The work described in this review has been achieved despite the two major changes which I anticipated last year.

First, following Richard Clarke’s departure at the end of 2006, we appointed Fiona Newcombe as our new Director, and she is carrying out her role with energy and ability. Second, in October 2006 the Countryside Agency was replaced as our supervisory body by Natural England. This entailed much uncertainty and rebuilding of relationships, but we are confident that the outcome will be very positive. In June 2007 a new ministerial team was appointed at Defra, with the possible consequence of new policies for the countryside and landscape management.

Finance is a continuing problem for Natural England and our local authority partners, who are our funding bodies. We suffered cuts to the Sustainable Development Fund in 2006-07 and in 2007-08, and to our project finance in 2007-08. We understand the difficulties, but we will continue to promote the message that we are a very cost-effective way of delivering the objectives of our funding bodies.

As always, I would like to thank most warmly all those who do so much to help the North Wessex Downs AONB to achieve its objectives, especially the Council of Partners, the Executive Committee and our hard-working team, but also the many other people who contribute, either through their organisations or as individuals.

Sir Charles Nunneley
Chairman
Council of Partners

The Executive Committee is the ‘delivery arm’ of the Council of Partners. Members are appointed because of their skills rather than as representatives of particular organisations. We are fortunate to have people with knowledge of landscape, historic environment, biodiversity, agriculture, local communities, local government and fund-raising. During 2006-07 members of the Executive Committee instigated or led several projects.

Duncan Coe, Archaeological Officer at West Berkshire Council, led the Historic Landscape Characterisation project and also gave active support to the excellent work on the Woodland Archaeology project. Chris Boreham, a partner at land agents Drewett Beate, led the contract for a study into the economic, social and environmental effects of the horseracing industry. I chaired the steering group for the Study of Landscape Sensitivities and Constraints to Wind Turbine Development, which was undertaken by consultants and adopted by the Council of Partners.

We are working with consultants to develop a pilot of a new Spatial Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs. This is a web-based management plan that will be the first of its kind. It will provide more locally-relevant detailed guidance and information to help land managers and others implement the excellent Management Plan.

David Carman
Chairman
Executive Committee

Bird’s-foot-trefoil in chalk grassland
Since joining as Director in January 2007, I have been impressed with the high level of activity from many people who are committed to looking after, sharing and enjoying this very special landscape. The team and the Partnership have been extremely active during the year, and I am very grateful for all their hard work, and the way they welcomed me.

The Management Plan Review process (described on page 9) revealed many achievements. A great deal of work has been done by organisations in the Partnership to deliver actions including woodland archaeology, developing planning policies, and helping target support for farmers.

The North Wessex Downs AONB showcased several partnership projects when we co-hosted the Europarc conference in September 2006. Delegates from across Europe attended this prestigious conference on the theme Living, Working Landscapes. Field trips took place at Avebury World Heritage Site, the Landscape Evolution Centre at the Northmoor Trust, the Ardington and Lockinge business development, and, with Great Western Community Forest, on the downland south of Swindon.

The Chairman refers in his Foreword to the importance of funding. Relatively low-funded schemes such as the Sustainable Development Fund can generate an enormous amount of activity as reported on pages 6 and 7. We are pleased that this scheme continues in the current year.

The North Wessex Downs AONB continues to work at regional and national level, building excellent relationships with South West and South East regional development agencies and Government Offices. The support and guidance of these bodies is invaluable to the development of our bid for the North Wessex Downs to receive LEADER funding. This EU funding stream can support a wide range of rural action, and help more people engage in delivering our Management Plan.

Fiona Newcombe
Director
North Wessex Downs AONB

On the gallops in the North Wessex Downs
Introduction
The project work undertaken by the North Wessex Downs AONB team is only possible with the continued financial support of organisations such as Natural England, the Forestry Commission and our constituent local authorities. In addition, considerable achievements have been made through working on shared goals with our partners and a range of other dynamic and enthusiastic individuals. Through these integrated partnerships we have made effective use of the skills, time and funding.

The projects featured below focus on those initiated with assistance from the North Wessex Downs team.

Downland Heritage Initiative (DHI)
The Downland Heritage Initiative was one of the first projects to be established by the North Wessex Downs AONB team. It seeks to achieve the restoration and enhancement of key areas of downland, their natural and cultural heritage.

The project is now working across four target areas. These areas have been judged most likely to return multiple benefits from the restoration and expansion of species-rich chalk grassland. Each area has a steering group comprising landscape managers, ecologists, farmer advisors, Natural England representatives and landowners.

One of the principal outcomes was the establishment of a more co-ordinated approach to working between land management advisors in each of the target areas, to ensure high quality and consistent advice based on good data and a clear strategy for each area.

Project development reports identified the potential for expansion of species-rich chalk grassland, and to bring areas of existing chalk grassland into species-rich condition through appropriate management such as grazing. This evidence helped us to target free advisory visits across both areas.

Work conducted in 2005-06 on the identification of local seed harvesting sites on the Horton Downs Project area was replicated across the Liddington to Letcombe and the North Hampshire Downs target areas. This work was then developed across all three areas to include a directory of seed harvesting contractors and a sample contract for landowners to use. Some sites were unsuitable because of weed infestation and we ran a workshop focussing on methods of weed control.

A survey of Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINCs) was commissioned from Hampshire County Council. This included the development of a consistent approach to survey, considering not only condition, but also current management. The surveying of SINCs is now broadly in line with that required for SSSIs.

A Study of the Key Effects of the Horseracing Industry on the North Wessex Downs AONB
A research project was undertaken to consider the economic, social and environmental effects of the horseracing industry on the North Wessex Downs. A better understanding of these effects will help us to ensure that the industry is a sustainable and vibrant economic and social resource within the area.

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC)
Work on the HLC project continued in West Berkshire with the development of Historic Environment Characterisation Areas (HECA). This adds value to the HLC by providing analysis and interpretation of the thousands of individual polygons of the HLC dataset. Polygons of similar character attribute are clustered together to create the HECA. A written overview provides users (e.g. planners, educators, local historians, parish councils, parish planning groups) with a baseline understanding of the development and cultural use of the landscape. It is hoped that this work will be extended across the North Wessex Downs in future.
Woodland Archaeology
The Woodland Archaeology project emerged as a result of the Woodland Strategy which highlighted the lack of knowledge and understanding of the historic aspects of our woodlands – both the archaeological / historic features remaining within woodlands, and the features of past woodland management.

The project was established to involve local people in surveying and recording these features. During the winter of 2006-07 more than 60 volunteers were trained in the project methodology and 30 volunteers were trained in the identification of indicative ancient woodland flora. The project’s aim is to improve our understanding and management of our woodlands, to alert woodland owners to the existence of historic features and advise how best these may be preserved for future generations.

Coppice Survey
A Coppice Survey to assess and grade 129 coupes (areas of woodland that are planned for clear felling) was commissioned from Hampshire County Council. 46% of the coupes were classed as failing in terms of their economic potential as viable coppice. Neglect of coppice management, deer damage and high tree canopy cover were identified as the main causes. Recommendations include targeting resources towards the best coppice, linking forestry grants with deer control measures and assessing deer damage to stock, support for deer management, best practice guidance, and development of coppice training and coppice product markets. These recommendations will form the basis of future partnership projects with the Forestry Commission and Hampshire County Council.

Wood fuel
In March 2007, the Natural Light Partnership, funded by Hampshire County Council and the North Wessex Downs through its Forestry Research Grant, ran wood fuel workshops at the Living Rainforest in West Berkshire. The events were targeted at landowners, planners and architects with the aim of providing the most up-to-date information on site planning, types of automated woodchip and pellet boilers, sources of wood, and supply contracts.
The Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grant scheme has made a real impact among communities living and working in the North Wessex Downs AONB. During 2006-07, the scheme’s second year, 12 projects and more than 100 community groups benefited from grants to the value of £72,000.

The SDF grants encouraged more collaboration between existing community and voluntary groups. New working relationships between farmers and schools, and between local food producers and new customers, were established. In addition, more than £15,600 was levered in as matched funding.

The grants encouraged local organisations and individuals to take part in the delivery of elements of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan. It is vital that this local understanding spreads throughout the area, assisted by the continuity of the SDF grant scheme.

The Grant Panel are members of the Council of Partners and the Executive. The Panel comprises: Sir Charles Nunneley (chairman), Henry Wilson, Brian Langer, and Rowan Whimster thus ensuring expertise is available in finance, land management, community development and the historic environment.

**THE PROJECTS**

**Avebury World Heritage Site Residents Pack.** Kennet District Council received £9,691 to create a comprehensive pack for people living and working in the World Heritage Site. This project involved young people and residents to deepen awareness and appreciation of the varied significance of Avebury and the surrounding area, build positive partnerships and foster sustainable management of the outstanding heritage and its closely linked landscape.

**Boosting Butterflies in the North Wessex Downs.** Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys Countryside Project (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) received £8,065 to carry out detailed research of chalk grassland butterflies in the North Wessex Downs AONB. FWAG, the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre and the Butterfly Conservation Society collated all the existing chalk grassland butterfly data and tested the distribution of key butterflies against the remaining chalk grassland in the Letcombe Regis target area and across the chalk downs within the AONB. A new group interested in butterfly conservation has been set up.

**Buckleybury Parish Plan.** Buckleybury Parish Council received £850 to help with the publication and distribution of the Parish Plan, helping local people to have a wider understanding of the unique qualities of the North Wessex Downs.

**Countryside education visits in the North Wessex Downs.** Hampshire Country Learning received £10,950 to enable farmers and landowners to host educational visits by school children to the countryside, and to set up a new website linking schools with farms and estates. The project included in-school sessions with groups of children and their teachers before and after their on-farm visit. The website www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/education offers teachers information about farms to visit with their school groups.
Earth heritage in West Berkshire. The Berkshire RIGS group received £5,000 for a project to enable people to discover and appreciate the rich geological heritage in the North Wessex Downs area of West Berkshire. Through walks, talks and events, the Berkshire RIGS group recruited and trained 20 people in recording and conserving geological heritage, surveyed regionally important geological sites and provided environmental stewardship advice to landowners. The project exceeded expectations and will ensure a sustainable group continues to research and maintain areas of geological importance in West Berkshire.

Flavours of the Thames Valley. The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Food Groups received £1,000 to support the annual trade event to showcase local produce with retailers, chefs, restaurateurs and the hospitality sector. The event featured producers from the Hampshire and Wiltshire areas of the North Wessex Downs. The event was attended by 134 businesses, including 22 exhibitors who said that at least £13,000 worth of new business had been developed.

Future Fuels – Savernake Forest. RFET Wiltshire Outreach received £5,471 to deliver, with BTCV Wessex, a project where adults living with or recovering from mental health difficulties and young people at risk of exclusion worked in separate phases of the project to restore Charcoal Burners Ride in Savernake Forest, Wiltshire. The project continues to attract youth groups and improve the biodiversity of the Forest.

Grazing animals in the North Wessex Downs. Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group received £7,550 for this project to encourage more grazing of sheep on the priority chalk grassland areas of the North Wessex Downs. The project promoted the website www.sheepkeep.co.uk which provides an information sharing service for graziers with sheep and landowners.


Local Geodiversity Action Plan for the North Wessex Downs. Oxfordshire Geology Trust received £16,200 to carry out research across the North Wessex Downs AONB and develop a draft Local Geodiversity Action Plan (LGAP) to provide a framework for the future conservation and promotion of local geodiversity. The LGAP will inform and influence a wide range of activities including planning, use of natural resources, habitat improvements, and celebrating local character to attract visitors.

Vale of Pewsey: access all areas. BTCV Wessex received £4,720 to run a residential project enabling young people from towns close to the North Wessex Downs, and at risk of serious social exclusion, to carry out useful projects in the protected landscape and learn new practical and social skills. The groups lived on British Waterways Board narrow boats, carried out pathway improvements and built picnic tables to be sited alongside the Kennet & Avon Canal.

Yatesbury Organic Farm visitors leaflet. The Soil Association received £975 to design and print a leaflet about Yatesbury Organic Farm so that visitors learn more about organic farming in the North Wessex Downs and the Avebury World Heritage Site.
Planning Progress

Regional planning
The South East Plan (the Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East) and the South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) both provide a framework for the development of their respective regions up to 2026.

It is important for the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership (including its constituent local planning authorities) that the regional spatial strategies contain the right messages and policies for this area. Also, as the North Wessex Downs AONB straddles the two regions, it is vital that there is consistency between the regional spatial strategies in order to avoid conflicting policy approaches across the AONB.

The second draft of the South East Plan was subject to formal consultation in 2006 and the Planning Policy Advisor led the collective response on behalf of all the AONBs in the South East. We also made formal representations on both South East and South West Plans on behalf of the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership. These responses were considered at Examinations in Public in each area. The final reports are awaited.

Local planning
We worked with colleagues in the districts on the early stages of Local Development Framework preparation and contributed to Statements of Community Involvement, Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Reports, and Core Strategy Issues and Options consultations. Work also took place with West Berkshire Council to develop new policies, which will be included in the Council’s local development documents (LDDs). It is hoped that this will encourage the Planning Officers Working Group to develop model policies to ensure a consistent approach to the North Wessex Downs AONB in LDDs throughout the area.

Landscape Sensitivity Study for Wind Turbines
A Statement of Consultation was produced for the Landscape Sensitivity Study, demonstrating how the local community and other key stakeholders were consulted. This should ensure the Study becomes part of the evidence base in the new planning system. In June 2007, the Study was used in the preparation of a response from the Council of Partners to a wind turbine proposal in West Berkshire.

Undergrounding overhead wires
Four proposed schemes for undergrounding overhead lines were sent to Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) for their consideration under Ofgem’s funding package of £4.1 million for AONBs and National Parks in central southern England. These comprised proposals at Avebury World Heritage Site, Watership Down, Little London and Blewbury.
More than halfway into the five-year North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan, now is a good time to review progress and to plot a way forward for the rest of the Plan period.

It is clear that the environmental, economic and social background against which the Management Plan was prepared in 2002-03 has changed. There are new programmes for land management and a new framework for land use planning, the new government agency (Natural England) with new priorities to be taken account of, and increasing concerns about the changing climate.

In December 2006 and February 2007 Management Plan Review working groups met to review and assess the actions achieved, identify gaps in activity and new issues to be addressed, and identify the priorities for action that have changed since the original plan was drafted.

Of a total of 90 actions in the Management Plan, 27 have been completed and work is underway on a further 45. Just 18 are awaiting any action. By all measures, this represents really good progress on behalf of the Partnership in just three years.

A few of the priorities for action over the next few years are outlined below. The full list is on our website.

Raise the profile of the North Wessex Downs and the work of the AONB Partnership.

Engage local people with their local environment and with the work of the North Wessex Downs AONB team, through parish planning and mapping, the arts, schools, promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Manage and mitigate the impacts of climate change and assess the potential impact of climate change on the management of land in the North Wessex Downs.

Provide more guidance on the potential economic impact of energy crops, and the sensitivity of the North Wessex Downs landscape to accommodate them.

Support the rural economy, taking forward the recommendations from the horse racing industry study, promoting local consumption of woodland products/use of wood fuel, and supporting farm diversification.

Liaise with tourism destination partnerships and with rights of way and leisure officers to encourage sustainable tourism and countryside recreation.

The North Wessex Downs AONB team is already starting to tackle these issues and is looking to partners to become increasingly involved in the future. If we are successful with our bid for LEADER funding during 2007-08, this could provide the support and impetus to involve and engage a much wider partnership in addressing more priorities for action.

The results of the Management Plan Review groups will feed into the formal review of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan. Our aim is to produce a new plan that is as highly regarded as the original and that will meet the needs of the North Wessex Downs for another five years.

Illustrative map of the North Wessex Downs AONB by Sue Reynolds
# Financial Statement 2006 - 2007

## CORE

### INCOME

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**TOTAL INCOME**  
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**TOTAL EXPENDITURE**  
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## PROJECTS

### INCOME

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**TOTAL INCOME**  
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**TOTAL EXPENDITURE**  
£161,921
The North Wessex Downs AONB team supports and works with the Council of Partners and the Executive Committee to:
- Provide a focus and central information base for the North Wessex Downs 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.

Contact the team in the following ways:

Fiona Newcombe, Director: 01488 680454, fionanewcombe@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Belinda Fowler, Assistant Director: 01488 680452, belindafowler@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Heather White, Development Officer: 01488 680450, heatherwhite@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Caroline Kaneen, Information Officer: 01488 680451, carolinekaneen@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Alison Leese, Admin and Finance Officer: 01488 685440, alisonleese@northwessexdowns.org.uk

The Executive Committee consists of individuals with a variety of skills appointed by the Council of Partners. They have 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 Executive Committee met on 20 June, 29 August, 17 October, 5 December 2006 and 6 March 2007.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Forum meets annually to discuss issues to be addressed through the work of the Executive and North Wessex Downs AONB team. The Forum met in May 2006 at The Bouverie Hall, Pewsey, Wiltshire to discuss Our Villages: Vibrant, Valuable and Vulnerable.

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

The Council of Partners has a responsibility to:
- Advise on and co-ordinate the work of the constituent local authorities.
- Prepare, produce and implement the AONB Management Plan.
- Promote the unique identity of the AONB.
- Secure sufficient funding for AONB activities.
- Raise the profile and increase the understanding of the AONB.


Visit to Wayland’s Smithy during Europarc 2006
Council of Partners

Chairman
Sir Charles Nunneley

Funding Partners
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Hampshire County Council
Kennet District Council
Natural England
(the Countryside Agency and English Nature)
North Wiltshire District Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Swindon Borough Council
Test Valley Borough Council
Vale of White Horse District Council
West Berkshire Council
Wiltshire County Council

Representing the interests of:
Community and Parish
Committee for Rural Hampshire
Community Council for Berkshire
Friends of Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys
Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Overton Parish Council

Farming and Rural Business
Axis Farming
Country Land and Business Association
Forestry Commission
Government Office for the South East
National Farmers’ Union

Historic Environment
Council for British Archaeology
English Heritage

Nature Conservation
Action for the River Kennet (from January 2007)
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Natural England
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (to December 2006)

Recreation and Rural Tourism
Friends of the Ridgeway
Ramblers’ Association

Executive Committee

David Carman (Chairman)
Garry King (Vice-Chairman)
Rupert Ashby (from November 2006)
Andrew Bennett (from July 2006)
Christopher Boreham
Duncan Coe
Alistair Heliwell (from October 2006)
Jeremy Sandell
Deborah Tann (from August 2006)
Harry Barton (to July 2006)
Graham Bryant (to August 2006)
Andrew Davis (to July 2006)
Alex Green (to May 2006)
Richard Clarke (ex officio to December 2006)
Fiona Newcombe (ex officio from January 2007)
Sir Charles Nunneley (ex officio)