Chairman’s Foreword

Six years after the CRoW Act formalised the management of AONBs, they remain a mystery to the general public, but lack of recognition has not prevented them fulfilling their role as cost-effective guardians on the public’s behalf of many of Britain’s most cherished landscapes. The North Wessex Downs AONB, as one of the largest and most influential, plays its full part, both locally and nationally. During the year under review we have continued the programme of implementing our first Management Plan, launched in 2004. The following pages give details of our work, which has been achieved in spite of staff shortages and the customary funding restraints.

The first half of 2008/09 has seen some encouraging developments. We have recruited a number of first-class additions to our team; we have been successful in raising substantial Leader funding from both SEEDA and SWRDA; we are engaged in discussions with Natural England and our other funding partners about moving to three-year rolling funding; and we have embarked upon the testing process of the first statutory review and revision of our Management Plan.

As always, my heartfelt thanks go to those who do all the hard work: our partners, especially those on the Council, and their officers, our Executive Committee, and our team, who remain wholly admirable in achieving so much with such limited resources.

Sir Charles Nunneley
Chairman
Council of Partners

Report from the Chairman of the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee provides the link between the Council of Partners and the North Wessex Downs team in their primary responsibilities: the preparation, review and delivery of the Management Plan.

The deadline for completing the review of the Management Plan by September 2009 is fast approaching. Although things may appear to have been fairly quiet on this front, a great deal of work has been going on behind the scenes, all leading towards stakeholder events in November. For example, I have just come from a meeting to look at the further development of an interactive, web-based Management Plan for the North Wessex Downs. This is an innovative project that has captured the interest of Natural England, who are now partners in its creation. We aim to launch the web-based Plan at the same time as the revised paper based Plan in 2009. After its launch, anyone will be able to access a wealth of information, guidance and policy about the landscape, biodiversity, historic environment and socio-economic characteristics of the North Wessex Downs.

We envisage that the web-based plan will be of interest to other AONBs, providing a model for Management Plans in the future. We are, after all, just one member of a large family of protected landscapes and we can learn a great deal from the experience and knowledge of others. We were able to do just that with the co-hosting, with Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, of the 2007 Annual Conference of the National Association for AONBs. Delegates from across the country left with a very positive impression of the North Wessex Downs.

I would like to acknowledge the help and support given to the team by all the Executive Committee members, and to congratulate the team, who have continued to work to a very high standard in the interests of the wider North Wessex Downs Partnership.

David Carman
Chairman
Executive Committee

Sir Charles Nunneley helping at the ARK Trout release
It has been a busy and exciting year in the North Wessex Downs AONB. During our first five years we worked closely with land managers as the custodians of this wonderful landscape. This year, in addition to continuing our close relationships with land managers, we have worked more closely with communities and businesses to protect the landscape. As a result, many people from across the North Wessex Downs helped develop our bids for Leader funding. I am delighted that the bids were successful, and that we have been awarded £2.5 million over five years to distribute in grants for farmers, communities and businesses to secure a sustainable future for the landscape.

Within the North Wessex Downs AONB team, we have welcomed Liz Alexander as our Planning Advisor, Liz Duquenoy as the Office Manager and John Tabor as Assistant Director. All have brought a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and knowledge of the North Wessex Downs. I wish to thank the team members who have departed over the year for the strong legacy they have left.

The first North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan was extremely well received on its publication in 2004. I have been impressed by how many of its actions have been implemented by a variety of people. We are now working with many organisations on the publication of the next Management Plan. We wish to build on the achievements of the existing plan, and reflect the increased activity in new areas.

One such area is climate change. The North Wessex Downs AONB has a key role to play in supporting the generation of renewable energy in an appropriate way, so that the landscape’s special qualities are not damaged. For example, we have provided guidance to land managers on the siting of energy crops. The Leader programme will also provide funding for delivering renewable energy, such as woodfuel systems.

Many partners are also working hard on ways to adapt to the changing climate. For example, through the Catchment Sensitive Farming project, many farmers have implemented action to reduce run-off from fields during increased rainfall, which will lead to improved water quality of the Kennet and Lambourn rivers.

On behalf of the team, I would like to thank all those who have worked to protect and enhance the North Wessex Downs over the last year. We work with all interested in the North Wessex Downs and would like to encourage anybody who wishes to be involved to contact us.

Fiona Newcombe
Director
Projects in The North Wessex Downs AONB

Introduction

Project work undertaken by the North Wessex Downs AONB team during 2007/08 has been made possible through the financial support of Natural England and our constituent local authorities. The delivery of projects has been achieved through effective partnership working with local organisations.

The projects featured below are those initiated or assisted by the North Wessex Downs team.

Downland Heritage Initiative Projects

In partnership with Hampshire FWAG, small scale farm based projects were identified at four farm locations. Funding totalling £19,456 was allocated which enabled the repair of fencing, scrub clearance and the installation of water stations. This helped the farmers to sustain and improve the delivery of grazing.

Arable Strategy

Consultants were engaged to research and produce an Arable Strategy for the North Wessex Downs. This important strategy complements the previously published Chalk Grassland Strategy. It identifies the extent of arable farming in the North Wessex Downs AONB and proposes a series of actions to support it. The ‘hot spots’ of arable farming, identified in the strategy, will be important in working to deliver other projects such as the encouragement of farmland birds and arable plants, highlighting the extent of resource and potential for landscape-scale working.
Downland Heritage Initiative Website

To act as a central information resource for the farming community in the Downland Heritage Initiative area, a website has been commissioned. It is intended that, once designed and published, the site will become an important information resource for the farming community on environmental conservation issues.

Farm Environmental Health Checks

Fourteen farm environmental health checks were carried out by Hampshire and Wiltshire FWAG advisors. These comprehensive farm visits raised awareness of cross compliance, waste regulations and agri-environment issues, helping farmers to ensure that their operations complied with current regulations and best practice. Each farmer was provided with an action plan to address any potential issues.

Reconnecting Communities

With financial contributions from Natural England, Swindon Borough Council, and Oxfordshire County Council, the Ridgeway National Trail Team was engaged to devise four circular routes centred on the Ridgeway. The four routes were aimed at families wishing to explore the countryside. Initial maintenance and improvement work was undertaken to ensure the routes were in an appropriate condition. Route information is downloadable from the National Trail website and from other partner authorities’ web sites; it is also available in leaflet form from a range of outlets in the area. The popularity of the routes has exceeded expectations with over 200 visits to the website during the first three weeks after the information became available.

Woodland Archaeology

Further training was held for volunteers in surveying and recording archaeological and historic features. With the training undertaken during 2006/07, a total of over 100 volunteers have completed the course.

Woodland Archaeology training at Hampstead Norreys
The Sustainable Development Fund is a grant scheme administered by the North Wessex Downs AONB and funded by DEFRA through Natural England. Almost anyone can apply but successful applicants will have been able to demonstrate a principle of sustainability and a central aim to help conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs AONB.

In 2007-08 £63,000 was awarded to 17 projects with an estimated total value of £133,233. The projects are;

**The Northmoor Trust**  
Guide to the Broad Arboretum and footpath link on the Northmoor Trust Estate

**Oxfordshire Geology Trust**  
Diversity in Stone leaflet

**Goring & Streatley Sustainability Group**  
Study of turbine technology to be used in the River Thames for energy generation

**Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust**  
Toolkit for Parish Plans

**West Berkshire Council’s Countryside Service**  
Footpath improvement in Lambourn

**Sheepdrove Organic Farm**  
Bat project working with local schools

**Wiltshire Geology Group**  
Illustrated guide to the landscape and geology of the Vale of Pewsey

**Hampshire Country Learning**  
Cooking and local food project with six primary schools in West Berkshire

**Richmond Fellowship**  
Schools project monitoring wildlife at Hat Gate Nature Reserve, Mud Lane and Savernake Forest

**Sheepdrove Organic Farm**  
Farm visits for Trinity School, Newbury

**Berkshire RIGS group**  
Carrying out actions from Local Geodiversity Action Plan

**Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys Countryside Project**  
Improving habitats for barn owls

**Tidmarsh with Sulham Parish Planning Group**  
Publication and dissemination of the Parish Plan

**Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys Countryside Project**  
Programme of coppicing and hedgelaying training engaging members of the local communities

**Action for the River Kennet (ARK)**  
‘Trout in the classroom’ project

**Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes**  
Walking guide to the Wiltshire area of the North Wessex Downs AONB

**Wiltshire Wildlife Trust**  
Project to increase the water vole populations on the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal
Trout in the Classroom
A Case Study

Action for the River Kennet (ARK) received a £2,253 grant to set up a ‘trout in the classroom’ project with Ramsbury and Preshute primary schools on the River Kennet in Wiltshire. Local (Kennet valley) brown trout eggs were brought into the classroom in specially adapted fish tanks which replicated conditions in a fast-flowing chalk stream. The children looked after the eggs until they hatched and then cared for the fish until they were released into the River Kennet in the spring.

Children’s learning experiences included appreciating the significance of water as a valuable resource, the habitats for brown trout, and how chalk streams and their wildlife play their part in the ecosystem of the North Wessex Downs AONB. The hands-on nature of this project created a real understanding of brown trout and their place in the ecology of the River Kennet. The children understand that conservation includes what’s on their doorstep.

Lambourn Primary Goes Bats
A Case Study

Sheepdrome Organic Farm received a £447.77 grant to work with Lambourn Church of England Primary School on a project to encourage school children to have greater understanding of bats and their habitats, and establish a network of bat boxes linking the school with local gardens and Sheepdrome Farm. This was an exciting project for the teachers and children. Head teacher Peter Shelton said: “The bats have inspired the children in their work...and will keep the children interested in conservation for many years.” During the project the children visited local farmland for the first time and learnt to appreciate and enjoy the countryside and wildlife.
Regional Planning

An important part of the Planning Advisor’s role will be responding to the Government’s comments on the South East Plan (the Regional Spatial Strategy) and the South West Regional Spatial Strategy. These are key documents which provide a vision for the future development of the South East and South West Regions to 2026. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership has played an active role in responding to earlier drafts of the Regional Spatial Strategies to help to ensure that they contain the right messages and policies for the North Wessex Downs AONB. As the North Wessex Downs straddles two regions it is vital that there is consistency of policy approach between the two regions.

Public consultation on the Government’s comments ends in October 2008. After considering any further views which are raised as a result of this consultation, both the Plans are due to be finalised by the end of 2008.

Renewable Energy

As part of the Government’s long term goals to reduce CO₂ emissions, the UK has signed up to an EU renewable energy target which would ensure that, by 2020, 15% of the UK’s energy consumption is provided from renewable sources. This is likely to lead to increasing pressure for wind turbine development.

The Landscape Sensitivity study for wind turbines for the North Wessex Downs AONB was completed in 2006. This shows that all landscapes within the North Wessex Downs are constrained to some degree and that wind energy developments could potentially have a considerable impact upon the landscape. National and regional guidance states that smaller scale wind energy developments could have a role to play within AONBs, and so research will take place this year to develop guidance for the North Wessex Downs on the smaller scale turbines. This policy will set out some principles to steer wind turbine development, including guidance on the appropriate height, form and scale. It will also guide it towards locations that minimise impacts on the natural environment as a whole.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership has been actively involved in objecting to a wind turbine proposal in West Berkshire. The case has now been referred to a planning appeal, and the Partnership has been invited to submit further comments as evidence.

Local Planning

The Planning Advisor works with colleagues in the local authorities across the North Wessex Downs, to help ensure a consistent approach to development management and policy development across the area. This includes getting involved in all stages of the Local Development Framework process where appropriate, to make a positive contribution in support of the AONB’s aims. It also involves commenting on development proposals if these have significance in terms of their size or cumulative impact.

The Planning Officers’ Working Group for the North Wessex Downs AONB is being re-established, involving representatives from the 11 local authorities within the North Wessex Downs. This group will help to ensure that North Wessex Downs AONB issues are fully reflected in the planning approaches of the individual planning authorities, and will initially focus on work on the Regional Spatial Strategies and renewable energy policy, as well as developing a consistent approach to North Wessex Downs AONB policy within Core Strategies.
The Management Plan is the vital strategic document for the North Wessex Downs AONB. It sets a framework for the local delivery of policy and actions, in support of national agendas, and reflects the environmental, economic and social issues that are important to the North Wessex Downs. The Plan is for everybody in the North Wessex Downs AONB.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan was first published in 2004 covering the period up to 2009. It is now necessary to review the Plan to ensure its policies and action plan reflect current issues for the North Wessex Downs and to plan for its future. For the review to be successful, it is essential that we engage with a wide range of people, including farmers, local communities, businesses, charities, government bodies, and local authorities.

The process of reviewing the existing Plan commenced during 2007/08. A series of community consultation workshops were held during 2007 to engage stakeholders; further consultation will be carried out during 2008/09 prior to the drafting, publication and adoption of the new Plan during July 2009. The process of reviewing the Plan will involve undertaking a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Plan’s policies and actions to ensure that they have a positive impact on the environment. Similarly an Appropriate Assessment of the impact of the policies on the five sites within the North Wessex Downs AONB with European designation will be undertaken. Once adopted by the eleven partner Local Authorities, the revised Management Plan will be formally submitted to the Secretary of State in September 2009.

*Illustrative map of the North Wessex Downs AONB by Sue Reynolds*
## CORE

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**TOTAL INCOME** £333,640

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**TOTAL EXPENDITURE** £331,717

## PROJECTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND

### INCOME

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**TOTAL INCOME** £132,592

### EXPENDITURE

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**TOTAL EXPENDITURE** £132,242
Who’s Who

The North Wessex Downs AONB Team and how governance works

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

Fiona Newcombe, Director: 01488 680454; email: fionanewcombe@northwessexdowns.org.uk
John Tabor, Assistant Director: 01488 680452; email: johntabor@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Liz Alexander, Planning Advisor: 01488 680455; email: lizalexander@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Caroline Kaneen, Information Officer 01488 680451; email: carolinekaneen@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Liz Duquenoy, Office Manager: 01488 685440, email: elizabethduquenoy@northwessexdowns.org.uk

The 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.

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

The Council of Partners includes representatives of the 11 local authorities that have administrative responsibilities for the area covered by the North Wessex Downs AONB. It also includes representatives of Natural England, community and parish councils, farming and rural business, historic environment, nature conservation, rural recreation and tourism. The complete list is on the back cover of this document and on www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

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.


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 24 April, 12 June, 28 August, 7 December 2007 and 4 March 2008. A list of the Executive Committee members is given on the back cover of this document.

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 2007 at Ashton Tirrold and Upthorpe Village Hall, Oxfordshire to discuss ‘Climate Changing the North Wessex Downs’.

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, and community action and special interest groups. Forum members nominate candidates from the interest groups to serve as Advisory Members on the Council of Partners.
Council of Partners

Chairman
Sir Charles Nunneley

Funding Partners
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 District Council
West Berkshire Council
Wiltshire County Council
The Countryside Agency/Natural England

Representing the interests of:
Community and Parish
Committee for Rural Hampshire
Community Council for Berkshire
Friends of Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys
Hungerford Town Council
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
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Action for the River Kennet

Recreation and Rural Tourism
Friends of the Ridgeway

Executive Committee

David Carman (Chairman)
Garry King (Vice-Chairman)
Andrew Bennett
Sir Charles Nunneley (ex officio)
Fiona Newcombe
Christopher Boreham
Duncan Coe
Jeremy Sandell
Deborah Tann
Alistair Helliwell
Rupert Ashby

North Wessex Downs AONB
Denford Manor, Lower Denford
Hungerford RG17 0UN
T: 01488 685440
E-mail: info@northwessexdowns.org.uk
www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

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