NORTH WESSEX DOWNS
ANNUAL REVIEW
2011-2012

NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

NATURAL ENGLAND

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NORTH WESSEX DOWNS
One of the AONB Family
Highlights of the year

- We distributed a record £58,656.43 to support 20 community projects from our Sustainable Development Fund (SDF). This was matched by some £78,776.60 of external funding. That’s an injection of £137,433.03 to North Wessex Downs communities.

- The North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme awarded £486,000 to 15 projects. Over £1 million of grant money has been awarded to 47 projects since the start of the Programme.

- A series of hand-painted images of the icons of the North Wessex Downs were formally unveiled to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the AONB.

- We responded to and were involved with four planning appeals, all of which were decided in our favour.
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Chairman’s Introduction

As a resident of Wanborough, right on the northern fringe of the North Wessex Downs, I am familiar with the need to reconcile statutory responsibilities to conserve and enhance the countryside, its wildlife and heritage with the needs of local people, farming and businesses.

Those who manage the land in our North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Beauty are central to its appearance and qualities. They are its custodians, but they and their families need a viable economic future.

The many projects reported on in this annual review prove over and over again there is a wealth of imagination and initiative locally to create a viable economic future that can help conserve and enhance the AONB.

This is well shown in the responsible tourism sector in and around the North Wessex Downs – from our World Heritage Site at Avebury to Watership Down --that is demonstrating how partnership working can help support economic prosperity and a win-win situation for the environment, public enjoyment, wildlife conservation and a growing appreciation of our heritage.

The sections in this Report show how a broad but committed partnership between communities, landowners, businesses, special interest groups, and the public sector from the parish to the county level, with a dedicated team of officers across different disciplines, can and do work together to ensure that the North Wessex Downs stay an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We must continue to demonstrate good value for money, proving that the AONB partnership is a worthwhile investment for the future.

Byron Carron, Chairman, Council of Partners
Statement from the Chairman of the Working Group

Despite the on-going turbulence created by the severe economic restraints, I am sure you will agree that this review encapsulates yet another full and successful year for North Wessex Downs AONB. By the end of the year we were ideally placed to begin celebrations for 40 years of the AONB’s designation.

The following pages provide many highlights showing how the Partnership is delivering real value for money and working with others at both a local and national level for the benefit of the North Wessex Downs and those that live and work in and visit this unique landscape.

I am proud that this work has been enthusiastically supported by a wide range of individuals, community and interest groups, local and national organisations and, of course, the dedicated AONB Team, who have worked very hard with our partners to achieve so much – my thanks to you all.

Our tranquil and breath-taking scenery is cherished by many people and it is rightly celebrated. But we must remember that landscapes are much more than just the view. Our distinctive landscapes are the result of a close collaboration between people and nature over many generations and it is a relationship underpinned by land-based activities such as agriculture, woodland management, wildlife conservation, field sports and particular local specialties such as the racing industry.

Responsible land-based activities are vital for the continued management and evolution of our landscapes, for the sustainable provision of our essential needs – food, water, energy, employment, tourism, residential and business development – and for the long-term vibrancy of our rural economies.

Richard Broadhead*
Chairman, Management Working Group
*On behalf of Duncan Coe, who chaired the Management Working Group 2011-12 but has since stepped down.
Enhancing Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Management

The North Wessex Downs has a range of ecologically important habitats – chalk grasslands and chalk rivers, semi-natural broadleaved woodlands, biodiversity-rich farmland and arable hotspots.

We are the third largest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) the United Kingdom, but with a population of only 125,000 within our boundaries. Some 84 per cent of North Wessex Downs landscape is farmed and just over 13 per cent of the landscape is wooded (45 per cent of these woodlands are designated for wildlife value).

We also proudly boast 66 sites of special scientific interest and have a wealth of important archaeological and historic sites including Averbury World Heritage site (pictured on the front cover) and the Uffington White Horse.

Our area is also home to the second most important centre for the racehorse industry in Britain.

In common with all the AONB family, the North Wessex Downs AONB has a statutory Vision and Management Plan to guide the sustainable future for the landscape, achieved through partnership working, and below are some of our achievements in 2011-12.
The Big Chalk

In May 2011, with the development of the Big Chalk project, we shifted our strategy away from a North Wessex Downs-wide Downland Heritage Initiative (DHI) towards multiple local target areas, where local resources and commitment are focused, and where we can also achieve wider strategic collaboration with partners beyond our boundaries.

In April our Director Henry Oliver was accompanied by Dr Rowan Whimster, representative of the Historic Environment Interest Group on the Council of Partners, at a meeting with the Minister responsible AONBs, Richard Benyon MP. The case for creating a truly landscape-scale initiative was outlined to the Minister. With our partners from Dorset AONB, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and the Ministry of Defence, we expressed our ambition for organisations to work in partnership towards shared conservation goals across the full extent of chalk habitats of southern England. The Minister showed great interest, and suggested that we propose the Big Chalk as one of a dozen or so Ecological Restoration Zones (ERZs), later renamed Nature Improvement Areas to be selected following the Natural Environment White Paper.

With support from MoD contractors Landmarc, a meeting was convened at Westdown Camp on Salisbury Plain. This was attended by representatives of over 100 groups to identify a common vision for the concept. In July a steering group started work on the Stage 1 application to become a Nature Improvement Area (NIA). Having been approved, this was followed by a Stage 2 business plan, a portfolio of a number of projects under the Big Chalk umbrella.

Our own Oliver Cripps also contributed expertise to the development of the Marlborough Downs NIA bid, assisting the project coordinator Jemma Batten to develop a community engagement strategy.

Incredibly, three of the final 15 national entries were based partly or wholly in the North Wessex Downs. Unfortunately Big Chalk and the Hampshire Farmers bids were unsuccessful, but Marlborough Downs NIA was approved as one of the final 12 areas, as was Wild Purbeck, at the southern extremity of the Big Chalk area.

For the Big Chalk NIA to fall at the last hurdle was extremely disappointing for us after the huge efforts put in on the various stages of the bid. In retrospect it was perhaps predictable that no more than one NIA covering a single AONB would be selected, given the need for national coverage. In spite of this, Natural England did encourage the Big Chalk partnership to further develop our proposal. A sum of money was offered for the next year which we are hoping to use to deliver limited outputs from the Big Chalk business plan.
Chalk Scrapes and the Stepping Stones Project

Staff visited Magdalen Hill Down in Hampshire with Charles Flower, pioneering wildflower farmer in the North Wessex Downs and owner of Charles Flower Wildflowers to look at the creation and management of scrapes on chalk grassland specifically aimed at butterfly conservation. It was hoped that this work, known as the Stepping Stones Project and managed together with neighbouring Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs AONB, would inform the development of landscape-scale conservation initiatives based on the principles from Sir John Lawton’s report to Government Making Space for Nature of ‘bigger, better and more joined up’ conservation management.

The Stepping Stones objectives are:

- To connect high quality wildlife hotspots, such as wildlife sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves, by creating habitat links and stepping stones of habitat so that individual creatures and species can move from one to the other, thereby expanding their range.
- To enhance the areas around the best wildlife sites, buffering valuable habitat.
- To create spaces for collaboration and sharing best practice.
- To gain the involvement of local volunteers and organisations in the design, delivery and monitoring of the project.

Farmland Birds

We helped create the Best Farmland Bird Album in the World Ever CD, produced with our partners at Natural England, RSPB and the Cotswolds and Cranborne and Chase West Wiltshire Downs AONBs, as part of the South West Farmland Bird Initiative (SWFBI). This features calls of 52 species, including the target species that form the focus of the South West and North Wessex Farmland Birds projects. It is aimed primarily at farmers, land managers and others contacted by our Farmland Bird Advisors, in the hope that it will improve awareness and appreciation of the species they are helping to conserve by choosing the best agri-environment options.

The initial funding for the project in the part of the North Wessex Downs that lies in Wiltshire came to an end in March 2012. So, too, did the funding for the more recent sister North Wessex Farmland Bird Project covering those parts of the AONB that lie in the former SE region (Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire). Funding has been secured to extend the project for another year, with one project officer covering the entire North Wessex Downs AONB under the project title of SWFBI North Wessex Farmland Bird Project.

SWFBI has generated great interest countrywide to the extent that Diane Nicolle, North Wessex Farmland Bird Advisor for the eastern counties in the AONB, working with colleagues in the
RSPB Brighton office, enabled 10 farms in the project area to have full surveys (free of charge) carried out by volunteers over the spring/summer.

**Woodland**

Unfortunately our bid to LEADER for funding to provide training in sustainable woodland management was rejected. It was disappointing, as we had sought to establish a precedent for this type of project among other AONBs and discussed the training with other RDPE-funded agencies. However, time spent developing the proposal with Sylva Foundation, Forestry Commission and others will not be wasted as we look into alternative sources of support.

We also held talks with partners in the South West regarding a potential Heritage Lottery Fund bid for a woodland habitat project, based on a similar principle to the South West Farmland Bird Initiative. Ultimately it was decided that the focus of this particular proposal was too narrow for the Protected Landscapes to add their support.

Staff helped to gather and disseminate good practice in sustainable woodland management from projects such as Neroche in Somerset.

**Stonebridge Meadow Project**

Following the acquisition last year of Stonebridge Meadow in Marlborough by Action for the River Kennet and Marlborough Town Council, we provided a small amount of grant funding to expedite site surveys and work on a management plan. Initial surveys have identified a number of female black poplars on the site, and we would like to explore opportunities to conserve and expand this population in the North Wessex Downs.

**Local Nature Partnerships**

We have been supporting emerging Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) in Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire. The ambition for LNPs is that they will help their local area to manage the natural environment as a system and to embed its value in local decisions for the benefit of nature, people and the economy. To do this effectively they will need to be self-sustaining strategic partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people with the credibility to work with and influence other local strategic decision makers. A full update has been made available on the AONB website.
Conserving Natural Resources and Protecting the Historic Environment

The North Wessex Downs has been shaped for centuries by the changing patterns of land use and settlement. We must work to protect, manage and promote the quality of our air, water, soils and biological resources and both the vital natural features and the ancient man-made landscapes that characterise our special areas.

Avebury World Heritage Site

The protection of archaeological assets and the enhancement of their landscape setting have been greatly enhanced by two projects in which AONB staff have played an important role.

The Woodland Strategy funded by Natural England and led by the National Trust addresses the impact of woodland, trees and scrub on the monuments, their settings and important inter-relationships with the overarching aim of protecting and enhancing the site’s outstanding universal value. The strategy is based on documentary research, site visits and complex digital viewshed analysis. It provides advice to landowners, agencies and managers on removal, management and planting. It also informs projects such as the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area (NIA).

The undergrounding of cables at Overton Hill was a public-private partnership with Scottish and Southern Electricity. It has greatly enhanced the eastern gateway to the World Heritage Site and the setting of the Overton Hill Bronze Age barrow cemetery, the Sanctuary, and West Kennet Avenue.

The National Trust and the BBC collaborated to restore Avebury Manor in 2011 which culminated in a television series on the restoration process. The Manor had previously stood empty for some time but is now open for the public to enjoy and appreciate. Visitor numbers to the Museum and
Barn Gallery have increased as those visiting the Manor gain an insight into the wider historic landscape.

**Historic Landscape Character**

We appointed Emma Rouse of Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy to undertake work on historic landscape character in the North Wessex Downs. This will draw together the information already available and put it into a form much more readily useable by us and others. A large element of the work is to undertake initial work on settlements, which were excluded from some of the previous work, and develop a method for more detailed characterisation that could be applied by communities themselves.

**Five Mile Re-fencing Project**

AONB staff liaised with Natural England staff and local landowners in the north of the AONB to progress a large (five-mile) (re)fencing project on SSSI grassland that is owned by an arable farmer and grazed by sheep belonging to one of his neighbours. The project was complicated by steep slopes and the need to remove the eyesore of existing broken fences. We helped the project to completion by offering a grant to cover part of the extra costs.
Encouraging Appropriate Development

Meeting the economic and housing needs of the AONB communities is vital to the long-term sustainability of our sparsely populated and tranquil landscape. However, there is a need to manage development pressures with great sensitivity both within and in areas bordering the AONB.

Although not having any decision-making powers, it is essential that the AONB Partnership plays an active role in planning issues affecting the North Wessex Downs. The AONB therefore seeks in its work to make a positive contribution to the planning process by heightening awareness of the special qualities of the North Wessex Downs and of the need to protect the landscape from inappropriate development. This is always done in the context of the AONB’s primary purpose – to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape.

Over the year we submitted comments on significant developments outside, but within the setting of the North Wessex Downs AONB, including large residential applications at Commonhead, Swindon; Grove; Cholsey; Ludgershall; Wallingford; Pincents Hill, Reading; and Didcot. We also made pre-application comments in respect of the proposed Ikea store at Calcot, on the eastern edge of the AONB and the redevelopment of Culham Science Centre outside but within the setting of the AONB. A particular pre-application consultation, which featured largely in the local press, was in relation to the proposed waste-to-energy plant at Chieveley.

In all the Planning Advisor responded in detail to some 143 planning applications, having been consulted on many hundreds of applications, and around 12 appeals.

We attended the West Berkshire Core Strategy Hearings to articulate our concerns about a proposal to build 2,100 houses in the North Wessex Downs AONB. We commissioned our own examination of the landscape sensitivity of potential development sites included in the Council’s
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to inform our position. In response to our concerns, the Hearing process was suspended. The Inspector stated:

*I could not conclude that this aspect of the Core Strategy is compliant with national policy because it is not apparent that great weight has been given to the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside.*

Accordingly, the Council had to prepare a new SHLAA (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment) together with a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment specific to sites in the North Wessex Downs AONB before the Hearing process could recommence.

**Minerals extraction**

We commented on proposed minerals sites outside the western edge of the AONB in the Calne, Heddington and Rowde area. There was a particular concern that these large mineral extraction sites could have a direct impact on the setting of the AONB from visual harm, noise, dust and pollution, lighting and increased traffic into the AONB.

We objected to the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy’s proposals for new road building both within the AONB and within its setting without due consideration to potential landscape and character impact. Specifically, these are the proposed Rowstock and Harwell Field link roads within the AONB and the proposed Wantage and Didcot link roads within the setting of the AONB. We also raised concerns over the potential of harm to the setting of the AONB from the proposed housing allocations at Wallingford and to the north east of Didcot.

**Planning Appeals**

We have responded to and been involved with four planning appeals, all of which were decided in our favour. Most inspectors give very supportive consideration to the statutory protection of this nationally protected landscape and our Management Plan.

**Planning Protocols and Position Statements**

As previously agreed through the Council of Partners and Management Working Group, planning protocols were circulated to all district, county and unitary planning authorities, and a further protocol agreed with local Natural England staff. The purpose of the Planning Protocols is to improve the flow of consultations on applications, policy and appeals between the planning authorities and the North Wessex Downs AONB team. The Position Statement on Setting was also agreed by the Council of Partners and work commenced on two further Position Statements on Renewable Energy and Housing.

**Parish and Community Planning**

We helped a number of communities in development of their community plans. Among these were Marlborough Community Area Plan and Aldworth Community Plan.
Supporting Communities

Through our own Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the North Wessex Downs LEADER programme, we have been able to progress one of our leading roles – that of enabling communities to develop sustainably by stimulating economic prosperity and local culture whilst also nurturing respect for the landscape.

The LEADER programme delivers funding from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme is run by a Local Action Group (LAG), comprising people from land-based business, commerce, public and charity sectors in the area. The Local Action Group sets the priority themes and makes the grant decisions.

In this financial year, the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme awarded £486,000 to 15 projects and it was expecting approximately 10 projects to be considered at the next appraisal panel to be held in May 2012. At the end of the year £184,000 of project funding remained.

Over £1 million of grant money has been awarded to 47 projects since the start of the Programme. The funding has supported a variety of initiatives as diverse as forestry and precision farming equipment, holiday lets and support for rural and community businesses.

The Local Action Group has begun to explore the legacy of the current programme and the opportunities that may be available for future LEADER funding beyond 2014.

Some of this year’s successful funded projects were:
A LEADER grant of **£50,000** was awarded to support the project to convert a former piggery into a farm shop together with associated facilities such as cold storage, car parking and a tea room.

The farm shop prides itself on locally sourced produce, including the farm’s own beef, eggs and game; indeed a condition of planning permission is that the shop must sell a minimum of 20% of the farm’s own produce. The new shop will employ three full time members of staff and will help safeguard two existing jobs.

**Business Development - Ridgeway Biologicals Ltd, Compton, Berkshire**

Ridgeway Biologicals Ltd specialises in the production of veterinary autogenous vaccines for use in food-making animals. A LEADER grant of **£42,797** was used to purchase new equipment and allow minor building works. The new equipment is being used primarily for the production of vaccines to control bovine mastitis and digital dermatitis – common diseases in dairy cattle with associated with high veterinary costs. The company estimate that the selling price to dairy farmers will be £5 per vaccine.

**Enjoying the North Wessex Downs**

**New Shepherd Hut - The Wilton Windmill Society, Wiltshire**

Two very small, dilapidated shepherd huts installed in the early 1900s were replaced by a bigger, purpose built shepherd hut designed to be in keeping with the windmill to enable greater use by schools and visitors. It provides an all-weather modern visitor centre. The Society received a LEADER grant of **£16,000** and had the hut ready for use for the busy Easter weekend in 2012. By encouraging more visitors, the Society hopes to ensure the long term future of the Windmill as well as providing a creative learning environment for local schools.
The Sustainable Development Fund

In 2011-2012, we contributed a record £58,656.43 to 20 community led and sustainability projects through the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF). This was matched by some £78,776.60 of external funding. Some of the projects are listed below:

East Woodhay Boardwalk

The East Woodhay boardwalk, supported by the SDF, opened with a community walk on 20 April. The AONB received fulsome thanks from the project organisers in associated publicity.

Breathe Barbury

SDF funding was also being considered for Breathe Barbury, a community interest company aiming to operate the proposed visitor centre at Barbury Castle. Working with Planning Solutions Consulting, a business plan was produced and staff plan to meet with with wider partners to push the development forward.

Some other SDF successes include:

- A series of ten leaflets showing how people in one of our largest neighbouring towns can get out to enjoy the landscape without a car were published as part of the Swindon Bus Walks project, using the North Wessex Downs AONB template. Initial feedback has been excellent.
- A further walk leaflet was also produced for Brightwalton Parish Council.
- The Around Three Valleys' book was published containing lots of interesting information about the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn areas.
- Aldworth Parish Plan was produced.
- Friends of the Railway Path were launched, a volunteer group who will be helping to maintain the Chiseldon to Marlborough cycle route, in association with Sustrans. We have been invited to join the Board.
- A series of events has been funded as part of a new children’s geology club known as 'Rock Detectives' (thanks to the North Pennines AONB for letting us use the name and logo).
- A grant was awarded to help the Fyfield and West Overton Landscape Group to publish a study of their parish in landscape terms.
- Oak Processionary Moth (OPM, *Thaumetopoea processionea*) was discovered in the Pang Valley in 2010. An SDF grant helped fund a programme of identification and treatment during 2011-12. We are pleased that the latest figures point to a real and considerable reduction in the level of OPM population.

From left to right: The Aldworth Parish Plan; The children’s Rock Detectives geology club; caterpillars of the oak processionary moth; and the Fyfield & West Overton Landscape Assessment.
Promoting Leisure and Tourism Opportunities

Encouraging both local people and visitors to explore and enjoy the area and its produce and natural resources is an important aspect of the AONB Partnership’s work. We try to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to enjoy the AONB whilst minimising the harmful impact that visitors may have on our landscape and heritage. Key to this is promoting a recreation and tourism sector that is vibrant, well managed, sustainable and adds value to the local economy. An important development this year was the birth of the Our Land tourism project which encompasses a number of protected landscapes. More details appear below.

Our Land launch for sustainable tourism

'O Our Land is a pioneering initiative by nine AONBs and National Parks in South East England in partnership with private sector partner, ResponsibleTravel.com to develop a distinct brand marketing overnight stays in our protected landscapes. It is aimed predominantly at visitors from London and the wider SE. Our Land is backed by almost £1m of funding through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). Our Land was formally launched by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt MP at an event in the Surrey Hills
on 14th October. Kate Humble (of ‘Autumnwatch’ television fame) also spoke in support of the initiative.

With the goal of encouraging more businesses to participate in this wider SE protected landscapes tourism initiative, we decided not to require accreditation by participating businesses under an existing tourism scheme (e.g. the Green Tourism Business Scheme). Instead, under the Our Land project, all businesses will be asked to sign a Promise that commits them to operating as guardians and ambassadors for the landscape. They will choose specific commitments that are appropriate to their local environment and activities from a menu.

Businesses in North Wessex Downs are then be assessed by AONB staff and ResponsibleTravel.com, the private sector marketing partner, for eligibility to join the project. Once accepted they can choose from a range of degrees of involvement with the marketing campaign, but initial registration is and will remain free; additional options would carry a small charge. The businesses are then be marketed as part of the overall Our Land brand on a fully interactive website with accommodation and attractions.

**Up! On the North Wessex Downs**

*Up! 2011* came out in a new A5 format, which enabled better and wider distribution to encourage visitors to and within the area. This edition featured tranquil ways to explore the AONB including walks around white horses and cycle routes along the canal, a pull-out calendar of events and an expanded Local Products Directory. The new distribution channels included key motorway service stations, hotels in the area and Paddington Station. AONB Communications staff were also piloting a project to encourage local estate agents to display and distribute the publication.

**Icons of the North Wessex Downs**

The eight iconic hand-painted images of the North Wessex Downs – Avebury, Savernake Forest, the Kennet & Avon Canal, Wilton Windmill, Combe Gibbet, Uffington White Horse, Watership Down, Wittenham Clumps were formally launched at the Annual Forum on 14th October. Two more paintings are due to be commissioned to make sure they cover all parts of the AONB. Discussions are being held as to how to can further capitalise on both the original icons paintings and the postcards.
1SW off-road cycling project

The North Wessex Downs was awarded significant funding to take forward a project to survey all legally accessible off road cycle routes in the AONB. A meeting was held with members of the rights of way teams from Wiltshire, West Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire to discuss their requirements for data. A phase three bid for funding to 1SW to provide cycle infrastructure and interpretation which will ‘improve the welcome to cyclists in the AONB’ was partially successful, with grants secured for two projects. We were also actively involved in the steering group for the 1SW project.

E-bulletin

Six editions were sent out throughout the year on a bi-monthly basis promoting things to do and see within the AONB as well as the latest news from the team and our partnership.
National and Regional Partnerships

The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) acts on behalf of the AONB family throughout the UK to promote the interests of our protected landscapes, communities, nature and culture within them. We also participate in a number of regional initiatives with AONBs and National Parks, such as the South East and East (SE&EPL) and the South West (SWPL) Protected Landscapes groups.

Regional Protected Landscapes

Staff continued to contribute to both the South East and East Protected Landscapes and South West Protected Landscapes Fora, which include AONBs and National Parks. Our partnership work with these groups enables us to secure additional funding for protected landscapes in the south and a more co-ordinated approach. Collaborative activities included common responses to the proposed Localism and National Planning Policy Statements, developing a monitoring framework with partners Natural England, the One South West (1SW) off-road cycling project and the Our Land tourism initiative.

Local Nature Partnership Development

We convened a meeting of partners involved in nature conservation to discuss the implications of the Natural Environment White Paper in Hungerford on 23rd June. The aim was to see what support there was for taking forward a bid, or bids, for Local Nature Partnerships which are seen as a replacement for the county-based Biodiversity Action Partnerships. It was agreed that the AONB Partnership would support bids by the Wildlife Trusts in Wiltshire, Berkshire and Hampshire and by Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum in Oxfordshire. The need to work across traditional boundaries and with a wider range of partners were specifically recognised as things to which the AONB can contribute.
The North Wessex Downs Annual Forum

Nearly 80 people attended the 2011 Annual Forum, held on 13th October at the Barn in Purley-on-Thames. The morning session featured the work of the AONB Team on behalf of the Partnership and the LEADER Programme. This was followed by a focus on tourism in the North Wessex Downs, highlighting the Our Land and 1SW Projects. The practical perspectives of promoting tourism in the AONB were focused on by presentations from one local business, the Bear Hotel in Hungerford, and two local projects, the Henge Hopper experience, and Swindon Bus Walks. The afternoon field trips and workshops looked at forestry and land management on the urban fringe in the Sulham Gap; planning on the edge of the AONB at Theale/Calcot and Pincent’s Lane and future work to implement the Woodland Strategy. Unusually, the sun shone throughout the day and made for a beautiful autumnal afternoon. There were numerous positive comments, including: ‘It was both lively and informative and provided an opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest in a most convivial atmosphere’; ‘thanks for the day - well run, nice venue, good food, good programme, nice weather, what more?’; ‘Excellent day! I thoroughly enjoyed it’; ‘Excellent – good networking opportunity and helpful to meet the NWD team’.

State of the North Wessex Downs

In February 2012, we published The State of the North Wessex Downs – a set of data intended to create a baseline for monitoring change. Indicators were chosen to illustrate key Management Plan themes. This fulfils a key action in the current AONB Management Plan.
Who’s Who

In May 2011, Caroline Kaneen, the North Wessex Downs Information Officer left us to spend more time with her family. We are extremely grateful for the contribution made by Caroline, who had been at Denford Manor since the AONB team was first created!

The North Wessex Downs AONB Team, Management Working Group and Council of Partners between 1st April 2011 and 31st March 2012 was as follows:

The Council of Partners

The Council of Partners met on 30 June and 3 November 2011, and 13 March 2012. The members during this time were:

**Chairman**
Mr Byron Carron

**Funding Partners**
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Hampshire County 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 Council
Natural England (representing DEFRA)

**Representing the interests of Community and Parish**
Friends of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys (to December 2011)
Carole Ruse (from March 2012)

Dennis Gower (from March 2012)
Bryan Castle (from March 2012)
Vacancy

**Representing the interests of Farming and Rural Business**
Axis Farming (to December 2011)
Forestry Commission (to December 2011)

Dr Joanne Smith, Elm Farm Organic Research Centre (from March 2012)
Lois Philipps (from March 2012)
Country Land and Business Association
National Farmers’ Union
**Representing the interests of Historic Environment**
Council for British Archaeology (to April 2011)
Nicholas Fogg (from March 2012)

**Representing the interests of Nature Conservation**
Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Action for the River Kennet (to March 2012)

Charles Flower, Charles Flower Wildflowers (from March 2012)

**Representing the interests of Recreation and Rural Tourism**
Friends of the Ridgeway (to April 2011)
Denise Dane (from March 2012)

Meg Chambers (from March 2012)

Find out more about the responsibilities of the Council of Partners.

**Management Working Group**

The Management Working Group met on 14 April, 9 June, 18 August, 10 November and 16 December 2011, and 23 February 2012. The complete list of members during this time were:

Duncan Coe *(Chairman)*
Richard Broadhead
Cllr Andrew Bennett
Byron Carron *(ex officio)* (from November 2011)
Henry Oliver
Christopher Boreham (to February 2012)
Alison Cross
Tim Brock
Vicky Fletcher (to February 2012)
Imogen Parker (to November 2011)
Richard Lemon (from June 2011) Sarah Wright (from February 2012)
Moira Hankinson
The AONB offices at Denford Manor, Hungerford

The North Wessex Downs AONB Team:

Oliver Cripps, Management Plan Co-ordinator and acting Assistant Director
Liz Duquenoy, Office Manager (to March 2012)
Andrew Lord, Planning Advisor
Henry Oliver, Director
Katie Wilson, Communications Officer

The AONB Team supports and works with the Management Working Group and the Council of Partners. Find out more about the current AONB Team http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/wba/nwd-aonb/NWDWebsiteV2.nsf/$LUcontent/1.2?OpenDocument
## Financial Summary

### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>DEFRA</td>
<td>£ 283,427.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basingstoke &amp; Deane Borough Council</td>
<td>£ 4,794.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hampshire County Council</td>
<td>£ 10,508.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire County Council</td>
<td>£ 8,710.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Oxfordshire District Council</td>
<td>£ 4,794.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swindon Borough Council</td>
<td>£ 6,152.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test Valley Borough Council</td>
<td>£ 4,794.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vale of White Horse District Council</td>
<td>£ 4,794.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Berkshire District Council</td>
<td>£ 15,902.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wiltshire Council</td>
<td>£ 19,458.05</td>
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</table>

**Total**                                                                                   £ 363,336.34

### Expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries (including Benefits)</td>
<td>£ 192,894.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training Courses &amp; Conferences</td>
<td>£ 1,624.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel and Subsistence</td>
<td>£ 6,522.18</td>
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<td>Accommodation</td>
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<td>IT</td>
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<td>Projects</td>
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<td>Communications</td>
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<td>UP! Publication</td>
<td>£ 1,821.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forum and Partnership</td>
<td>£ 2,222.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promotion, PR &amp; Events</td>
<td>£ 2,527.05</td>
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<td>Other General Office Costs</td>
<td>£ 1,572.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership and National Working</td>
<td>£ 1,779.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainable Development Fund</td>
<td>£ 60,889.25</td>
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</table>

**Total**                                                                                   £ 359,165.10

Net underspend to be carried forward to 2012-2013                                                                                   £ 4,113.01
North Wessex Downs AONB

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