North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Review 2004 - 2005

October 2005 • Prepared on behalf of the Council of Partners
Chairman’s Report

My predecessor, Martin Spray, handed over to me on 1st April 2004. I would like to thank him most warmly on behalf of the Council of Partners for playing such an important part in establishing our management structure and producing our widely-praised Management Plan, which was launched formally in May 2004.

Creating the Management Plan was difficult enough; putting it into practice is even harder, although much progress has already been made, as this Review shows. Perhaps the hardest task is making organisations and individuals within the AONB aware of our existence and our aims, and conscious of the vital importance of giving us their active support in implementing the Plan. To give one example, it has proved remarkably difficult to persuade other parties to let us know what work they have already done, or have in progress, which contributes towards the achievement of our objectives.

There is no way in which the small AONB management team, with its limited resources, can do everything on its own. I hope that all those who live and work in the North Wessex Downs will recognise the value of the AONB and will be prepared to help us.

A recent development, which should encourage that co-operation, is the creation of the Sustainable Development Fund (see page 9). The Fund, which comes from Defra via the Countryside Agency, provides a substantial part of the funding for projects proposed by organisations of any kind, large or small, which help the AONB to achieve one or more of its aims. Initially the Fund was only guaranteed for the current financial year, and had to be spent by 31 March 2006, but it will now be provided for 2006-07 and 2007/08, which is good news. We have received a satisfactory flow of proposals and all this year’s funding is effectively committed.

The AONB’s core funding from Defra, via the Countryside Agency, is also provided only on a year-to-year basis at present. There is an agreement in principle to move to a rolling three-year basis, but we cannot plan forward effectively until the principle is put into practice and is extended to cover project funding.

It is encouraging that the influence of the AONB and the value of its work are becoming more widely recognised by planners, and more generally by local and central government. Everything suggests that the problems of the future will relate not to finding enough work to do, but to finding the resources to tackle the rapidly increasing workload.

I began by thanking my predecessor, and I would like to end by thanking my colleagues. The small management team, led by Richard Clarke, has performed near-miracles in coping with the incessant demands made upon them. Members of the Council of Partners and the Executive Committee, who receive no payment from the AONB, have also responded nobly to the increasing claims on their time. I am very grateful to them all.

Richard Clarke, Director of the North Wessex Downs AONB

Confidence and Commitment

The activities in the year under review in this document show the confidence and commitment of the Council of Partners in delivering the AONB Management Plan.

Writing, discussing, agreeing and finally adopting the Plan required confidence and commitment: the confidence to agree collectively to a vision for the North Wessex Downs that all stakeholders could accept, and the commitment actually to do all the work necessary to carry out the actions in the Plan.

The members of the Council of Partners have risen to this challenge. This Review includes examples of how we are working together to deliver the shared vision for the AONB.

We have limited money and a small management team, so the support of the Council of Partners, along with other individuals and organisations, will continue to be crucial to the achievement of that shared vision. All of us on the management team are grateful for the support we have been given so far; and we look forward to playing our full part as the Partnership goes forward.

Richard Clarke, Director of the North Wessex Downs AONB

‘The North Wessex Downs is the largest Protected Landscape Area in Southern England’
Implementing the Management Plan

David Carman, Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee reports on progress so far, and challenges for the future

The statutory Management Plan for the AONB, together with a 90 point Action Plan, was adopted by the AONB partners in March 2004. A total of 54 actions were identified as high priority, mainly because they are essential precursors to further action or to improving knowledge and understanding.

This Annual Review is an opportunity for the Council of Partners collectively, and its individual members, to demonstrate their effectiveness in delivering the Management Plan objectives.

It is clear from the report below that much work is underway, but there is also a strong sense that this shows only the tip of a very large iceberg.

The most effective delivery is achieved where member organisations within the Council of Partners work together. The comprehensive, joined-up approach that the Council of Partners enables brings benefits to all its members, not least in terms of economies of scale, resource efficiency and integration.

This approach has enabled the production of the Management Plan, the Landscape Sensitivity Study and the AONB publication Up! On the North Wessex Downs, to name but a few examples.

Beyond the Council of Partners is a network of individuals, groups and organisations that are actively engaged, possibly unwittingly, in the delivery of the Management Plan. It is a challenge to the AONB partnership to make and maintain contact with those people. This illustrates the need, for example, for an awareness-raising strategy. As the AONB team enters its fourth year of existence, and the Council of Partners its fifth, it will be increasingly important to demonstrate that the objectives set out in the highly acclaimed Management Plan can be translated into action.

It will also be important for the future of the AONB to have an accurate picture of the combined effectiveness of the actions and programmes. The Executive Committee will work with the Council of Partners, the AONB team and external partners to implement, the Management Plan, and monitor and evaluate its achievements.

The AONB Management Team is working with partner organisations to deliver several actions from the Management Plan. Key among them are:

- Historic Landscape Characterisation study (Action A4), Chalk Grassland study (Action A17), Woodland Strategy (Action A18), Local Products Directory (Action A33), Geographical Information System (Action A38 and 39), launch of the Tourist Welcome Pack (Action A45 and A76), Downland Heritage Initiative (Action A57 and A63), Ridgeway Corridor (Action A58), and the Urban Fringe project south of Swindon (Action 61).

A further 11 actions that cover the whole of the AONB are underway.

These high priority areas are not yet receiving attention, or urgently require wider action than is currently being undertaken:

- Intrusive power lines
- Pools of darkness (although CPRE has produced an England-wide map generated from satellite images)
- Availability of grazing livestock
- Environmental effects of the racehorse industry
- An awareness-raising strategy
- Design guidance
- Alternative funding sources
- Advisory leaflets
- A network of best practice sites.

Of the 54 high priority actions, nine have been delivered for the whole area. They are:

- A9. Key views into and from the AONB, addressed as part of a stakeholder exercise on landscape value - delivered by the AONB Forum 2004.
- A12. Preparation of a Landscape Sensitivity Study into wind turbines (originally a capacity study)
- A15. Condition of statutory nature conservation sites – delivered by English Nature
- A18. Preparation of a Woodland Strategy – delivered by the AONB team
- A30. Socio-economic characterisation of the AONB – delivered as part of a Countryside Agency contract
- A36. Data collection on current tourism provision – delivered by Roger Buldern’s work at Tourism South East
- A38. Geographical information system for the AONB
- A39. Updating and expanding the GIS information system for the AONB
- A46. Establishment of the North Wessex Downs Planning Group

The Fringe Benefits Workshop held at Wroughton in March 2004 attracted a wide audience and stimulated lively discussion on the management of the urban fringes of southern Swindon. Funding from the Countryside Agency enabled us to carry out an integrated urban fringe action plan. This is part of a national planning demonstration programme and will be useful for discussions with local authorities and partners in other urban fringe areas close to Basingstoke, Reading and Newbury.

The action plan covers a wide range of issues, from fly-tipping, ‘rat runs’ and use of rights of way, to the future of farming in the fringe. It identifies a number of practical ways to tackle some of the issues that affect the area, and is being used as the basis of funding bids to get these projects started.

Action Plan achievements.

The following organisations have delivered, are delivering or are planning to deliver high priority actions:

- The Council of Partners as a whole
- Wiltshire County Council
- Hampshire County Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- West Berkshire Council
- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
- Test Valley Borough Council
- South Oxfordshire District Council
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- Countryside Agency
- English Nature
- Tourism South East
- RSPB
- Hampshire Woodland Forum
- Pang and Kennet Valley Countryside Projects

Many activities that are not high priority but nonetheless contribute significantly to the delivery of the Management Plan are being undertaken. Swindon Borough Council, Kennet District Council, and Berkshire RIGS (Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites) Group are involved in lower priority actions.

The South East Rural Pathfinder project hosted by Hampshire County Council provides an exceptional opportunity for the AONB to take part in a project to pilot new ways of delivering land management advice and achieve the implementation of a number of priority actions (Action A72, A53, A54, A55 and A59). In addition, many local actions, too numerous to list, that contribute to the partial delivery of the Management Plan, are underway or completed.

The AONB team will continue the work on delivering the Management Plan. This is a challenging task, but the Council of Partners and partner organisations are committed to achieving the objectives identified in the Management Plan.
Achievements and Events during 2004 and 2005

The launch and subsequent implementation of the Management Plan was highest on our list of priorities for the year under review.

We created a memorable launch event at Flower Farms, Shalbourne, south of Hungerford, attended by 110 people from a wide range of stakeholders, many of whom planted Horseshoe Vetch in a specially-designed chalk pit. The plants took root and flourished, so the Chalkhill Blue butterfly will be attracted to colonise the area.

The Management Plan was dispatched to hundreds of partner organisations with a letter explaining the significance of the Plan and how to request additional copies. The Plan is also available to download from the AONB website www.northwessexdowns.org.uk, and continues to be sent out to enquirers.

Management of the historic Ridgeway involves several local authorities, and in February 2005 Richard Clarke joined Defra Minister Alun Michael and the Friends of the Ridgeway to view the impact of winter traffic regulation orders to improve the condition of this National Trail. At the Minister’s suggestion, Highway Authorities are urged to work with the AONB to ensure consistent and sympathetic signing of the traffic orders.

Through the Local Products Directory published in UPI on the North Wessex Downs and the new website www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/products we continue to support producers of food and drink within the AONB. More than 60 producers of food, wine, beer, wildflower seeds, and furniture are featured. For many this is their only dedicated free Internet presence, and they have the option to enhance it with images and detailed information about their products. We promoted the new Welcome Pack for hospitality providers at the Local Food and Tourism event organised by BBO Food Groups near Wallingford in January 2005.

During Spring 2005, AONB Director Richard Clarke, and Development Officer Belinda Flower provided guidance to farmers and land managers within the AONB, to show how Environmental Stewardship could help conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The AONB team worked closely with Defra’s Rural Development Service to draw up workshop presentations and a factsheet that highlights those management options that will do most to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the area. The Environmental Stewardship programme, launched by Defra in March, is set to transform the way the landscape and countryside is managed.

The first edition of the annual newsguide UPI on the North Wessex Downs was published in July 2004 and proved to be a great success. 30,000 copies were distributed widely in libraries, tourist information centres, museums, visitor attractions and at shows and events including the Royal Berkshire Show. The 2005 edition was published in March and featured several partner organisations such as the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust and West Berkshire Ramblers. 30,000 copies were distributed locally by the AONB team, and throughout a wide area by a brochure display company. The newsguide continues to be published in the spring to make the most of the tourist season.

‘The North Wessex Downs has a relatively high proportion of high-quality agricultural land. Nearly 3% grade 1, 25% grade 2 and 64% grade 3, according to Agricultural Land Classification’

‘Farming is highly productive. The North Wessex Downs has the highest farmgate income - £100M in 2003 - of all Protected Landscapes in the South East’
The new Welcome Pack for hospitality providers in the AONB to give to their guests was launched in Spring 2005. Dr Andrew Clegg of Chichester University led a workshop organised by Tourism South East for people in the tourism business to gain a better understanding of the North Wessex Downs and how to maximise this valuable asset in their service provision.

The 2004 Forum meeting took place in November at Hungerford Town Hall. The meeting focused on the challenges that this protected landscape faces from the changing needs of farming due to the introduction of the Single Farm Payment scheme, and the Government’s commitment to producing energy from renewable sources. Representatives from more than 100 different groups took part in a consultation to assess the emotional significance of specific views within and of the AONB, which could be affected by changes to farming practices and introduction of renewable energy sources. The results contributed to a Landscape Sensitivity Study to help guide planners, estate managers, farmers, energy providers and local authorities trying to meet the Government’s targets on renewable sources for energy production, while protecting the landscape.

Fly-tipping and management of hazardous waste in the countryside is a problem for several AONBs. At the 2004 Game Fair, we teamed up with the Environment Agency to focus on the importance of reporting fly-tipping and taking steps to remove hazardous waste safely. The Cotswolds and Chilterns AONBs highlighted different aspects of their landscape in a joint display area with the North Wessex Downs.

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Our regional work

The North Wessex Downs AONB represented all the Protected Landscapes of the South East in making representations to the Regional Assembly on the South East Plan.

Sir Charles Nunneley, Chairman of the Council of Partners, along with the Chairmen of the Sussex Downs and Chilterns AONBs, had discussions with the Chairman of SEEDA over closer working.

Richard Clarke sits on the Board of the National Association of AONBs.

Through a competitive process the North Wessex Downs AONB Team gained more than £20,000 to research the management of the countryside south of Swindon. This work will be used regionally and nationally to influence Countryside Agency policy.

Looking Ahead

with Richard Clarke, Director of the North Wessex Downs AONB.

During the financial year 2005-2006 the North Wessex Downs AONB management team, along with the Executive Committee and Council of Partners, is fully committed to the delivery of the Management Plan.

At the same time as encouraging and facilitating the delivery of the Plan we continue to maintain a strategic view of the bigger picture. Our involvement in the development of regional and national policy is particularly important given the size and trans-regional location of the AONB.

Spatial strategies are being developed for the South East and South-West regions; Defra’s modernising agenda continues; and the Government Offices will develop their regional delivery frameworks. It is essential that the AONB team is influential in the Rural Pathfinder scheme and the creation process of the new agency Natural England, and closely involved with the National Association of AONBs.

The North Wessex Downs management team, on behalf of the Council of Partners, is well placed to be influential at regional and national levels. The broad range of organisations represented on the Council of Partners have equally important roles to play to ensure the key issues for this nationally important landscape are fully understood at all levels.

The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grant scheme introduced in July 2005 is helping us realise practical aspirations and meet strategic goals. We secured £100,000 from Defra via the Countryside Agency to be distributed in the SDF scheme to projects before 31 March 2006. It provides grants for innovative, sustainable projects that involve communities, and in particular young people. This grant scheme is our first, and we led the way among AONBs by developing an on-line application form and guidelines to minimise the amount of paperwork.

Between 15 and 20 organisations will receive money from the SDF scheme during the current financial year. Visit our website www.northwessexdowns.org.uk for more information about the grant recipients, the criteria and how to apply for a grant. We will be applying to the Agency for at least £100,000 per year for the next two years.

Andover, Devizes, Swindon, Abingdon, Oxford and Didcot’

‘More than 5 million people live within 20 minutes drive of the North Wessex Downs. The major towns are Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, Devizes, Swindon, Abingdon, Oxford and Didcot’

‘27% of land in the North Wessex Downs was under agricultural schemes in 2003 – well above the regional average – and this is likely to have increased under the new stewardship schemes’
Financial Statement 2004 - 2005

Income. Contributions to core budget from:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Contribution (£)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countryside Agency</td>
<td>£199,022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council</td>
<td>£3,362</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hampshire County Council</td>
<td>£8,220</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kennet District Council</td>
<td>£4,641</td>
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<td>North Wiltshire District Council</td>
<td>£2,785</td>
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<td>Oxfordshire County Council</td>
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<td>Swindon Borough Council</td>
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<td>Test Valley Borough Council</td>
<td>£3,362</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vale of White Horse District Council</td>
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<td>West Berkshire Council</td>
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<td>Wiltshire County Council</td>
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<td>Other sources:</td>
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<td>Landscape Sensitivity Study</td>
<td>£8,840</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsguide / Publications</td>
<td>£3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>£265,363</td>
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Core Expenditure

Salary and associated costs: 55%
Management Plan production costs: 13%
Accommodation: 9%
Promotion and research: 8%
IT: 6%
Newsguide and publications: 4%
Partnership costs: 2%
Other costs: 2%
Recruitment: 1%

Income. Contributions to projects received from:

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<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Contribution (£)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Countryside Agency</td>
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<td>Forestry Commission</td>
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<td>Great Western Community Forest</td>
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<td>Hampshire County Council</td>
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<td>Wiltshire County Council</td>
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Project Expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Expenditure (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woodland Strategy</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Fringe Action Plan</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chalk Grassland Strategy</td>
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<td>Downland Heritage Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated Access Project</td>
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<td>Local Products Directory</td>
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<td>Quiet Lanes Project</td>
<td>11%</td>
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<td>Land Based Training Provision</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product Evaluation Group</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</table>

Who's Who

Who’s Who in the AONB Team, and how the AONB governance works.

The AONB office is located at Denford Manor, Lower Denford, Hungerford, Berkshire.

The Management Team contact telephone numbers and e-mails are:

Richard Clarke, Director: 01488 680454
ricclarke@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Belinda Fowler, Development Officer: 01488 680452
bfowler@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Huw Williams, Planning Policy Advisor: 01488 680455
hwilliams@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Liz Wright, Administrative Support Officer: 01488 685440
lwright@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Caroline Keanen will return to the office in February 2006 to take on work associated with GIS.

The AONB team supports and works with the Council of Partners and the Executive Committee to:

- Provide a focus and central information base for the AONB.
- Raise awareness of and promote the unique identity of the AONB.
- Provide the strategic approach to delivering the AONB Management Plan.
- Be a catalyst for and project-manage activities to deliver the AONB Management Plan.
- Provide planning advice to add value to local authorities’ planning function.
- Develop links with key external organisations and influential local bodies.
- Develop policy recommendations and identify management issues.

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The Executive Committee consists of individuals with a variety of skills who are appointed by the Council of Partners, with a responsibility to:

- Provide guidance and advice for the work of the AONB team.
- Promote liaison and co-ordinate action between organisations implementing the AONB Management Plan.
- Advise the Council of Partners on the resources required to implement the AONB Management Plan.
- Develop links with key external organisations and influential local bodies.
- Develop policy recommendations and identify management issues.


The North Wessex Downs AONB Forum meets annually to discuss issues to be addressed through the work of the AONB. The Forum met in November 2004 at Hungerford, and in May 2005, at Temple Farming, Rockley, Marlborough.

The Forum comprises representatives from organisations and groups within the AONB including farmers, land-owners, ramblers, horse-riders, parish councillors, and members of local wildlife groups, history societies, and community action and special interest groups. Forum members nominate candidates from the interest groups to serve as Advisory Members of the Council of Partners.

The Forum meeting has a dual purpose:

- To enable the AONB Director to give reports on activity and progress in delivering the AONB Management Plan, and to encourage the discussion of issues that require their contributions from Forum members.
- To enable Forum members to raise issues that need to be addressed through the work of the AONB.

To date the Forum meetings have been lively, with a high level of community engagement.

"Many people who live in the North Wessex Downs work in banking, finance and insurance"

"1.4% of people who live in the North Wessex Downs work in agriculture, forestry and equine sectors"
Council of Partners at 1st April 2004
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Hampshire County Council
Kennet District Council
North Wiltshire District Council
Oxfordshire County Council
South Oxfordshire District Council
Swindon Borough Council
Test Valley Borough Council
Vale of White Horse Borough Council
West Berkshire Council
Wiltshire County Council
The Countryside Agency

Representing the interests of Community and Parish
Committee for Rural Hampshire
Community Council for Berkshire
Friends of Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys (from June 2005)
Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Letcombe Regis Parish Council (up to June 2005)

Representing the interests of Farming and Rural Business
Axis Farming
Country Land and Business Association
Forestry Commission (from June 2005)
Government Office for the South East
National Farmers’ Union
Lockinge Estate (up to June 2005)

Representing the interests of Historic Environment
Council of British Archaeology, Wessex
English Heritage

Representing the interests of Nature Conservation
English Nature
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (up to June 2005)
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (from June 2005)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Representing the interests of Recreation and Rural Tourism
Friends of the Ridgeway (from June 2005)
Ramblers’ Association
Tourism South East (up to June 2005)

Executive Committee
Members from 1st April 2004
Andrew Davis (Chair)
David Carman (Vice Chair)
Graham Bryant
Paula Amorelli (until July 2005)
Harry Barton
Christopher Boreham (from July 2005)
Duncan Coe (from July 2005)
Alistair Cunningham
Richard Clarke (ex officio)
Alex Green (from July 2005)
Garry King (from July 2005)
Sir Charles Nunneley (ex officio)
Jeremy Sandell
Julian Sayers (until July 2005)
Sir James Scott (until May 2005)