trust  
Blackdown & East Devon Woodland Association  
Blackdown Support Group  
British Horse Society  
Butterfly Conservation  
Campaign to Protect Rural England  
Community Council for Somerset  
Council for Voluntary Service (Mid Devon)  
Country Land and Business Association  
Devon Biodiversity Records Centre  
Devon Communities Together  
Devon County Council  
Devon Wildlife Trust  
Devon Women's Institute  
Devon Young Farmers Club  
Devon Youth Association (Young Devon)  
East Devon Council for Voluntary Service  
East Devon District Council  
Environment Agency  
Forest Enterprise  
Forestry Commission  
FWAG South West  
Historic England  
Mid Devon District Council  
National Farmers Union  
National Trust  
Natural England  
Neroche Woodlanders  
Otterhead Estate Trust  
Parish councils (falling entirely or partially within AONB)  
Ramblers Association  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Somerset County Council  
Somerset Environmental Records Centre  
Somerset Rural Youth Project  
Somerset Wildlife Trust  
Somerset Women's Institute  
Somerset Young Farmers Club  
South Somerset District Council  
South West Heritage Trust  
Taunton Deane Borough Council  
Transition Group (Blackdown Hills)  
Wessex Water

## BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT GROUP 2016/2017 (as at end of year)

**Cllr Paul Diviani** East Devon District Council (chairman)  
**Bruce Payne** special appointee (vice chairman)  
**Cllr John Berry** Devon County Council  
**Cllr James Hunt** Somerset County Council  
**Cllr Frank Rosamond** Mid Devon District Council  
**Cllr Martin Wale** South Somerset District Council  
**Cllr Dave Durdan** Taunton Deane Borough Council  
**David Westbrook** Natural England  
**Gordon Field** Blackdown Hills Artists & Makers  
**Heather Stallard** Blackdown Hills Business Association  
**Martin Turner** Blackdown Hills Hedge Association  
**John Greenshields** Blackdown & East Devon Woodland Association  
**Margaret Hall** Campaign to Protect Rural England, East Devon & Exeter  
**Simon Larkins** National Trust  
**Mark Pope** National Farmers Union  
**David Northcote-Wright** Somerset Wildlife Trust  
**Graham Long** Uptontery Parish Council  
**Bob Nelson** Broadhembury Parish Council  
**Jocelyn Pritchard** Hemyock Parish Council  
**Elaine Hayes** special appointee

## BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB STAFF TEAM 2016/2017

**Linda Bennett** manager  
**Lisa Turner** planning officer  
**Jackie Vaughan** office manager  
**Clare Groom** communications officer (from May 2016)  
**Kristen Lambert** nature and wellbeing officer  
**Sammy Fraser** volunteer coordinator (from March 2017)  
**James Maben** Blackdown Hills Natural Futures manager  
**Conrad Barrowclough** Blackdown Hills Natural Futures officer



The Blackdown Hills is one of the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty protected for the nation because of their exceptional countryside, heritage and wildlife. The Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership consists of more than 80 organisations with a small, dedicated staff team based in Hemyock.

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