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Facts and Figures: the North Wessex Downs

The North Wessex Downs was designated an Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB) in 1972 and is one of the UK’s 46 AONBs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>668 sq miles (1,730 sq km). The third largest AONB.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area by Land Use</td>
<td>84% farmland. 60% under arable cultivation. Significant concentration of ancient woodlands (total 21,231 acres; 8,592 hectares)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Parishes</td>
<td>173 parishes, including the market towns of Hungerford and Marlborough</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>125,000. However, the AONB is surrounded by the significant urban centres of Reading, Newbury, Basingstoke, Andover, Swindon and Didcot, collectively providing a population of over 1.2 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Settlement</td>
<td>Remote, rolling downland to charming market towns, picture postcard villages and historic farmsteads. The area is also packed with wildlife, history and bustling business</td>
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**Landscape Character**

A predominantly chalkland landscape rich in prehistoric archaeology, with dramatic scarp slopes and moulded dip slopes that reflect the underlying chalk geology. Heaths and commons, majestic ancient woodland, sheltered valleys, and sparkling chalkstreams.

**Special Sites**

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>World Heritage Site at Avebury</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Registered Historic Battlefield (Roundway Down)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>National Nature Reserves (Fyfield, Pewsey Downs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Registered Historic Parks and Gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)</td>
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<tr>
<td>520</td>
<td>Scheduled Monuments</td>
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<tr>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>Listed Buildings (250 listed as Grade I or II*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>Sites, monuments and finds of archaeological and historical interest</td>
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**Rights of Way**

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>Footpaths</td>
<td>900 miles (1,448 km)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open Access Land</td>
<td>2,938 acres (1,189 hectares)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Trails</td>
<td>The Ridgeway 87 miles (139km)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Horse riding</td>
<td>The Thames Path 184 miles (294km)</td>
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<td>National Cycle Network Routes</td>
<td>The Three Downs Trail</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Routes 4, 5, 20, 45, 254 and 403</td>
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To celebrate our 40th anniversary, we commissioned artist Anna Dillon to paint 10 Icons of the North Wessex Down (above) and (below) some scenes from our wonderful landscape...
Chairman’s Foreword

The special quality of our landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage provided the basis for the designation of the North Wessex Downs as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1972 and this past year has seen us celebrating the 40th anniversary of that event.

Despite many changes over the past 40 years, the North Wessex Downs retain their special status and now, more than ever before, the high quality environment is key to future economic prosperity within the area.

The retention and development of skills in farming, forestry and conservation management are essential to maintain the character of the landscape that is the essence of the area we cherish so much, whilst the conservation and enhancement of our environment and wildlife is in itself an economic activity and an important driver for the wider financial health of the community.

A significant number of our area’s existing businesses, including those in recreation and tourism, depend on a high quality countryside that is attractive and accessible.

Although the economic climate has not improved, the AONB partnership has undertaken a range of value for money projects by working closely with others for the benefit of the North Wessex Downs landscape and those who live, work and visit this wonderful place. Undoubtedly, we need to increase our focus and ambition for project funding. It is, however, important to remember that the core funding we receive from the Government and our local authority partners remains vital to our ability not just to meet our core responsibilities, but to develop new projects, build partnerships and source additional resources from elsewhere.

The enthusiasm of ‘our’ Minister, Richard Benyon MP, for AONBs encourages me to hope that this will continue to be recognised, even in the face of continuing austerity. It is a credit to all that the AONB seems more valued than ever and the high level of influence the AONB partnership has puts us in a good position for the future.

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

Despite the year under review being highlighted by the 40th birthday of the North Wessex Downs AONB, we are all aware that the current climate left no room for lavish celebrations.

However, financial challenges can trigger new, imaginative, ways of working and there are many opportunities ahead. Partnership working helps us unlock the full potential of our greatest resource – the people that care passionately about these areas and our local authorities are key players in this.

The North Wessex Downs AONB family – its Council of Partners, Management Working Group and staff -- has already been embracing these challenges by reducing expenditure, finding more cost-effective ways of doing things, pursuing new income streams, and making better use of our largest collective resource – the community groups who share our passion for conserving and enhancing our wonderful landscape and history.

Indeed, very little would be possible without the help of all our partners within the AONB partnership, pooling knowledge and expertise for the good of conserving and enhancing one of our finest landscapes.

I am pleased to report that, despite the significant reductions in Government and local authority grant funding that had occurred and those that are planned as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review for the period to 2014/15, the North Wessex Downs AONB is in a viable financial position through prudent financial management and forward planning with clear and robust plans to meet its Management Plan targets and objectives.

Together with the AONB Officers, I would like to thank all of our partners for their help over the past year. We look forward to working with them to make 2013/14 similarly successful.

Richard Broadhead
Chairman, Management Working Group
Welcome by the Director

AONBs are uniquely placed – we are nationally and internationally recognised protected landscapes, led and run by local partnerships. Our own Partnership includes a variety of partners from different sectors and interests – able to identify needs and opportunities, and facilitate project development and additional investment in the North Wessex Downs, whether directly or indirectly. We do this by using our extensive specialist knowledge to engage and work with anyone who is prepared to work with us, and by influencing policy, and decision-making and practice across a wide range of partner organisations. The results are substantial benefits to the protected landscape.

A large proportion of the added value that we achieve for the North Wessex Downs is derived from raised levels of inward investment that occur from the recognition of the area as a desirable place to live, work and visit. For example, our partner Natural England targets the Higher Level Environmental Stewardship scheme on protected landscapes, while we, through our Farmland Birds partnership work, influence the content and delivery of individual agreements to conserve and enhance habitat for species of special interest in the landscape of the North Wessex Downs.

Over the past year we have continued to be involved in the development and roll-out of a number of initiatives bringing positive investment in the North Wessex Downs. The North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme, which we helped establish and now host, has awarded £598,000 in grants to 25 farming and forestry related businesses over the past four years. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) grants, like those to the Kennet Community Energy Group, Marlborough Communities Market, and the Englefield Five a Day Market Garden, have delivered AONB Management Plan objectives hand-in hand with local communities. And our new partnership on the Stepping Stones Project, restoring, improving and linking chalk grassland habitat from Cranborne Chase to the top of the North Wessex Downs, is opening up exciting new possibilities to link conservation initiatives on a truly landscape scale, well beyond the aspirations of the Government’s Natural Environment White Paper.

The AONB is excellent value for its nine local authority partners – for every local authority £1 the AONB generates an impressive £6.81.

Over the past five years, we have increased the amount of non-core funding secured by almost 600%. This does not include partnership bids to which we have contributed as a minor partner.

We retain a Sustainable Development Fund that has distributed £0.5m in grants to local projects to date. Our assessment process and our dedicated panel of volunteers enable us to keep administration light and be flexible in the type of
projects we approve. This approach has helped secure matching contributions of 196% during 2012-2013.

We have found significant value in partnerships with other protected landscapes, joining bids such as Our Land and 1SW to achieve outcomes on a scale that individual local authorities or we as a single AONB could not have.

However, there are many cases where it is difficult to evidence monetary value – where we have contributed time to initiatives such as Local Nature Partnerships, Catchment Management Partnerships and Rights of Way Improvement Panels. In such cases, we have not received additional funding for ourselves or others, but our core funds mean we have been able to lend landscape expertise where others have not.

There are other instances where we providing or developing services that our local authority partners are no longer able to provide, such as pre-application planning advice, tourism promotion and business development.

The Government derives significant added value from having AONB Partnership staff teams in place. AONB Partnerships have the flexibility and local knowledge and support to develop and deliver projects with appropriate partners, from small community groups to major funding bodies. They also have the limited, but vital, staff resource to dedicate to this and to attracting external funding.

The potential for sharing best practice and using a collaborative ‘action learning’ approach to build the institutional capacity of AONB units has been shown through the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Future Landscapes Programme, which I have in which it has been my pleasure to take part.

The high landscape quality of AONBs, articulated in terms of their natural beauty, is now recognised as a key economic driver and the greatest opportunities for AONB partnerships are likely to lie in those sectors that manage or derive their business from this natural beauty - such as food, drink, forestry and tourism.

This doesn’t just happen. In the North Wessex Downs it is made possible by the support and commitment of our partners: local authorities, agencies, NGOs, community groups, businesses, farmers and individuals. We thank them all, and hope we can continue to work with them to achieve even more.

Henry Oliver,

AONB Director
Enhancing Biodiversity and Sustainable Land Management

Local Nature Partnerships

In 2011 the Government released its Natural Environment White Paper outlining its vision for the natural environment which included the setting up of LNPs; partnerships working to improve the range of benefits and services provided by good land management.

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.

In the North Wessex Downs, four Local Nature Partnerships have been established – Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and Swindon. We have made a commitment to supporting each of the Local Nature Partnerships and helping them to work together more effectively. We are also collaborating with neighbouring protected landscapes and others to promote the principles of the Natural Environment White Paper.

Stepping Stones

If we can work with people to reconnect the landscape by creating functional links between high quality habitats, then we will be able to reduce the ecological isolation of habitats such as species-rich chalk grassland and populations that are at risk, such as the marsh fritillary butterfly.

In partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, we have been successful in winning £140,000 of Government funding to deliver an exciting new project called Stepping Stones.

This project is under way on the Pewsey Downs and the West Wiltshire Downs, running from 1st October 2012 to 31st March 2015. We have concluded the first phase of the Stepping Stones project, including creation of a chalk scrape.
and species enhancement of grassland. However progress is being held up by a lack of dedicated staff.

The Stepping Stones objectives are:

- To connect high quality wildlife hotspots, such as County 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 hop 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.

Winning Ways for Wildlife

North West Hampshire is home to some of the county’s most threatened wildlife. Winning Ways for Wildlife aims to work with local people to make the area even better for wildlife through restoring and reconnecting important wildlife habitat.

The Winning Ways for Wildlife Partnership began work in 2012 to:

- Work with landowners to better manage woodlands and downland to benefit species such as the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly, willow tit and wild flowers characteristic of the landscape.
- Provide expert advice and support for farmers and landmanagers wanting to undertake wildlife management on their land.
- Provide funding to help eligible projects.
- Help people find out more about the wildlife on their land or in their parish.
- Provide training and opportunities for volunteering.
- Enable people to learn more about the area through a programme of walks, talks and events.
Farmland Bird Project

The North Wessex Farmland Bird Project continued to make progress during 2012-2013, working with farmers and landowners across the North Wessex Downs.

Farmland birds are currently the fastest declining group of birds in England, however hotspots still exist, scattered throughout the country where many of the hardest hit species can still be found. The open landscape of much of the North Wessex Downs is a hotspot for some of the UK’s most threatened farmland birds.

The North Wessex Farmland Bird Project is one of four similar projects working in the South West (and part of the South East) under the umbrella of the South West Farmland Bird Initiative (SWFBI).

The project works with farmers and landowners across the AONB, using Environmental Stewardship schemes to put in place habitats to provide farmland birds with nesting and feeding opportunities all year round.

**THE NUMBERS FOR 2012-2013**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Farmland birds are classified as species that spend the majority of their time on farmland, although they may also use other habitats, such as gardens or woodland edge. The North Wessex Farmland Bird project concentrates on six farmland bird species of most concern and whose ecology we know enough about to be able to address their needs. These six have shown massive declines in numbers and their ranges have become restricted to hotspots such as the North Wessex Downs. They depend on arable farmland and are known as the ‘Arable 6’:</th>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>87</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<td>4,890</td>
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<td>10,500</td>
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Marlborough Downs NIA

The Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area (MDNIA) Partnership is a unique three year project funded by Defra and designed by the farmers of the Marlborough Downs with help and support from North Wessex Downs AONB.

The Marlborough Downs NIA covers 10,370 hectares (225,625 acres) of chalk downland to the south of Swindon, within the North Wessex Downs. It is a special place for both wildlife and people but despite decades of conservation effort, many of the habitats found on the downs are at best stable and at worst in decline. The NIA project will support and supplement existing efforts by delivering more, on a bigger scale with better management of more joined up habitat.

In March 2013 the MDNIA celebrated its first successful year of a three-year project. Uniquely, this project has been and this farmer-led, bottom-up approach will lead to far greater and more wide-reaching benefits as a result of the “ownership” conferred by this project. An initial survey of farmers has confirmed an extremely high level of commitment.

A number of successful public awareness events were held during 2012-2013, led by the MDNIA’s Community Outreach Group chaired by our Acting Assistant Director Oliver Cripps.

A BUSY YEAR OF EVENTS IN THE MARLBOROUGH DOWNNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 2012</td>
<td>A Launch event to introduce the project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jun 2012</td>
<td>Visit by Natural England Community of Practice team</td>
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<td>Jun 2012</td>
<td>Presentation to Flora Locale summer meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jul 2012</td>
<td>Summer Barbeque to update stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 2012</td>
<td>Presentation to Chiseldon Parish Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2012</td>
<td>Introduction to wildlife target species and how the project is supporting them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 2012</td>
<td>Seasonal Supper to highlight actions on farmland birds and biodiversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 2012</td>
<td>A demonstration on wild bird feeding techniques</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb 2013</td>
<td>Birds, Bees and Bumblebees workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 2013</td>
<td>Supporting farmland birds seminar</td>
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The MDNIA has identified six key objectives to support and to improve the condition and connectivity of the ecological network of the area, and to re-connect people to the landscape of the Marlborough Downs.

Water is a scarce commodity on the Downs and it acts as a magnet for wildlife. The farmers want to create a necklace of traditional clay-lined dewponds as stepping
stones for wildlife, linked by corridors of wildflower-rich habitat. This will also reconnect the chalk grassland resource by linking between these wildlife sites.

Butterfly numbers have declined in the area and the MDNIA want to restore the downland species of national and local importance by providing nectar-rich habitat across the landscape. Alongside this, the plan is to create nesting and feeding habitats for farmland birds, and set aside areas for arable plants.

Since Neolithic times farmers have shaped this downland landscape, carving small fields out of wildwood, clearing larger areas for grazing animals, planting hedges to enclose them on the lower slopes, and cultivating large tracts for a variety of crops. These Downs may have been one of the first areas to be farmed because of the ease of clearing and cultivating the thin, dry soils. The MDNIA want the Downs to be recognised as a “Centre of Excellence” for wildlife management.

Volunteers and friends getting out and about…

Some of the year’s activities -- (left) habitat mapping and (right) some volunteers who built tree sparrow nesting boxes. (Below left) a kestrel at Chiseldon and (below right) the first dew pond completed in November 2012.
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

Avebury prehistoric stone circle is the largest in the world. It forms part of the only prehistoric World Heritage Site in England, recognised and protected by UNESCO. The Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Property is internationally important for its complexes of outstanding prehistoric monuments.

Current Projects

The North Wessex Downs AONB is represented on the World Heritage Site Steering Group. The team is part of a project board developing a Woodland Strategy for the Stonehenge and Avebury WHS. We have also been actively involved in reviewing the current Avebury WHS Management Plan with other partners.

Roads, traffic and parking are major challenges to Avebury which, unlike its neighbour Stonehenge has a village population living amongst the stones and a road running through the middle.
Work began early in 2013 on the Avebury WHS Traffic Strategy. This Strategy will provide a holistic bundle of responses to road and traffic related issues and, at the same time, we part funded a project with Avebury Parish Council to produce a Community Traffic Plan to set out the residents’ concerns and suggested solutions.

**Traffic in Avebury’s main village street...raising concerns for local residents**

Wiltshire Council is leading on the Traffic Strategy and their consultants Atkins will be undertaking the work. Continued liaison and consultation with WHS partners will be an important element of the Strategy as it progresses.

Avebury also provides a wonderful outdoor classroom for local youngsters, not just students of archaeology. Members of the Avebury World Heritage Site’s research body, the Avebury Archaeological and Historical Group, came up with a way for young people to get out into the WHS landscape and engage with their local heritage.

Using geophysical survey results from the West Kennet Avenue and a range of surveying techniques, pupils from St Mary’s Catholic School in Swindon were able to plot the positions of buried Sarsen stones on the ground.

The children were so excited by their experiences that they have insisted on leading their own families on guided tours of the World Heritage site.

*Left: David Field from English Heritage shares his surveying skills with two pupils from St Mary’s Catholic Primary School.*
March 2013 marked the fourth anniversary of the Avebury Community Shop at Hope Cottage, which has also received support from North Wessex Downs via the Sustainable Development Fund.

The shop is run by a group of local volunteers and is committed to supporting local businesses as well as local people. Products come from, among others, the Wiltshire Bee Centre, Handmade Cider and Athelstan Farm Foods.

Village youngsters are encouraged to take part in the rota of volunteers at the shop, as this is seen as a way of helping them gain confidence in dealing with the public as well as giving them useful experience for their CVs.

Historic Landscape Character

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is an archaeological method used to define and map the historic and archaeological dimension of the present day landscape. It forms part of a National Programme developed by English Heritage in the early nineties and is continually evolving with ongoing development and changes in methodology, technology and application.

The current AONB Management Plan highlights the lack of clear spatial focus for its objectives. It also refers to a “lack of knowledge about the broader cultural landscape of the North Wessex Downs” and “insufficient understanding of the historical evolution of individual settlements and how this should influence their future” as key issues. In terms of recent AONB activity, the ‘historic environment’ has been something of a poor relation, with activities in recent years only stemming from the Sustainable Development Fund, the LEADER Programme and a community-based Woodland Archaeology Survey Project.

A Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) was completed covering the whole of the AONB in 2008, funded by English Heritage. Notably, it excluded settlements – an omission that is gradually being rectified through county-based activity. However, while the core HLC dataset was completed to a high standard the accompanying glossary describing Historic Landscape Types was incomplete and there was no summary report or ‘iconic’ map. The information has therefore remained largely unused beyond a small professional circle.
To begin to address these points we engaged Emma Rouse of Wyvern Heritage and Landscape Consultancy to carry out some work on the historic environment of the North Wessex Downs. Emma has undertaken similar projects for the Tamar Valley and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONBs. Guided by a small expert steering group, the work has built on the existing datasets to define a series of Historic Landscape Character Areas with accompanying descriptions which can inform AONB activities more widely. The work is now largely complete, and should be published in the next few months.

Looking further ahead, the work has also given us a proposal for identifying the significance of the key characteristics identified in each area and the outline of a methodology for community-led historic settlement character assessment. There are also plans to establish a North Wessex Downs Heritage Forum, along the lines of the Woodland Forum which was formed this year, to co-ordinate action for the historic environment across the AONB.

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<th>Historic Landscape Character Areas</th>
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Sensitive new housing developments...but can suitable brownfield sites be found for 600 homes?

Encouraging Appropriate Development

Meeting the economic and housing needs of the AONB communities in ways that conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area is important 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, a core responsibility of the AONB unit is to play an active role in planning issues affecting the North Wessex Downs. We therefore seek 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.

A number of significant planning applications were decided this year in relation to the AONB. Although the team screened many hundreds of planning applications, around 150 applications warranted responses and some 12 appeals were supported by additional detailed submissions.

The most significant planning application this year was the Grundon waste-to-energy proposal at Old Kiln Quarry, Chieveley which was strongly opposed by the North
Wessex Downs AONB Unit. This planning application was subsequently refused by West Berkshire Council with AONB impact specifically stated as a reason for refusal. A related minerals application at Old Kiln Quarry, was also refused planning permission and became subject of a Public Inquiry to which the Planning Advisor gave evidence in support of West Berkshire’s refusal of planning permission.

The appeal was dismissed and the Inspector fully noted the impact the proposal would have had on the AONB. This subsequently led to Grundon confirming that it no longer wished to proceed with the waste-to-energy scheme.

The proposal for a new Ikea store at Pincent’s Lane, partly within the very edge of the AONB, was approved. The scheme was amended to specifically address the impact on the landscape of the AONB and a legal agreement signed to make provision for £25,000 to be paid by the applicant via West Berkshire Council to the North Wessex Downs AONB to ensure long-term off-site landscaping management and enhancement.

The pressures for new housing within the AONB became very apparent when planning applications were submitted at Newbury Street, Wantage (23 dwellings) and Manor Road, Wantage (18 dwellings). The Newbury Street site was approved at Committee whilst the Manor Road site was won on appeal by the appellant. Both sites are in the North Wessex Downs and had been objected to in principle by the AONB unit. The Chairman, Director and Planning Advisor met with the Leader of the Council, the Head of Development Control and the Cabinet Member for Planning at the Vale of White Horse District Council in May 2012 to discuss these cases and seek some certainty over the planning policy approach to the AONB.

A long running attempt to install a wind turbine at Baydon Field, near Baydon (35m height to tip) was dismissed on appeal for the third time. The Inspector stated in respect of this smaller turbine (compared to the previous attempts) that “Altogether, I find that views of the turbine from public viewpoints in the AONB would display high sensitivity. The turbine would introduce a highly visible, vertical, alien moving structure above the wooded skyline. As such I find that it would detract markedly from the special qualities of this part of the AONB. In particular the development would have a major significant adverse impact on the more sensitive open downland.”

In a case that aroused considerable local passions for and against, proposals for a new indoor children’s play building at a Farm Shop outside Hungerford were dismissed on appeal. The Inspector stated that “the building would be of a substantial bulk, having a floor area of around 265m² and rising to around 7.2m at the ridge. It would increase
the amount of built development at the appeal site by introducing a building into a part of the site that is presently open. Furthermore, the appellant estimates that the proposal would attract around 22,000 additional visits to the appeal site per annum. In my judgement, the proposal would change the nature of the existing business from that of a modest rural enterprise within the AONB to one which would bring about a significant increase in the amount of built development and activity at the appeal site. As a result, it would be likely to harmfully change the character of the AONB through increased development and activity."

We objected to three large waste recycling facilities at Kingsclere Lime Quarry, Copyhold Farm in Hermitage and Beenham, as all three were proposed to handle in excess of 50,000 tonnes per year of material which would have led to issues over traffic, noise, loss of amenity and in one case loss of landscaping. The application for Copyhold Farm was withdrawn and re-submitted on a temporary basis and the Beenham application was withdrawn altogether.

A solar photovoltaic array at just over 10 ha in area was approved by Wiltshire Council on land at Rudge to the southern side of the former Ramsbury airfield. We made an objection in principle due to the “major” characteristics of this development and failure to comply with national policy on photovoltaic installations. However, we helped secure considerable improvements, including a reduced site area, post and wire deer fencing rather than a steel security fence, and improvements to the design of associated equipment.

We continued to highlight the lack of care on the Wiltshire Core Strategy process on the issues of housing sites and allocations in the North Wessex Downs AONB. The proposals include a housing allocation in Marlborough (pictured left) for 220 dwellings on agricultural land off Salisbury Road with a further requirement for 430 dwellings in the surrounding Marlborough and Pewsey areas and a proposed employment site near Pewsey. No proper explanation had been given in the Core Strategy as to how housing need, traffic, impact on water abstraction and river condition and other issues have been considered in arriving at these proposals.
Following publication of the Inspector’s report, the West Berkshire Core Strategy was adopted by the Council on the 16th July 2012. The AONB unit maintained serious objections during the consultation process and devoted time preparing evidence and attending the hearings.

The continued allocation of 2,000 dwellings into the North Wessex Downs AONB is a great disappointment, and raises important questions about how local authorities fulfil their duty to have regard for the purposes of AONB designation under Section 85 of the CRoW Act. It is however accepted that both the Council and Inspector have gone some way to meeting the AONB’s concerns.

Compton...best placed to accommodate new housing on brownfield sites

The actual residual housing number to be found in the AONB is around 600 dwellings. It is hoped that a significant proportion of these could be located on brownfield sites, for example at Compton. Beyond that there remains a risk that greenfield sites may be needed. However, the Core Strategy has been amended to allow provision to avoid development on the most unsuitable greenfield sites. Specifically the Core Strategy now has a requirement to provide “up to” 2,000 dwellings with a mechanism to locate housing sites outside the AONB if no suitable greenfield sites in it can be found. The full implications of this policy for the AONB impact may not be clear until the proposed housing allocations plan is developed.

Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy

Although the majority of this document is fully supportive of AONB avoidance in terms of new mineral sites and only having small-scale local facilities in the AONBs for waste, we raised an objection on the continued inclusion of the Cholsey Minerals Site. Although not in the AONB it lies in a narrow gap between the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns AONBs and is considered still likely to be detrimental to both. We made a written submission to the hearings in agreement with the Chilterns AONB.

Revised Position Statements

The Management Working Group and Council of Partners reached agreement on the Setting, Housing and Renewable Energy Position Statements. However, as the Government published its new National Planning Policy Framework at the end of March 2012 it required all Position Statements to be amended and updated to take this guidance in to consideration. All three Position Statements were changed, consulted on and were finally approved for use in October 2012.
Undergrounding electricity cables

Meetings took place between all the protected landscapes that fall within the Scottish and Southern Electricity provider area to agree possible undergrounding projects to take forward.

This scheme has been running for a number of years to underground existing electricity lines and remove associated poles. Because of the very limited amount of funding, available schemes are subject to strict scoring and funds are concentrated on countryside locations, with good public access and where the electricity lines are the only discordant feature.

Of some five schemes we submitted to SSE, two have been shortlisted to be undertaken -- at West Kennett, within the Avebury World Heritage Site and at New Town between Alton Barnes and Lockeridge.

*Poles to go...View Towards Silbury Hill and West Kennett Long Barrow (left) and view of poles through open landscape close to New Town (right).*
Supporting Communities – 1
The Sustainable Development Fund

Through the AONB’s own Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme (see next section), 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.

Summary of SDF Projects 2012 - 2013

Aldbourne Walks, Runs and Cycles
Following completion and publication of the Aldbourne Village Plan, a book of walking, running and cycling routes has been published. These were researched by local resident Simon Knighton, a keen walker and experienced mountaineer. Copies are available in Aldbourne either from the Post Office or the Crown pub at a very reasonable £2.50 each. It includes 11 walks with clear colour maps, photos and directions as well as an overview map showing all the routes. The walks range 2 to 20 miles in length so there is something for everyone. For further information visit the Aldbourne Village website.

Allotment Improvements
A grant was provided to the gardeners of Fairfield Allotments in Hungerford, where we previously helped provide fencing and waterbutts, to provide storage through repair of existing brick sheds. This has helped to ensure the sustainability of the site and plot-holders were hoping to enjoy a bumper year!

Andover Trees United
A grant to the Andover Trees United project funded the launch of a new community wood. The aim of Andover Trees United is also for every young person in the town and surrounding villages, over a ten-year period, to have contributed to the project by planting a tree in their school nursery bed and later moving it to the wood itself. Through their involvement with the project we hope that they will learn about the importance of trees in helping to maintain the health of the planet and to act as ambassadors within the community by involving their families, friends and colleagues.
Former arable land near Enham Alamein was donated for the woodland and there are further plans to develop access and create varied habitats such as meadows. The project was launched in Autumn 2012 by HRH Princess Anne, followed by a fortnight of tree planting activities, celebrated through songs, artworks and community engagement. A Youtube video has been created for the launch. Visit the Andover Trees United website for further details.

**Archaeological Dig**
A geophysical survey by Berkshire Archaeology Research Group revealed evidence for a large building, near Boxford. This is probably a Roman villa, set within a ditched enclosure and a wider landscape of ditches, trackways, and possible 'industrial' features. The surveys, taken together with the evidence of surface finds and aerial photographs, have been successful in revealing new information about the size and nature of this site. Roman finds have been recorded at Boxford since the late 19th century. A grant was awarded for local residents and members of the Boxford History Project to undertake an archaeological investigation during the summer of 2013.

**Blewbury Downland Project**
A further grant was awarded for the community-led chalk grassland restoration in Blewbury. The broad aim of the project is to identify remnants of original calcareous grassland and then to conserve and enhance them where possible. This was achieved through directly seeding the ground, germination of specialist plants in trays, clearance of invasive species and planting downland shrubs.

**Chalk Grassland Day 2013**
A grant was given to provide a technical workshop exploring issues regarding management of species-rich chalk grassland. Specific topics included managing sensitive sites, controlling invasive species and a demonstration of scything. The event was a partnership between local charity Flora Locale, North Wessex Downs AONB and the Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area. A number of free places were made available for farmers and land managers based in the North Wessex Downs AONB.

**Community Wildlife Gardening**
The SDF funded Five a Day Market Garden, located in the Englefield, Berks to provide a series of Wildlife Gardening Workshops for adults and families. Those attending helped to create new habitats and features to attract and support native wildlife, both at the Five A Day Market Garden community project and in their own gardens at home. We hope this will benefit wildlife and increase local and national biodiversity.
The programme covered a range of topics including: wildlife Gardening, Wild Flower Meadows, Butterflies, Bees & Beetles, Ponds, amphibians & Reptiles and Trees & Hedgerows for Garden Wildlife.

**Flora Locale Summer Event**

A grant sponsored this event, kindly hosted by local wildflower farmer Charles Flower in Wiltshire. The theme was ‘promoting good science and practice’ and featured talks from Peter Thompson of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and wildflower expert Charles Flower.

Acquired by Charles Flower in 1980, Carvers Hill Farm, Shalbourne is situated at the foot of a beautiful stretch of downland (pictured right).

Charles and his team successfully managed this mixed farm, with corn crops, sheep, wild flower meadows and wild flower seed commercial crops, with 5,000 new trees, two miles of restored hedgerows and several ponds to create habitats to support native wildlife and flora.

**Hungerford Town Plan**

The Hungerford Town Plan is a vision for the future of the town based on the views and wishes of residents and local businesses. Over the past couple of years a team of volunteers has worked to prepare a refresh of the previous 2010+ plan which was published in December 2005. This grant was approved for printing and delivery to every household in the town.

**Kennet Community Energy**

Established as an Industrial & Provident Society (IPS), Kennet Community Energy Limited (KCEL) is developing renewable energy resources for the benefit of the communities in north and east Wiltshire.

It has grown from an initiative of the Energy Group of Transition Marlborough, and has been set up as a practical response to the challenges that we face with our future energy supplies and climate change.

Our contribution supported start up costs for creating the Community Interest Company. This included company registration, accountancy services, website and launch costs. This enabled the CiC to issue community shares and take on significant renewable energy projects, such as the Solar PV installation at Wadworth brewery. We also provided guidance regarding projects considered suitable in a protected landscape.

The Society was formally incorporated in January 2013 and has commenced operations with the development of a solar photovoltaic installation in Devizes.
Marlborough Communities Market
A grant helped to re-establish the Marlborough Communities Market, selling local produce in the town. Members of the Town Council and Transition Marlborough were concerned that, following the loss of the farmers’ market, small producers no longer had a regular outlet and they invited Wessex Community Markets to establish the new market.

Project Manager Ellie Gill said: “In the early stages of this process it soon became clear that while the new market would have a farmers’ market section, the criteria for farmers’ markets do not always support other local business such as Ramsbury Tea, who supply a range of Fairtrade products”.

“In addition we were keen to create a market that provided as wide a product range as possible, so local arts and crafts have been included.”

New Steps in East Woodhay
A grant was awarded to East Woodhay Parish Council for the repair of wooden steps on a footpath in East Woodhay. The footpath is close to the edge of an old chalk pit and after gaining some height, the views are breathtaking. The footpath carries on uphill through a large meadow and joins the Wayfarers Walk.

Marlborough Community Orchard
A contribution was made to the Marlborough Community Orchard project to sponsor a tree. The small apple orchard in the shape of a diamond was planted at Marlborough Common to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Marlborough Community Orchard Group chairman Philippa Davenport told enthusiasts, who had paraded up Kingsbury Hill from the Town Hall, led by a piper: “This is the first time we are going to plant a full quota of Wiltshire varieties.

“We are saving them for posterity, to be enjoyed by our children's children. We are planting trees here and at other spots around the town, so that we truly become a town in an orchard.”
North Wessex Downs Bat Project
The SDF helped a local bat conservation group to purchase bat detection equipment. Linked to the West Berkshire Living Landscape project it will be used in various walks, talks, surveys and practical methods to help learn more about bats in the area, bring a variety of wildlife groups together and maintain important records. Bat walks are scheduled to take place in partnership with local groups during 2013.

NWD and Chilterns AONB Chalk Grassland Day
Local groups were invited to attend an event looking at current best practice in managing chalk grassland, jointly hosted by the North Wessex Downs and Chilterns AONBs. With site visits either side of the Thames, participants brushed up on their plant identification skills and saw the results of different grazing regimes.

One of those attending, Peter Cockerill of the Blewbury Sustainability Group, said of the day: “All the site visits were superb examples of species rich swards worked under quite different management and grazing regimes.

The speakers were well chosen to give great depth to the day, talking about everything from plants, fungi and snails to butterflies and farming methods”. There was also a demonstration by our very own SWEAT (Scything Without Effort or Tears), a company set up previously with assistance from the Sustainable Development Fund. Special thanks to our hosts at Lardon Chase, Chalkhills Farm, the Hardwick Estate and Coombe End Farm. Also to speakers including Dr Chris Smith and Des Sussex from Natural England.

Preshute Ecoschools Phase II
Following the success of gaining eco-school status, supported by the North Wessex Downs, Preshute received a grant to purchase a chicken house so that the children can gain an understanding of where food comes from, and how to take care of animals. Some pond clearance work was also carried out to improve the habitat for biodiversity.

Parish Conservation Plan
A grant was awarded towards the cost of printing this community-led Conservation Plan. As David Fox, Chairman of the Brightwell cum Sotwell Parish Council explains; “It is necessary to document what has happened and what is important, and give some pointers to what we must try and achieve if we are going to conserve what we know and love in an ever more quickly developing world”. The Plan will be distributed free to all households in the Parish and provided to certain outside bodies and individuals. It is designed to inform, shape and enhance knowledge and understanding of the
environment and its sustainable use and encourage increased community participation in the Group.

**Rock Detectives 2013**

Rock Detectives is a children’s geology club, with the emphasis on fun and discovery. As well as providing exciting educational opportunities for children, they also create an ideal environment for family learning, as many parents stay for the activities and can join in the fun.

There are events being held at a number of locations across the AONB during 2013. These include field visits, fossil and cast making, fossil and rock identification and other events. There will be a small fee payable for each event.

Events are being coordinated by Berkshire Geoconservation Group, Hampshire Museums, Oxfordshire Geology Trust and Wiltshire Geology Group. Each of these groups also organises a regular programme of events such as walks and quarry visits.

**Students for Conservation**

Students on the Foundation Degree in Environmental Conservation and Heritage Management at Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester have been busy working with farmers and the Wiltshire Ornithological Society recently on the new Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area (MDNIA).

This is one of a series of placements supported through the North Wessex Downs Sustainable Development Fund.

Matt Prior, expert ornithologist, was on hand to advise students on creating ‘tree sparrow villages’. Tree sparrows are one of a number of farmland bird species whose populations have dramatically declined in recent decades. Creating pockets of ideal habitat or ‘villages’, which provide year round food and suitable nest sites and are linked across the landscape, will lead to stronger sparrow populations.

**TAG (Tangley Allotment Group)**

Residents of Tangley near Andover identified a small area of land that they wished to turn into a vegetable allotment. Following negotiation with the land owner and Parish Council, they applied for an SDF grant to provide infrastructure such as paths and water storage.
Treatment of Oak Processionary Moth
This grant continues a campaign to treat and eradicate an outbreak of oak processionary moth in Pangbourne. This man-introduced pest defoliates oak trees and poses a respiratory health risk to humans and animals. Last year only four nests were found compared with 29 the year before and shows that the treatment which was assisted by a grant from the AONB is working. It is hoped to continue with further treatment in 2013 with a view to eradicating the pest.

The project is a collaboration between West Berkshire Council (WBC), the Forestry Commission (FC), residents and landowners. A specialist contractor has been employed to treat all of the trees at the same time, thus realising the economies of scale and further reducing costs.

Tree Climber
A local arborist and tree surgeon received an SDF grant to diversify his business into providing recreational tree climbing activities. The Project will enable people to experience a great day out in the woods. It can be used as an activity for educating people about trees and the woodland environment, be it the trees themselves or the wildlife they support. Recreational tree climbing can also be used to challenge people both physically and mentally and could be used to build people’s confidence. It is intended to provide these experiences for school children, young offenders, or youth groups. There is also the potential to link to the tourism economy.

OVERVIEW OF SDF FUNDING FOR 2012-2013

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Supporting Communities – 2
The LEADER Programme

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.

The North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme has been running since March 2009 and is due to complete at the end of December 2013. It delivers funding under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) with a project grant budget of £1.419m.

By the end of the 2012-2013 financial year, the Local Action Group (LAG) had awarded 97% of its available project funds - £1.383m had been awarded to 63 different projects - to farmers, foresters, small businesses and rural communities across the North Wessex Downs. Combined with match funding, the LAG had facilitated a total investment in the area of more than £3 million since the Programme began.

The programme has focused on 4 themes:

- **Farming, food and forestry** – 25 farming and forestry related businesses have been supported via farm modernisation, farm diversification and woodland management projects.

- **Business Transformation and Community Development** – other small rural businesses have also benefited. At least 59 existing enterprises have benefitted either directly or indirectly and 5 new ones have been helped to get started. Other projects have developed and improved rural community services and facilities.

- **Challenges and Opportunities for Climate Change** – 13 projects have involved sustainable woodland management or renewable energy and all LEADER projects are encouraged to be as sustainable as possible, for example in how they manage waste and use energy.

- **Enjoying the North Wessex Downs** – the LAG has helped 12 tourism related projects either by developing attractions or by creating holiday accommodation. Another 6 projects involved improvements to local cultural heritage.

The vast majority (81%) of the grant money awarded should help grow the economy – developing business, creating jobs, improving competitiveness and encouraging tourism. Programme Manager Dawn Hamblin estimates that the grants have helped create at least 35 new jobs and safeguarded another 81. On the community side village halls, community shops, churches and recreational facilities in a number of villages across the area have been supported.
During 2012-2013 awards were made to:

**Catriona Guinness, Biddesden Farm** for the purchase of dairy equipment to upgrade the existing vacuum pumps to a “vacuum on demand” system and to install a cluster flushing system to help prevent the transmission of mastitis between cows in the dairy.

**Zeb Inker** who runs a small tree surgery, fencing and landscape business, Inker Tree Surgery, Fencing and Landscapes. He received a LEADER grant to purchase additional machinery so he can take on larger forestry related contracts. He purchased a specialist tractor with grab, a timber / woodchip trailer and forklift. These will allow him to remove large quantities of timber from woodland efficiently and with minimal damage to the ground. The longer lengths are processed at a local sawmill reducing costs and transportation.

**Laura O’Brien** for the extension and expansion of her Cakes by Cocochoux cake manufacturing and retail business in Kintbury. Laura carried out some property development work, bought new equipment and improved her business marketing and advertising. She has also taken on a young apprentice.

**Albourne Youth Council** to create “The Community Junction” in Aldbourne. This involved significant rebuilding and refurbishment of a dilapidated cottage in the middle of the village.
They have created a building which will act as a multi-purpose venue for youth activities, meetings, lectures, cinema, and workshops for the whole community and for all ages. The building houses a larger kitchen which can be used for cooking demonstrations, lessons and an after school café; a charity shop which will sell recycled goods, provide an opportunity for young people to gain work experience and provide paid local employment; an upstairs chill zone for older youths; a recycling area and community garden with outdoor table tennis and pool table.

Marc Hart to help him restore and re-open the Alan Liddiard Forge in Aldbourne. Extensive improvements have been made to the blacksmith shop, the shoeing house and the blacksmith’s yard behind so that they can be used for their original purpose.

Holgate and Pack Ltd which is a high quality furniture making business based in Great Bedwyn. They received a LEADER grant to extend their workshop to allow more space to expand their business and to buy a briquette press to convert their own and other businesses’ waste material into wood pellets. These carbon neutral pellets will be sold in local villages for burning rather than the waste chippings and sawdust being sent to landfill.

David and Carol Oliver, Barrow Farmhouse Lettings to support the conversion of a garage/barn to a small 2 bedroomed holiday let. This involved building and ground works, some fitting out and marketing.
Baydon Young People’s Association to update and improve their hall to make it more usable by the whole community throughout the year. They improved the roof insulation, replaced the flooring and re-fitted the kitchen.

The Wiltshire Heritage Museum at Devizes to build re-constructions of two iconic AONB sites within the museum - the West Kennet Long Barrow and Bishops Canning Bronze Age hut. The aim is to encourage visitors to explore the ‘real thing’ and to visit these monuments in-situ.

Wildflower Turf Ltd for the design and construction of a custom built tractor powered and trailed machine which performs a number of the processes to establish soil-less wildflower turf: laying out a plastic growing surface; laying out netting on top; and then spreading pre-seeded substrate seeded with native wildflower and grass seeds onto the surface and netting.

St Mary’s Church PCC, Aldworth to build a small extension to the church to provide a disabled WC and kitchenette facilities. The new work is dressed in stone and flint with oak external framing, handmade roof tiles and stone flagged floor. The project provides facilities which are the basic necessity for any building being used by the general public whether they are the congregation, local community or visitors from this country or abroad to see the Church and the Aldworth Giants. The extension also provides level access to the church for the first time.
The Earth Trust to purchase display boards and computer hardware / software to allow for the development of a web-based mapping system that will demonstrate and interpret the integration of land use (particularly farming and forestry), heritage and wildlife features.

Stuart Collins for purchasing forestry machinery to help grow and develop his Greentips Sustainable Firewood business.

St John the Baptist PCC at Moulsford for some internal works to improve the facilities and usage of the Church. This project is currently underway and is due to complete later this year.

What next?

The Local Action Group has established a Transition Group, chaired by the AONB Director, Henry Oliver, to look at options for securing future funding under the next Rural Development Programme 2015 – 2020.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.
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.

This year we have focused on further development of Our Land, a partnership tourism project among a number of protected landscapes.

With funding from the Rural Development Programme for England and a partnership with online travel expert www.responsibletravel.com, ‘Our Land’ provides a comprehensive guide to the AONB, which includes a thoroughly researched list of accommodation and in the current year we saw recruitment of local accommodation providers and tourism-linked businesses grow to over 70.
In February and March 2013, we held a series of product development workshops for local tourism businesses involved in the Our Land project. The events aimed to provide:

- Training input on key AONB and Our Land related topics such as landscape, sense of place, outdoor activities, local produce and sourcing and environmental sustainability.
- Networking opportunities to encourage businesses to make links with other Our Land members and local businesses
- Involvement of local operators and local and national experts on their specialist topics or business experience
- Familiarisation visits to appropriate businesses and local producers

**Feedback from participants**

At the end of each workshop participants were asked to complete an evaluation. This included rating a range of elements of the workshop and also invited participants to make open comments.

On the whole the rating questions received very positive scores of 4s and 3s throughout. The only exceptions were a few people from organisations rather than businesses who found limited business benefits and one individual who had wanted a more income generation focused session.

A selection of the comments made about what people found most useful is given below:

- Very good on all aspects
- Meeting others
- Geology talk most useful – I’m an enthusiast
- Networking
- The time to think about other people’s ideas and perspectives
- Meeting people and learning more about marketing
- Interaction with other businesses and like-minded people
- Finding out about cycling
- The general understanding of the activities in the area

**1SW Off-road Cycling Route**

The 1SW project aims to bring health and business benefits to the south west through encouraging sustainable adventurous cycling.

1SW is a partnership project hosted by the Forestry Commission and with an Executive Board comprising Woodland Renaissance, CTC (The UK’s National Cyclists’ Association), Sport England, International Mountain Biking Association UK, British Cycling, Devon County Council, South West Protected Landscapes Forum and others.
Working with 1SW, we completed surveying of all 920 miles (1,480 km) of legally accessible off road cycle trails in across Wiltshire, West Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Hampshire in the current year. Information regarding the type of trail, including International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) grading, descriptions, photographs, videos and management information can be found on the 1SW Adventure Cycle Map. It is intended to give people a choice regarding the type of experience they want, whether it is a day out cycling with the family or a challenging ‘black run’ cycling experience.

New Website with Interactive Map

Our new North Wessex Downs website went live in March 2013 and for the first time featured a fully interactive map with an Ordnance Survey base and aerial photography where people are able to view useful information about accommodation, recreation for walkers, cyclists and riders, historic sites and transport links throughout the AONB area.

It is hoped that our map will encourage local people as well as visitors to explore some of the many places to visit in the North Wessex Downs. Users can choose a category, such as a short walk, from the list on the left side of the map and then click on map icons to find out more information - they can even download a descriptive map of the walk. Users can also browse by category or search by location.

The interactive map has proved of special interest to tourist and leisure groups. We have been working hard with the horse riding community to feature scenic rides throughout our area and we now have what is believed to be the most comprehensive and detailed web listing of horse riding trails, such that our site will soon be flagged as a very useful resource by the British Horse Society’s national website and locally by links to the Berkshire County Riding Club website and the Wiltshire Bridleways Association.

We are now looking at more ways to expand listings for the Our Land members and thereafter a means of including ‘specials’ like breakfast on the gallops.

Racehorse gallops. The racing industry is a special feature of the North Wessex Downs, a source of prosperity and a magnet for tourists.
Throughout the rest of the website there is a whole host of information and inspiration, from where to enjoy the best chalk grassland flowers, like the scene pictured above, to technical information on how to manage a woodland project.

People seeking help with planning matters can find a whole section to take them through the process whether they are an applicant, a planning officer or care about what's happening in their neighbourhood.

**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. All editions are now included on our website.
Celebrating an important milestone

Director Henry Oliver joins our stand celebrating the Queen’s Jubilee visit and our 40th anniversary at Salisbury Cathedral.

We spent a busy year celebrating our 40th anniversary. We commissioned Anna Dillon, a local artist, to paint 10 Icons of the North Wessex Downs (below), we staged a Bountiful Landscape Market in Hungerford, we ran a Favourite Places photo competition and we launched our Welcome to the North Wessex Downs guide
Enthusiasm for our landscape showed in the photo competition entries

Three of the shortlisted entries were...

And the winner was...

Dave Gray won the competition with his thematic shot of Woodborough Hill, Pewsey Vale. Tom Dingwall of T4 Cameras presented the award.

And our Bountiful Landscape Market was just, well, bountiful...

Held in Hungerford Town Hall in July, our Bountiful Landscape Market offered tastings of local foods and beer, demonstrations of local crafts, competitions, a raffle and an opportunity to learn more about the AONB.
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 have participated in the NAAONB’s Future Landscapes programme of leadership development and improving collective working amongst AONBs. We also participate in a number of regional initiatives, such as the South East and East (SE&EPL) and the South West (SWPL) Protected Landscapes groups, which include the National Parks. Our partnership work with these groups enables us to secure additional funding for protected landscapes in the south and helps to co-ordinate research and policy planning at regional and national level.

Regional Protected Landscapes

Staff continued to contribute to both the South East and East Protected Landscapes and South West Protected Landscapes Fora. Collaborative projects included common responses to the proposed Localism and National Planning Policy Statements and developing a monitoring framework with partners Natural England.

Local Nature Partnership Development

We convened a meeting of local 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 to replace the county-based Biodiversity Action Partnerships. It was agreed that the AONB would support bids by the Wildlife Trusts in Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire and by Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum in Oxfordshire. The need to work across traditional boundaries and with a wider range of partners are specifically recognised as things to which the AONB may be able to contribute.

The North Wessex Downs Annual Forum

The North Wessex Downs Forum is an annual meeting of individuals and organisations that support and/or contribute to the aims of the Council of Partners. It is free and open to all.

The Forum plays an important role in enabling everybody who cares about the protected landscape of the North Wessex Downs to share ideas and information. The Forum guides the work of the North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners through its discussions and questions. The meeting usually includes a review of the past year’s projects and activities.
Over 80 people visited the Lloyd Lindsay Rooms in Ardington (pictured right) in the north of the North Wessex Downs AONB to attend our 2012 Forum. The theme was a celebration of the 40th anniversary of the AONB’s designation as a protected landscape in 1972.

Speakers included John Davies, George McDonic MBE and Richard Clarke who were involved in the designation process and setting up the AONB team. In the afternoon there were field trips walking around the Lockinge estate, a downland farm and looking at planning topics on the AONB boundary.

The event also provided an opportunity to reveal the winning entry to our 40th anniversary ‘Favourite Places’ photo competition. Woodborough Hill, by Dave Gray took first prize, a share of £1,700 of Panasonic photography equipment, kindly sponsored by T4 Cameras (see previous page on 40th anniversary celebrations) The two runners-up, who also received camera prizes, were Short-eared Owl on Marlborough Downs by David White and West Woodhay by Peter Orr (pictured below).

Many of those attending remarked how the Forum offers a valuable chance to meet other AONB partners ‘particularly of like minded folk.’

Annual Forum attendees join in an afternoon field trip to hear about farming on the chalk at Warborough Farm
Other organisations and initiatives we supported or engaged with during the year

*The Family of Protected Landscapes*
National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) Management Plan Forum
NAAONB Future Landscapes Programme
NAAONB Planning Forum
NAAONB Woodland Group
South East and East Protected Landscapes Lead Officers’ Group
South East and East Protected Landscapes Planning Officers’ Group
South West Protected Landscapes Forum

*Access, recreation and tourism*
1SW Cycling Project Executive Board
Great Stones Way
Our Land Sustainable Tourism in our Finest Landscapes Project Steering Group
Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails Management Group
West Berkshire Local Access Forum
Wiltshire Local Access Forum

*Forestry*
North Wessex Downs AONB Woodland Forum
North Wessex Downs AONB Tourism Network

*Heritage*
Avebury World Heritage Site Steering Committee
Avebury World Heritage Site Woodland Strategy Steering Group
Berkshire Gardens Trust
Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan Review Project Board

*Nature conservation*
Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust
Flora Locale
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Hampshire Local Nature Partnership
Marlborough Downs Nature Improvement Area
Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum
Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership
Stepping Stones Project
North Wessex Farmland Bird Project
South West Farmland Birds Initiative
West Berkshire Local Nature Partnership (Steering Group and Executive Board)
Wiltshire Local Nature Partnership
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
Winning Ways for Wildlife

*Rivers and Water*
Action for the River Kennet
Environment Agency
Kennet Catchment Partnership
South Chilterns Catchment Partnership
Thames Water
Upper Thames Catchment Partnership

*Others*
Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) county branches and district groups
CPRE National Office
Community Council for Berkshire
Forestry Commission
Hampshire Geology Forum
Hungerford Food Festival
Hungerford Literary Festival
Hungerford Town Council
Hungerford Town Team
National Trust
Natural England
Ramsbury Estate
Royal County of Berkshire Show
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Scottish and Southern Energy
Smart Growth UK
Town and Manor of Hungerford and Sanden Fee
Warborough Farm
Wiltshire Community First
Wiltshire Community Land Trust
Yattendon Estate
The scope and purpose of AONBs

A report was recently prepared by Land Use Consultants (LUC) for the family of 46 AONBs, which cover 18% of the land area of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It objectively defines the five key roles that AONBs play:

**AONB partnerships are embedded within, and trusted by, local communities.**
The mix of locally accountable elected members with members of local interest groups and officers from national agencies provides a structure for deciding local priorities and co-ordinating shared programmes of action.

**AONB partnerships excel at using small sums of public money to draw extra money and resources into rural communities**
AONB partnerships are highly successful at using the core funding they receive from central government and constituent local authorities to lever other income. The diversity of AONB partnerships’ membership gives them the ability to turn small individual contributions, which would on their own achieve little, into significant shared endeavours. Without core funding the ability of the AONB partnership to lever in money and in-kind support would disappear.

**AONB partnerships are flexible, adaptable and respond to change**
The work being undertaken by AONB partnerships is of growing relevance to national and local policy objectives. Concepts such as sustainable development, the ecosystems approach and the environment as an economic driver and determinant of health and wellbeing, all of which are core tenets of the AONB purpose, now have widespread acceptance in national and local policy. This has meant that the work of AONB partnerships is of mainstream interest to many partners in a way that would not have been the case ten years ago.

**AONB partnerships are helping facilitate new ways of working in the public sector**
AONB Partnerships and their staff are actively involved in a range of delivery projects, often taking responsibility for leading projects where there are gaps in the capacity of partners to do so. This is seen as a key strength of the AONB Partnership approach and is increasingly relevant to the way most local authorities are operating more as commissioning bodies.

**AONB partnerships work together and recognise the benefits of acting together as a Family**
The potential for sharing best practice and using a collaborative ‘action learning’ approach to build the institutional capacity of AONB units has been shown through the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) Future Landscapes Programme.
Who’s Who

Congratulations to our Communications Officer Katie Wilson and her husband Simon on the birth of their baby daughter Molly at the same time as (but not at!) the AONB Forum in October. We were pleased to welcome Ken Westall, who joined us as cover for Katie in February 2013.

Ken brings a wide range of experience, from work as a sub editor with Reuters and the Press Association to Financial Times reporter in Southern Africa. Most recently, Ken was a hotelier and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce in Williton, Somerset, between Exmoor National Park and the Quantock Hills AONB.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Team, Management Working Group and Council of Partners

The Council of Partners

The Council of Partners met on 10 July and 6 November 2012, and 12 March 2013. 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 the interests of Community and Parish
CCB
Committee for Rural Hampshire
Friends of the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Valleys
Vacancy

Representing the interests of Farming and Rural Business
Mrs Lois Philipps, Environmental Consultant
Mr Christopher Musgrave, Country Land and Business Association
Dr Joanne Smith, Agroecology Researcher
Mr Bob Fidler, National Farmers Union

**Representing the interests of Historic Environment**
Mrs Veryan Heal, English Heritage
Mr Nicholas Fogg, Freelance writer and Marlborough Town councillor

**Representing the interests of Nature Conservation**
Dr Sarah Ball, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
Mr Charles Flower, Charles Flower Wildflowers

**Representing the interests of Recreation and Rural Tourism**
Ms Meg Chambers, Environmental Consultant and Woodland Advisor
Mrs Denise Dane, Oxfordshire Geology Trust

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

**Management Working Group**

The Management Working Group met on 30 May, 26 September, 12 December 2012, and 13 February 2013. The complete list of members during this time were:

- Richard Broadhead (*Chairman from November 2012*)
- Duncan Coe (*Chairman until November 2012*)
- Cllr Andrew Bennett
- Byron Carron
- Henry Oliver
- Alison Cross
- Tim Brock
- Sarah Wright
- Moira Hankinson
- Richard Lemon

**The North Wessex Downs AONB Team**

Julie Baldwin, Partnership Co-ordinator
Oliver Cripps, acting Assistant Director
Dawn Hamblin, Leader Programme Manager
Andrew Lord, Planning Advisor
Henry Oliver, Director
Ken Westall, Communications Officer (*covering Maternity leave from Feb 2013*)
Diane White, North Wessex Farmland Birds Advisor
Katie Wilson, Communications Officer (*maternity leave from Sept 2012*)

The AONB Team supports and works with the Management Working Group and the Council of Partners. Find out more about the current AONB Team at Meet the Team | North Wessex Downs AONB
Financial Summary

Income 2012-2013

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<td>Basingstoke &amp; Deane Borough Council</td>
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Expenditure 2012-2013

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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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