UP! ON THE NORTH WESSEX DOWNS

DISCOVER the North Wessex Downs – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

WIN: a very special Sony camera
2011 calendar: North Wessex Downs events
Local products directory: Eat UP! Drink UP! Buy UP!
Newbury

Where the South East meets the South West

For where to go, what to do and where to stay visit our new website www.visitnewbury.org.uk
Welcome to the magazine that helps you discover the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

What is an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'? Simply some of Britain's finest countryside – officially recognised as being up there with the Cotswolds and the Lake District.

The North Wessex Downs are a huge swathe of stunning countryside right in the heart of crowded southern England – somewhere with space to walk, cycle (on or off-road), ride, fish, canoe, sail (on our canal), watch wildlife, explore prehistoric sites, stargaze, eat, drink and be merry.

Let us take you on a tour of our wonderful white horses; show you where you can cycle or sail your way across country far from noise and bustle; introduce you to the people working to encourage farmland birds; lead you to places immortalised on page and screen; and tempt you with our Local Products Directory, the guide to all that's good in the North Wessex Downs.

And remember to enter our competition to win an amazing Sony NEX camera. Most of all, we hope you're inspired to go out and enjoy this beautiful landscape.
THAT’S £1 million in support for local North Wessex Downs projects over the last five years provided through the stimulus of the AONB’s Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

Since the SDF grant scheme started in 2005 almost £350,000 has been distributed to 85 projects in the AONB. The projects have attracted match-funding of cash, materials, services and people’s time worth more than £725,000, enabling SDF co-ordinator Oliver Cripps and colleagues to raise a toast on achieving its first million (pictured above):

“We provide SDF grants up to £10,000, and the diversity of the projects proposed by applicants never ceases to amaze me. This year alone we’ve been able to support schemes involving hydro-electric power, Henry II’s hunting lodge, a mobile observatory, chalk hill figures, stonestacking skills, community planning, countryside walks, a food festival and conservation work for bats, owls, bumblebees and trout.”

“Not only is that diversity stunning but all these SDF projects help to advance the aims of our AONB Management Plan. That’s a real win-win result for local communities today and the future of the North Wessex Downs AONB.”

FRESH FUNDING NOW AVAILABLE

SDF is administered by the North Wessex Downs AONB and funded by DEFRA through Natural England. Applications for innovative, small-scale projects are welcome from community and village groups, heritage and wildlife bodies, businesses and local authorities. Contact: Oliver Cripps 01488 680457.

During the past year SDF granted £57,753 to 17 projects. They generated £136,687 match-funding in cash and in kind.

DISCOVERING THE PAST . . .

Kingsclere Heritage Association, with the University of Southampton, has carried out historic landscape surveys on the Hampshire Downs, including a Bronze Age round barrow, a Romano-British settlement, and a 12th century hall built for Plantagenet kings. Excavation open days enabled school group and wider public involvement (main picture).
White horses and hill figures were highlighted in a very successful exhibition and study days staged by the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes (see pages 6-8). www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk

Thousands of Iron Age finds uncovered at Wittenham Clumps, when Channel 4’s *Time Team* undertook a 'dig' assisted by the Northmoor Trust, Oxford Archaeology and local volunteers, have now been detailed in an SDF-funded book.

The Friends of the Ridgeway have been able to develop their plans for a new path, The Great Stones Way, linking the ancient monuments of Avebury and Stonehenge. www.ridgewayfriends.org.uk

Traditional stonecraft is being used to help survey, maintain and restore Victorian memorials in local churchyards. www.stoneartcrafts.co.uk (article page 39)

**ENJOYING THE PRESENT.....**

*Hungerford Food Festival* is now an annual event thanks to SDF funding and the support of local community groups such as the Hungerford Environmental Action Team.

An interactive wildlife trail, set around the Organic Research Centre’s Elm Farm at Hamstead Marshall, now has better signage and publicity to attract visitors. Contact Roger Hitchings on 01488 658298 (ext 512).

Walking around Hamstead Marshall is more fun thanks to a range of local walking guides containing clear route maps, and information on land use, history, flora, fauna, viewpoints and the Country Code.

Dark skies are now being studied by young eyes thanks to SDF-funded building and equipping of a mobile observatory by The Richmond Fellowship (article page 43). www.richmondfellowship.org.uk

Ashampstead residents have produced a book for newcomers to the community to encourage them to discover, understand, value and contribute to the parish. An SDF grant also assisted production of the community-led Ashampstead Parish Plan, a five-year initiative to protect and improve beauty and tranquillity.

... PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Redds in the bed? Action for the River Kennet (ARK) staged a training course to enable volunteers to recognise, survey and record wild brown trout (pictured) spawning nests (redds) in the river bed of the upper Kennet. ARK has mapped the project results to monitor the relationship between wild brown trout and non-native stocked fish. www.riverkennet.org

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust produced a leaflet to inform farmers and land managers about managing habitats for the endangered shrill carder bee (article page 11). www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk

Burbage Sports Club installed owl and bat boxes on land near its village sportsground. Members got specialist wildlife advice and built the boxes themselves using materials from local builders.

The Goring and Streatley hydroelectricity project has been able to undertake work on feasibility, design and flood risk modelling for renewable energy generation at a weir on the River Thames (see pages 44-46).

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (H&IoWWT) has developed a wildlife mapping toolkit to help local people include biodiversity in their community-led planning process. The toolkit highlights key habitats and local species. North Wessex Downs AONB is seeking communities to pilot this toolkit. Contact Oliver Cripps on 01488 680457 or Elizabeth Allinson (H&IoWWT) on 01256 381186.

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Walking with white horses

THE North Wessex Downs AONB may be further away from the coast than almost anywhere else in England but visitors can still enjoy dramatic white horses.

Carved into the chalk downland and visible for miles, there are eight huge equine hill figures contained within the AONB – each accessible via a beautiful panoramic rural walk.

The most famous is the prehistoric Uffington White Horse near Wantage – thought to be the oldest hill figure in Britain – and also the largest at 360ft (110m) from head to tail.

The youngest is the Devizes Millennium White Horse and it is the only one of our AONB white horses facing eastwards like its ancient cousin at Uffington.

Other North Wessex Downs white horses can be seen at Hackpen Hill and Broad Town north of Avebury; at Oldbury Castle near Cherhill; near Alton Barnes and Pewsey, both south-west of Marlborough, which itself has a white horse tucked away behind Marlborough College on Grantham Hill at Preshute.

White horse whereabouts!

ALTON BARNES: Sited high in the Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve this 161ft (49m) long by 180ft (55m) high white horse can be seen from 22 miles (35km) away. Cut in 1812 for Robert Pile from Manor Farm, who ended up paying twice when the first contractor absconded with the money.

BROAD TOWN: Circa 1864, 79ft (24m) long by 59ft (18m) high. Accounts suggest it was cut by farmer William Simmonds. Visible from 20 miles (32km) away, best viewed from Broad Town village.

CHERHILL: Second-largest, second-oldest white horse in Wiltshire. Cut in 1780, 128ft (39m) long by 141ft (43m) high, visible from 30 miles (48km) away. Lies beneath the Iron Age hill fort of Oldbury Castle.
Cut to directions called out from below, ensuring it looks good from afar.

**DEVIZES:** On Roundway Hill, 148ft (45m) square, cut to celebrate the new millennium. A time capsule is buried under the head. Nearby, an earlier horse below Oliver’s Castle hill fort was cut in 1845 but was overgrown by the end of the century.

**HACKPEN:** Below the Ridgeway on the edge of the Marlborough Downs. Known as the Hackpen, Broad Hinton or Winterbourne Bassett Horse and was cut in 1838, probably to mark Queen Victoria’s coronation. Measures 89ft (27m) square.

**MARLBOROUGH:** Our smallest white horse, 62ft (19m) long by 49ft (15m) high. Can be glimpsed from the road between Manton and Marlborough. Designed by a local school pupil in 1804, well before Marlborough College was built in 1843, but now maintained by the College.

**PEWSEY:** Overlooks the Vale of Pewsey. Cut in 1937 to commemorate George VI’s coronation. At 95ft (29m) long by 33ft (10m) high it replaced (but did not cover) an earlier overgrown version.

**UFFINGTON:** On the Lambourn Downs overlooking the Vale of the White Horse. Looking artistically modern with its stylised equine design, the White Horse at Uffington was probably carved around 1,000 BC in the Late Bronze Age. It is the oldest surviving hill figure in Britain. Aerial photos show that this white horse is best seen from above (see inset).

**White horse walkabouts!**
The Uffington White Horse can be viewed at close quarters during a walk along the Ridgeway, west of Wantage near the Berkshire-Oxfordshire county boundary. The other North Wessex Downs white horses are conveniently sited in the Wiltshire hills.

In 1999 Wiltshire gained a White Horse.

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Main photo: The White Horse at Cherhill
Inset: The Uffington White Horse
Page 8 photos: Sue Melvin

**UP! On The North Wessex Downs | 7**
Trail – a 90-mile (145km) walk devised to take in all its existing white horse hill figures.

With the white horses commanding hilltop sites, the White Horse Trail provides majestic views from the Marlborough Downs, Roundway Hill, Tan Hill, the Wansdyke and across the Vale of Pewsey – all ever-popular destinations for walkers.

The Trail passes through or near the market towns of Devizes and Marlborough and a number of peaceful and interesting villages. One walking section passes close to prehistoric Avebury, Silbury Hill and the West Kennet Long Barrow – definitely worth a short detour.

Valleys, woods, hills, open fields and abundant wildlife add natural variety on the White Horse Trail, as does the man-made interest of the Kennet & Avon Canal with its famous flight of 29 locks at Caen Hill, Devizes.

Located at Roundway village, north-east of Devizes, White Horse Walking Holidays, run by keen ramblers Sue Melvin and her husband Martyn, offers mapped walks to all the white horses and provides another essential for an ideal walking holiday – a welcoming B&B with good food and a comfortable bed.

Walk Britain’s oldest high street . . .

Thousands of years old, the Ridgeway may once have tracked coast-to-coast following the chalk escarpment across south-east England for 250 miles (400km) from the Dorset coast to the Wash in Norfolk.

The central section of this ancient hilltop route lies within the North Wessex Downs – 43 miles (69km) from Overton Hill near Avebury to the River Thames at Streatley – and was the literal ‘high street’ of our forefathers.

The Ridgeway, with its high and dry advantages, would have provided a safe and viable walking route that avoided the prehistoric dangers in the valleys below. For centuries home-seeking families, drovers, traders and soldiers would have used this chalkridge downland route. Today, walkers (and cyclists and riders) continue to enjoy the superb views and natural beauty of the Ridgeway, now protected and promoted as a National Trail – or as many would say, a national treasure.

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Sue Melvin worked with Jenna Spellane, Exhibition Officer of Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society in staging a White Horses and Hill Figures Exhibition at the Wiltshire Heritage Museum in Devizes last year.

Opened in March 2010 and supported by a North Wessex Downs AONB grant, the exhibition proved such a huge hit with local, UK and international visitors that it was extended until February this year.

www.visitwiltshire.co.uk
www.whitehorsewalking.co.uk
www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk

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www.nationaltrail.co.uk/ridgeway
**Windows into the past**

**Restoration work reveals hidden secrets...**

Work to combat damp at St. Andrew’s Church at Boxford near Newbury has uncovered 1,000-year-old secrets of Saxon building methods.

Removal of cement rendering from church walls revealed a small timber window frame, complete with a hinged wooden panel.

Expert examination by the Diocese of Oxford archaeologist Julian Munby confirmed that the window pre-dates the Norman Conquest of 1066. Distinctive ancient mortar work around the window on the north wall was key to identification and dating.

It also proves that St Andrew’s, by the River Lambourn in Berkshire, is far older than previously suspected and can claim the oldest working wooden window in England.

Churchwarden Mike Appleton explained the significance of the discovery: “We’ve always suspected that the chancel end of the church was Saxon and the discovery of this window proves it. St Andrew’s is a small rural parish, the church is a simple building, and to find something like this puts us on the map.”

“Combined grants from the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme and the AONB’s Sustainable Development Fund provided support for the urgent restoration work on the window and both teams were extremely helpful in getting all the necessary administration completed quickly. The old cement render has now all been removed and our pre-Domesday Book church can be seen in its original flint stonework glory.”

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**...meanwhile**

Nestled at the foot of the Lambourn Downs is St Michael’s and All Angels’ church at Letcombe Bassett – a 12th century Grade 2* listed Norman church with a later Victorian extension. Major restoration works are underway to restore the main fabric of the building and a LEADER grant of £5,000 is focusing on the specialist restoration of the Medieval and Victorian windows, including reglazing of leaded lights and rust prevention on the frames.

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**St Andrew’s, Boxford**

**MEDIEVAL**

**VICTORIAN**
The UK Wolf Conservation Trust

PUBLIC EVENTS 2011
- Open Day - Monday 30th May
- Open Day - Monday 29th August
- World Animal Day - Sunday 2nd October
- Wolf Awareness Week 16th - 23rd October

The UKWCT is working to keep wolves in the wild

For further information visit www.ukwolf.org or call 0118 971 3330

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Close to the North Wessex Downs and where the Westley Ridgeway crosses the A4 near St Andrew

Canal: A short walk from Devizes Market Place and the wide choice of restaurants, shops and attractions.

Well praised guest facilities include:
- All en-suite bedrooms, available for doubles, single or twin occupancy inc; ground floor and 4 poster rooms.
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Tel: 01380 727122 | Email: info@rosemundycottage.co.uk
Web: www.rosemundycottage.co.uk
“BUZZ off, I’m busy! What? You want to know all about bees on the North Wessex Downs? I don’t have time to wax on about that. Got work to do. Here are some facts to be going on with:
• There are around 25,000 known bee species; more than 250 in the UK.
• Bees are either honeybees (who get all the human help and media attention) or us bumblebees (we just bounce on doing our thing).
• I’m a bumblebee, one of 24 UK species. Actually I’m from one of the UK’s two rarest families. I’m a shrill carder bumblebee (we have a very high pitched buzz, you see). My Latin name is Bombus sylvarum.
• They reckon all us bees together help deliver €14.2 billion to the European economy through our pollination work. True, we do this while looking for our favourite foods – nectar and pollen – but it’s still hard work!
• Someone’s been putting it around that we have smelly feet (I think it’s the honeybees). We don’t! It’s just an oily secretion we put on flowers to tell other bees where we’ve been (and it’s only slightly smelly).
• Sometimes we have to fly at up to 10mph (16kph) to get our day’s work done. (We fly a lot slower when we’ve found a food-stop!)
• Bees don’t all eat the same food. Different bees have different tongue lengths so we end up pollinating a lot of different plants.
• Trouble is, finding food is getting harder and harder. Some of my friends fly more than six miles (10km) for a meal.
• In the last 70 years, 97% of our favourite habitat – flower-rich grasslands – has been lost, which means our numbers have declined dramatically.
• Two UK bumblebee species have become extinct, six more (including the shrill carder) are priority species for conservation action.
• Fortunately, the North Wessex Downs still has some really good places for us to eat. It supports 19 bumblebee types, including five priority species.
• Last year, the AONB’s Sustainable Development Fund helped produce a leaflet that shows farmers how they can help us endangered bumblebees.
• Loss of habitat is really worrying us bumblebees. If you’d like to help, contact our friends at the Bumblebee Conservation Trust – www.bumblebeeconservation.org
• Sometimes I dream of people growing my favourite wild flower and plants – red clover, bird’s-foot-trefoil, tufted vetch, yellow rattle… Hmm, that’s making me hungry. Hope all this helps, must fly now!”

Meet one of the busiest workers in our AONB
LAND managers and farmers in the North Wessex Downs AONB are helping to stem the decline of farmland bird species through their practical involvement with the North Wessex Farmland Bird Project.

Operating within the Wiltshire part of the AONB for the past 18 months, the project’s scope was widened last October to include the AONB in Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. Land managers and farmers across the whole area now have access to the free advice and guidance that the project offers.

Sarah Blyth, RSPB project officer in Wiltshire, explained: “We’ve seen great success in the county with lots of farmers taking advantage of the project. Broadening it out means we can reach more people and should lead to even more habitat to benefit farmland birds.”

Farmland bird species, including lapwing, grey partridge and turtle dove, have declined dramatically across the UK over the past 40 years, in some cases by more than 80%. Changes in agricultural policy and practice have led to a loss of nesting habitat and food sources on farmland.

The project, supported by Government funding through Natural England, promotes a range of environmental options available to farmers within an Environmental Stewardship agreement.

The options – known as the Farmland Bird Package – provide the essential ‘Big 3’ requirements for priority farmland birds:

• safe nesting habitat
• summer food (insects)
• winter food (seeds)

Entry and Higher Level Scheme options allow farmers to take on a package that suits their farming system. Those who take part are guaranteed agri-environment payments for up to 10 years.

By putting in place environmental stewardship measures on their land farmers not only help provide food and habitat for declining bird species, but also benefit wildlife such as brown hares, bumblebees and rare plants.

Diane Nicolle, RSPB’s Farmland Bird Project officer for parts of the AONB in Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire.
Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, is based at the AONB’s office: “I have been heartened by the positive response from the local farming community to the Farmland Bird Package. Research, combined with practical experience on farms, has shown that by providing sufficient quantities of the Big 3 farmers can boost numbers of our declining farmland birds and therefore also help the wider populations in the surrounding countryside.”

Big 3 gains can be achieved in various ways. Look out for Environmental Stewardship farming examples if you are taking a country walk.

Skylark plots (pictured above) can look as if farmers have missed an area while seeding. They have – but deliberately. Winter-sown crops will have grown quite thick by the time skylarks arrive to breed. These plots act as landing strips for skylarks to get into the dense crop, where they can safely feed and nest.

Overwintered stubble (what’s left after the crop has been harvested) (main picture) provides seeds as a winter food source for farmland birds including grey partridges and corn buntings.

Uncropped cultivated margins enable rare wild plants to flower and attract insects – food in the summer for chicks.

Wild bird seed mixtures. Areas of arable land devoted to growing a mixture of seed-rich plants provide farmland birds such as corn buntings, linnets and tree sparrows with food through the winter.

Wildflower and grass buffer strips.

Wildflowers are an important source of nectar for insects which are food for chicks. Grass margins also provide insects and are a nesting habitat for some farmland birds including grey partridge.

More details: diane.nicole@rspb.org.uk 01488 680452 sarah.blyth@rspb.org.uk 07818 807480.
Literary locations

AONB landscapes provide settings for famous books and films

THIS is the view from White Hill near Kingsclere, looking towards the landscape of Watership Down. Yes, that Watership Down. It really exists – and it’s in the North Wessex Downs.

Many people think that Richard Adams’s timeless book about the rabbit families on Watership Down is a work of fiction. It is, except that Adams drew on his memories of living near the real Watership Down in northern Hampshire.

Adams’s classic 1972 book, with its memorable characters such as Fiver, Hazel, and Bigwig, became a family-favourite film and television series. Its Bright Eyes theme tune sung by Art Garfunkel was a UK number one hit.

Close by Watership Down is Sydmonton Court, the stately home of composer Lord (Andrew) Lloyd-Webber who owns the local estate.

The Earl of Carnarvon recently allowed his ancestral home, Highclere Castle, to be used as the location for the popular ITV series Downton Abbey.

Overlooking the Thames, the National Trust’s Basildon Park near Pangbourne has provided the authentic 18th century setting for the feature film of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, starring Keira Knightley. Austen was born and raised in Steventon, between Basingstoke and Andover.

The River Thames itself, the eastern boundary of our AONB, can also claim to be a literary location. Author Kenneth Grahame, who lived in Pangbourne,
set his *Wind in the Willows* children’s classic along the banks of the Thames. And Jerome K. Jerome’s *Three Men in a Boat* also immortalised ‘old Father Thames.’

Meanwhile, in the far west of the North Wessex Downs, the Avebury World Heritage Site has featured in the television drama *Children of the Stones* (1976) and the 1998 comedy *Still Crazy* starring Billy Connolly and Bill Nighy.

Perhaps not strictly literary, although much has been written about his work, artist Stanley Spencer painted some striking murals after his experiences in the First World War. These are viewable in the National Trust’s Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere, south of Newbury.

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**Walk to Watership Down**

Under Featured Walks at Hantsweb – [www.hants.gov.uk/walking-country](http://www.hants.gov.uk/walking-country) – you can find details of a 2 mile (3.2km) circular walk from The Royal Oak in Ecchinswell that takes in Nuthanger Farm, as mentioned in *Watership Down*. (Cango bus No.C24 from Newbury bus station to Ecchinswell – 0845 602 4135). Longer-distance walkers can see Watership Down by following The Wayfarers Walk towards Inkpen Beacon from the car park at the top of White Hill, west of Kingsclere on the B3051.
Meeting the change

Chippenham Museum & Heritage Centre

Chippenham Museum and Heritage Centre tells the story of our historic market town and the local area.

Our 2011 exhibition season will include:

- Local Village Stories
- The Chippenham Canal
- Conserving the Past

We have a wide range of family holiday activity sessions and there will be a special programme of hands-on activities, walks and talks, to coincide with National Archaeology Festival in July.

Open: Monday to Saturday (10am–4pm). Bank holidays except Christmas.

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Join this fun-filled running, walking & mountain biking event, between Avebury & Stonehenge. Races for all the family (even the dog!) Full or half marathon; 7, 11, 15 or 26 mile walk & 25 mile circular rough terrain bike route.

ENTER NOW AT www.wiltshirewildlife.org
OVERSEEING the past, present and future of the North Wessex Downs AONB is a team of eight professionals – each with the objective of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the region.

It's a challenging task – millions of visitors come to enjoy the AONB every year (Avebury World Heritage Site alone receives around 400,000). Then there are the 125,000 people who live and work in the AONB (Lambourn is a cornerstone of the British horseracing industry). Countless wildlife species also rely on the AONB for habitat and homes.

Many lives beyond the AONB boundaries are touched too by the farm produce grown and reared within the North Wessex Downs. It’s a challenging task – but not one without its rural rewards. “When your ‘office’ is an AONB you are never far from fresh air, fantastic views, amazing wildlife, and wonderful people and places of interest,” explains Henry Oliver, who heads the AONB team at its Hungerford office.

Among those ‘wonderful people’ are the supporters of AONB projects and objectives, not least the Council of Partners which oversees Henry’s team in implementing the AONB Management Plan.

These supporters come from a wide spectrum – government organisations, councils, farmers, businesses, environmental and recreational groups – and each year the AONB team stages a Forum to report on AONB activity, achievements and plans.

Last October, North Wessex Downs resident and local MP Richard Benyon, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries, addressed the Forum. His brief includes responsibility for AONBs, which he described as “a living, breathing example of the Big Society”. Howard Davies, CEO of the National Association for AONBs, was also a guest speaker.

At the Forum, Sir Charles Nunneley was congratulated and thanked for his six-year tenure as Chairman of the Council of Partners as he stepped down from the role. The new chairman is Byron Carron, a district judge and former Vice-Chairman of Wiltshire County Council.

*The AONB Management Plan can be viewed on our website and at local libraries, and copies are available from the North Wessex Downs AONB Office, Denford Manor, Lower Denford, Hungerford, RG17 0UN, Tel: 01488 685440. Email: info@northwessexdowns.org.uk Web: www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

Byron Carron (left) is welcomed by Cllr Andrew Bennett, Vice-Chairman of the Council of Partners.
EVERY traveller knows that the M4 and A4 road routes sweep through the centre of the AONB linking London with Bristol, but how many people know that the NCN4 does too?

No, the NCN4 is not the latest inter-city train service. Neither is it noisy, nor fast, nor even very busy. NCN4 – National Cycle Network Route No 4 – is simply one of the most pleasant ways to get around the North Wessex Downs AONB, either as a cyclist or walker.

NCN4 is part of the 12,600 miles of walking and cycling routes that make up the National Cycle Network across the UK. This includes a mixture of quiet lanes, on-road routes and traffic-free paths that not only provide great exercise and fun, but often practical ways to get to work, school or the shops.

Actually running from Greenwich in London to Fishguard in Wales, NCN4 follows the Kennet & Avon Canal towpath out of Reading as it skirts the AONB boundary near Theale. Through Newbury town centre it follows the east-west direction of the canal and railway out through Hungerford, Great Bedwyn (where a spur to Marlborough passes through the heart of Savernake Forest) and Pewsey, finally leaving the AONB near Devizes.

Water-borne users of the Kennet & Avon Canal, this year beginning its third century since its creation, complement the leisurely pace of cyclists and walkers, creating a quiet and sedate style of travelling. This unhurried, timeless atmosphere belies the once bustling heritage of this coast-to-coast industrial thoroughfare.

The actual 57-mile (92km) man-made canal, linking the River Kennet at Newbury to the River Avon at Bath, was opened in 1810. During the 19th and 20th centuries the canal fell into decline and eventual...
disuse, a victim of rail and road competition. The Kennet and Avon Canal Trust, formed in the 1960s, successfully restored the canal for navigation. It was formally re-opened by the Queen in 1990, with full operational restoration completed in 2003. Today’s Kennet & Avon Canal brings leisure and pleasure rather than commercial commodities. Its slower pace enables visitors to fully enjoy the lowland valley scenery, watch the locks in action, take time out for a boat trip or explore its bankside places of interest – not least its villages, pubs and restaurants.

One stop-off not to be missed is the Crofton Pumping Station (pictured above) between Marlborough and Hungerford, housing the oldest working beam engine in the world. Its distinctive chimney landmarks this literal high spot of any Kennet & Avon Canal trip. At this point the canal is 450ft (137m) above sea level. Crofton Pumping Station was opened in 1809 to lift well water 40ft (12m) upwards to replenish the canal water as it flows downhill towards Bath and London.

The Kennet & Avon Canal route largely owe their existence today to conservation trusts set up by enthusiasts and volunteers, as well as support and funding streams from local organisations.


Both the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Crofton Pumping Station largely owe their existence today to conservation trusts set up by enthusiasts and volunteers, as well as support and funding streams from local organisations.

Defences of all types were speedily implemented during the summer of 1940, when the threat of German invasion was at its peak. Churchill had put General Sir Edmund Ironside, Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, in charge of organising Britain’s defence.

Ironside’s plan was defence in depth – a series of defence stop-lines in the south to delay German invasion forces after landing and give Britain time to rally its mobile reserves.

Barriers formed by concrete pillboxes, gun emplacements, anti-tank obstacles and minefields were used along with man-made features such as rivers, canals and railway embankments.

The Kennet & Avon Canal’s ‘Ironside line’ of pillboxes was largely built by Local Defence Volunteers, later known as the Home Guard.

Today, many are merely historical relics, but some have been converted for office and canal purposes (see Tyle Mill below).
High, wide and handsome!

Win the camera that took these pictures

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**High**

This is the view from the highest point in the AONB and indeed the whole of south-east England – Walbury Hill, seven miles (10km) south-west of Newbury and at nearly one thousand feet (297m) above sea level very definitely UP! on the North Wessex Downs. Oh, and it’s also a high quality picture!

**Wide**

This stunning landscape was taken in one panoramic sweep, using an amazing new digital camera from Sony – an Alpha series NEX-3. Sweep Panorama™ technology within NEX cameras allows 226° horizontal pictures to be taken – multiple images are seamlessly merged together to create one perfect panoramic shot. So, you really can take home the full horizon-wide view of your favourite AONB landscape. Or use the NEX vertically to prove you’re not telling tall tales!

**Handsome**

Some might call this view handsome, others might link the description to photographer Cliff Carter who took it, but we are still talking about the NEX-3 – the handsome prize provided by Sony for our UP! competition.

Not only is the NEX-3 great for capturing panoramic landscapes with its extraordinary DSLR-like picture quality. It has a host of other features too.

- It has a 1080i HD video option,
- interchangeable lens facility, a never get lost ‘user navigation interface, and a tiltable 3-inch Xtra Fine LCD viewing screen with TruBlack technology.

But, best of all, we think AONB residents and visitors will just love its size. Just 117.2mm wide, 62.6mm high and 33.4mm deep, the NEX is the world’s smallest compact interchangeable lens camera – which makes it small enough to slip in a handbag, coat pocket, rambler’s backpack or family picnic basket.

**HOW TO ENTER OUR COMPETITION**

to win an Alpha NEX-3 camera from Sony, worth £450.

Simply answer the question on the opposite page and send us your answer marked UP! Magazine Competition 2011, with your name, address and a contact number, to:

The North Wessex Downs AONB Office, Denford Manor, Lower Denford, Hungerford, RG17 0UN
Or by email: info@northwessexdowns.org.uk
Or by fax: 01488 680453

Please indicate if you would not like us to keep you informed of AONB information and activities via your address details.
The closing date for entries is 1 August 2011.
The winning entry will be drawn at random from correct valid entries received. Only one entry per family please.
The winner will be personally presented with the NEX-3 prize camera and publicised through normal AONB publicity channels.

THE SONY PRIZE QUESTION
What is the depth of the Alpha NEX-3 camera?

Tips for landscape photography
(Provided by Sony photographic advocate Cliff Carter)

• Make sure you take a camera with you when outdoors! Opportunities to take terrific photos can occur at any time.
• Try different viewpoints, move closer or further away. Make the most of your camera zoom, drop the camera to ground level or climb to get a higher position. Small variations can dramatically improve an image.
• Good lighting will nearly always help to produce a memorable image but rain, fog or poor light can add drama and atmosphere.
• Something of interest in the foreground will often help composition, perhaps to give a sense of scale or relevance. Include receding landscapes and good sky detail.
• Try capturing the landscape in abstract, finding interesting patterns or using impressionistic blurred images.
• And a tip for NEX owners using the Sweep Panorama™ mode. Turn off the auto white balance and select the best balance for conditions, i.e. sunny, cloudy, etc. This ensures the colour in the images making up the panorama keep the same colour balance and should give a better result.
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Mathewson Waters Architects
IT expert goes back to the future to discover a new career

DIGITAL AGE IT expert Christine Brewster went ‘back-to-the-future’ to discover fresh digital dexterity and a second career in hand-made willow basketware.

Although a successful contractor in the IT sector, working with blue-chip corporates in the south-east, Christine had always enjoyed leisure time handicrafts such as quilting and dressmaking. She even found time to be a conservation volunteer with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

Then, in 1993 she took part in a two-day basket-making course. “I just got hooked on this centuries-old craft and started to go to lots of training courses, including some in Poland and Ireland. I used to make baskets for friends, developed my own stripy styles, and then began to get commissions.”

She gained City & Guilds qualifications, was asked to give basket-weaving demonstrations and private lessons, and now regularly runs basket-making courses for individuals and interested groups.

“Giving up IT and combining my passions for craft and conservation by setting up my own basketmaking business was the natural progression.”

Christine’s second career path has led to a stable-loft workshop on the Englefield Estate in the North Wessex Downs AONB from which she has successfully run her StripeyBasket business for the past seven years.

For most of her work Christine uses willow, some from Somerset and some grown in Berkshire. She makes a wide-range of baskets, but also plant supports, willow sculptures and weaving repairs to rush, cane and wicker furniture.

“Fortunately, people buy my work as fast as I can make it and I was probably one of the few businesses to get busier during the recession, largely thanks to the support of local purchasers.”

“I still miss the regular income I got from my contracted IT work, but have no regrets about losing the commuting and office politics. Instead I have gained my freedom, and now work doing something I love in wonderful country surroundings.”
## North Wessex Downs events

### APRIL
- **10** Pewsey Downsaround walking challenge
- **17** White Horse Challenge ~ 150 km cycling, Shively
- **22** (Good Friday) Lambourn Trainers' Stables Open Day
- **22-25** Crofton beam engines (open until September)
- **22** Devizes: Westminster International Canoe Race, K&A Canal

### MAY
- **1** Sarsen Trail – walk, run, cycle, Avebury - Stonehenge
- **3** Hungerford Tutti Frutti (Hocktide, 2nd Tues after Easter)
- **5** Look out for the may blossom of the hawthorn, bluebells and yellow oilseed rape fields. Listen for the distinctive purring song of the turtle dove. Sheep shearing begins.

### JUNE
- **3-5** West Woodhay House Charity Garden Show
- **5** Coarse fishing season begins (rivers and streams)
- **9-10** Barbury International Horse Trials
- **11-12** Wiltshire Steam and Vintage Rally, Rainscombe Park, Oare
- **15-17** Marlborough International Jazz Festival
- **19-21** Hay-making, silage cutting, mating of dairy and beef cows.

### JULY
- **1-24** Hungerford & District Community Arts Festival (HADCAF)
- **7-10** Barbury International Horse Trials
- **9-10** Wiltshire County Show, Barbury Castle Estate
- **15-17** Marlborough International Jazz Festival
- **16** Summer solstice at Avebury (Longest day)
- **19** Harvest-time. Combines crop the fields.

### AUGUST
- **21** Devizes Carnival activities (until September 3)
- **3-18** Pewsey Carnival activities
- **17-18** Royal County of Berkshire Show, Newbury (off J13, M4)
- **24** Arable crop harvesting at peak. Straw put by for winter livestock.

### SEPTEMBER
- **3-4** Harvest-time. Combines crop the fields.
- **17-18** Pewsey Food Festival
- **17** Devizes Carnival activities
UP! Market

Monthly Farmers’ Markets and local produce markets normally run from 8.30-9am till lunchtime 1-1.30pm. Most markets are overseen by local authorities and market’s associations but some are independent.

Aldworth Saturday Market* (Kathy Neville 01635 578090)
Andover* - 3rd Sun, 10am-2pm
Calne* - 2nd Sat (01249 814000)
Devizes* - 1st Saturday
Didcot* - 2nd Saturday
Hamstead Marshall & Enborne* - 2nd Sat 10am (Sue Watts 01488 658932)
Hungerford* - 4th Sunday
Inkpen* - 3rd Sunday, 10am start (David Thomas 01488 668305)
Marlborough* - 2nd Sat, 9.30am -1pm  (Jo Ripley 01672 513950)
Newbury* - 1st & 3rd Sun, 10am start
Pewsey* - 2nd Thursday (Nick Venner 01672 810257)
Parley-on-Thames** - 2nd Saturday
Reading* - 1st and 3rd Saturday
Swindon* - (Old Town) last Friday
Swindon* - (Designer Outlet) every Sun, 10am-4pm (Gerb 01453 758060)
Wallingford* - 3rd Tues and 5th Sat, (Caroline Tyler 07860 129508)
Wallingford* - (Regal Centre) Sat, Caron Spence 01491 825034)
Wanborough* - 3rd Saturday, (Sue Bailey 01793 790438)
Wantage* - last Saturday at Town Council 01235 763459
Wootton Bassett** - 4th Saturday

*independents

There are also traditional general Market Days within the AONB
Hungerford - Wednesday
Marlborough - Saturday

Details correct at time of publication but readers are advised to check personally nearer the event.
FREQUENT travellers along the A4 entering the Avebury World Heritage Site have a ‘mole’ to thank for the removal of ugly electricity poles and cables that were cluttering this ancient landscape.

A giant directional drilling machine known as a ‘mole’ was used to burrow more than four metres deep to ensure replacement cables could be laid underground and well away from internationally significant archaeology.

Scottish and Southern Electricity, who funded the project, employed archaeologists to monitor the work and examine the moling entry and exit points for archaeological evidence.

New underground cables now lie out of sight under the Overton Hill Bronze Age barrow cemetery and beneath the Neolithic West Kennet Avenue, which originally linked Avebury Stone Circle to the Sanctuary.

The partnership project also involved Wiltshire Council Archaeology Service, the National Trust, North Wessex Downs AONB, English Heritage and local farmers.

Sarah Simmonds, Wiltshire Council’s Avebury World Heritage Site Officer, said: “Winning private sector funding has helped us work together to achieve really impressive improvements at the gateway to the World Heritage Site. The prehistoric monuments are now returned to prominence in beautiful open downland and the landscape is closer to its ancient appearance.”
New work on some very old work

A COMPREHENSIVE new book, The Story of Silbury Hill, written by archaeologists involved in the 2007 conservation project, has been published by English Heritage.

At 130ft (40m) high and weighing in at a calculated half a million tons, Silbury Hill is the largest prehistoric artificial mound in Europe.

It was under construction between circa 2,400 and 2,300 BC in the later Neolithic period along with the Avebury henge, stone circles and avenues.

Silbury Hill is one of the key monuments that qualify the area to appear on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

www.english-heritageshop.org.uk
Tel: 0845 458 9910 ISBN: 9781848020467

Helicopter help...

SILBURY Hill was the subject of a minor ‘air rescue’ last October. This was no emergency however, but planned backfilling of a shaft dug during an eighteenth century exploration.

The shaft first collapsed in 2000 and conservation work designed to stabilise Silbury Hill was undertaken by English Heritage in 2007.

A survey during 2010 indicated some settlement of the chalk slurry used to backfill the shaft.

The helicopter lifted additional chalk and subsoil to the top of Silbury Hill. A Natural England-approved seed mix was sown to complete the work.
Local products directory

Eat Up! Drink Up! Buy Up! Take home a taste of the country

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www.helenbrowningorganics.co.uk

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T: 01264 359422  E: martinanddawn@greenfield-pork.co.uk
www.greenfield-pork.co.uk

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Contact: Gordon Hedges
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T: 0118 971 2138  E: gordon@bynghedges.plus.com
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www.laverstokepark.co.uk
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www.parsonage-farm.co.uk
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ROYAL BERKSHIRE PORK
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PO Box 6109, Newbury, RG14 9DA
T: 01488 638155 E: info@royalberkshirepork.co.uk
www.royalberkshirepork.co.uk
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T: 01380 850304 E: info@sandridgefarmhousebacon.co.uk
www.sandridgefarmhousebacon.co.uk

SHEEPDROVE ORGANIC FARM
Contact: Sales Team
Wanborough Herb Nursery, Callas Hill, Upper Wanborough, Swindon, SN4 0DQ
T: 01793 790357 E: info@sheepdrove.co.uk
www.sheepdrove.co.uk

THREE TREES FARM
Contact: Clare McMurray
Three Trees Farm Office, Draycott Foliat, Swindon, Wiltshire SN4 0HX
T: 01793 741436 E: sales@threetreesfarm.co.uk
www.threetreesfarm.co.uk
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www.meadowmaker.me.uk
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WANBOROUGH HERB NURSERY
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Wanborough Herb Nursery, Callas Hill, Upper Wanborough, Swindon, SN4 0DQ
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T: 01793 850999 E: tuck.highgate@btconnect.com
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www.susiespreserves.co.uk
Range of over 30 preserves – chutneys, jams, jellies, marmalades and pickles. Available from village and farm shops, butchers, delicatessens and garden centres in Berkshire, Oxfordshire, London, selected craft and country shows.

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T: 01635 201546 E: barney@bardsleyandbrown.co.uk
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T: 01793 850999 E: tuck.highgate@btconnect.com
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www.marsdensconfectionery.co.uk

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www.fieldersfarmshop.co.uk
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Market garden producing wide range of organically-grown fruit and vegetables. Local vegetable box deliveries (Andover, Newbury, Whitchurch & Overton). Farm shop. Thur-Sat 9am-6pm.

LITTLE HIDDEN FARM
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T: 01488 683253  E: acworths@littlehiddenfarm.co.uk
www.littlehiddenfarm.co.uk

Q GARDENS FARM SHOP
Contact: Katie Napper
Milton Hill, Steventon, Abingdon, OX13 6AB
T: 01235 820988  E: info@qgardensfarmshop.co.uk
www.qgardensfarmshop.co.uk
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www.theswaninn-organics.co.uk
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www.thekitchengarden.org
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www.tuftonsmallholding.co.uk
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UP! On The North Wessex Downs | 35
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T: 01672 851249  E: clanparker@aol.com
www.woodboroughgardencentre.co.uk
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T: 01380 859891  E: ross.paget@bromhamgrowers.co.uk
www.bromhamgrowers.co.uk
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Andover
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The Bear Hotel is one of England's oldest coaching inns and has been the focus of hospitality since 1464 in the quintessentially English market town of Hungerford, in the Royal County of Berkshire. We are situated in the Heart of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Thirty-nine individually designed bedrooms and award-winning restaurant.

Visit our website:
www.thebearhotelhungerford.co.uk
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The man who loves to read stones

Expert letter carver Joss lends a steady hand...

YOU may have read the work of Joss Nankoo. He's not an author. Joss is a skilled craftsman and also an avid reader like many of us – but of stones.

“There are so many different types of stone – Portland, Purbeck, York, sandstones, granite and slate to name but a few…. and you have to know them all very, very well if you are going to work them. You have to be able to look at a piece of stone, read it, see its individual character and then visualise how it will end up, before ever you set a hammer and chisel on it.”

Thatcham-based Joss is an expert stone letter carver, but his talents extend far beyond the carving of house nameplates and gravestones. That’s why he’s been assisting church groups and parish councils within the AONB recently, passing on his knowledge and advice about the condition, restoration and repair of local stonework.

The free condition surveys, funded by the AONB’s Sustainable Development Fund, have generated significant interest about the ‘hidden heritage’ of churchyard headstones and prompted workshops and demonstrations hosted by Joss.

“I used to teach at Thames Valley University, so that part came easily, but the important thing for me is it helps to retain traditional stonework crafts. I always try to use local materials and sensitive methods in my work,” says Joss who has a degree in building surveying, and is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons.

Joss got into stone letter cutting by accident. While working for stonemasons in Canada in the 1990s, the need came for a letter cutter with a steady hand and a head for heights. Joss volunteered. Soon he was 300ft up a church steeple working on restoring Latin stone inscriptions.

“I found I had a natural ability for it. My creativity, attention to detail and personal pride developed the work into a passion. When I got back to England, I directed my energy and enthusiasm in this direction and began focusing my work on letter cutting and stone restoration, eventually evolving into my own business Stone Art Memorials.”
TWO years into its five-year timeframe the North Wessex Downs LEADER Programme is already providing jobs, much-needed facilities, and hopes of a more vibrant and sustainable future for communities throughout the AONB. LEADER has targeted £2 million to be awarded as local grants between 2009 and 2013, and although £800,000 has already been spent or committed, the programme remains open to projects that show benefits for the AONB and deliver one of the key themes:

- Farming, food and forestry
- Business transformation and community development
- Challenges and opportunities of climate change
- Enjoying the North Wessex Downs

So far, LEADER has helped nearly 30 projects with grants ranging from £5,000 to £50,000. Projects vary widely from refurbishing village halls to start-up forestry businesses, renewable bio-fuels to recreational areas, meat-boxes to horse oats, a cattery to a brewery, and even historic church window restoration.

LEADER grants may provide some of the resources, but it takes driven people to invest in new businesses and to create active change and improvement to their communities. Many of the LEADER projects are inter-generational, taking established family businesses in a new direction or providing a fresh focus for community life.

Richard and Pamela Betts and their four children are aiming to enhance their 21st century commercial future at Manor Farm in Hampstead Norreys, as well as create a new hub for their village.

The Betts family gained a LEADER grant enabling them to construct a new building on their farm to house a community shop. The enterprising shop committee also obtained a LEADER grant for the fit-out. Above the shop, a skin health clinic has been established. These projects complement the conversion of former stables into five self-catering holiday cottages and all these buildings are heated by a new wood-fuel boiler.

Richard Betts explains: “LEADER financial support has provided the springboard for us to create a new community shop – a village stores, if you like – which will not only provide..."
Communities and businesses

a service for the village but we hope will also give Hampstead Norreys a fresh social focal point. It’s something that involves the whole village – it’s the village’s shop, built and managed by local people, selling local produce for everyone to enjoy.”

The Betts are not the only local family being assisted by LEADER aiming to sustain future business activities within the AONB. Gary and Sarah McMurray, together with their daughter, son and daughter-in-law, have formed the Three Trees Farm partnership near Chiseldon and received a grant for a processing facility to sell meat boxes. Philip and Julia Walters and their son Edward are upgrading their traditional turkey business with improved processing equipment and new online sales IT.

Frank Haighton at Netherton got a grant for a forestry tractor and firewood processor. His son Jack, currently studying forest management, hopes to join his father’s forestry business on completion of his college studies.

Mike and Gill Rowlands have recently started the Seasoned Timber Company of Hungerford. Mike and his son Ollie carry out the woodland management and produce seasoned hardwood logs, kindling and planked timber. Gill is in charge of marketing and keeps the accounts.

Other projects supported by LEADER:

Conservation of heritage
St Andrew’s Church, Boxford; St Michael’s and All Angels’ Church, Letcombe Bassett – restoration and refurbishment (see page 9).

Community facilities/activities
Bradfield Southend Community Shop – establishment of Post Office
Milton Lilbourne Village Hall – environmentally friendly heating system
Morrell Room, Streteley – refurbishment
Northmoor Trust, Little Wittenham – children’s food festival
Springline Community Theatre, East Hendred – lighting improvements
Streatley Recreation Ground – all-weather surface for ball games

Want to apply for a LEADER cash grant?

LEADER is European money provided to help the rural economy and sustainability at a local level through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

“We have roughly £400,000 available each year to distribute, so we are keen to hear about innovative and sustainable projects that fall within at least one of the four LEADER Programme themes,” says LEADER Programme Manager Corinna Woodall.

For further information contact: corinna.woodall@wiltshire.gov.uk or call 01488 680456 or view www.northwessexleader.org.uk
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“IT’S only when you get out of the towns that surround the North Wessex Downs that you realise how little we normally see in the night skies,” says Daniel O’Donoghue of The Richmond Fellowship.

He has been leading an AONB-funded dark skies project involving a mobile observatory and students from St John’s School and Community College in Marlborough. (Pictured. The red glow is Marlborough lighting up the sky.)

“Equipped with star maps, red lights, binoculars and telescopes, we are encouraging young people to explore the night sky, beginning with their near-sky neighbour the moon, then on to the planets and beyond. The idea is that they return home understanding how the darkest sky lets you see the furthest.”

“The North Wessex Downs AONB is not only beautiful during the day. Its night skies are among the best in the UK.”

The continuing project is investigating the impacts of light pollution on night skies. “The Downs are great places for viewing the night skies, but it’s a pity that people have to travel so far from their homes to see the sky at its best. They should be able to view it all from their doorsteps.”

Dark skies in the AONB are actually legally protected by light pollution legislation, but even so the encroachment of urbanisation and careless use of lighting is reducing our dark sky areas. Protection of dark night skies is a policy objective of the North Wessex Downs Management Plan.

“Light is arguably the most easily solved pollutant – just turn it off or point it downwards.”

Careful use of lighting can also lower energy bills and helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, he adds. “When you see towns on the AONB margin shooting light into the night skies, you quickly realize that it’s quite simply our biggest visible waste of resources.”

Details: 01672 516393
www.richmondfellowship.org.uk

“Too many people leave house lights on, or have badly directed security lighting that spills outwards and upwards. Businesses, sports floodlighting, and even streetlights add to unnecessary skyward glare. Light should only shine where it is needed and wanted.”

– Daniel O’Donoghue
OUR modern world relies too heavily on dwindling carbon-based fuels such as coal, gas and oil that contribute to global warming. By 2015, the UK’s level of imported gas supplies is expected to double to 80%. In 2004 we were a net exporter of gas.

We need to find alternative eco-friendly fuel sources for our energy needs. Within the North Wessex Downs AONB we have these natural energy sources, but we also have a duty to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

“Although we must resist harmful energy-related projects in the AONB, at the same time we must encourage local, sustainable, well-designed and concealed schemes,” says Andrew Lord, Planning Advisor for the AONB. “It’s a fine balance, but the local environment of the North Wessex Downs AONB, coupled with sensitive use of new technologies, may offer us local solutions to our 21st century demands for energy.”

The North Wessex Downs has been an AONB for 39 years. In the future, could it be an Area of Outstanding National Energy?

LIVING OFF THE LAND – 21ST CENTURY

CAN YOU SEE THE FUTURE?
Can you see the energy fields?
Use a little imagination: The sun beats down, a stream flows . . . generating electricity. The tractor prepares a field which will later provide straw for use in a biomass boiler. Short rotation coppicing in nearby woods supplies biomass power on the farm, where a ground source heat pump lies underground, unseen but actively producing energy for hot water needs. The restored Wilton Windmill (1821) still grinds wind-powered flour.
The technology for using alternative renewable sources of energy already exists. Hydro-power, anaerobic digesters, solar panels, ground and air source heat-pumps, bio-fuels and wind turbines may once have sounded like science fiction but they are all now practical methods of providing our own local energy.

Keith Richards, CEO of Thames Valley Energy, believes it’s time to move these technologies into greater everyday use. “They have already proved they work, and with wider application and support they will improve in quality and performance. We can’t afford not to, because our fossil fuels are finite.”

Keith is not advocating a blanket move to alternative energy use. “In some cases it will not be economically viable, or perhaps not in the best interests of the AONB landscape, but I would urge adoption of alternative energies wherever appropriate.”

Keith Richards is already doing his bit. When his own home burnt down, he took the opportunity to replace it by building a zero-carbon sustainable family home within the North Wessex Downs AONB. Electricity and heating for the traditionally styled cottage are provided by solar photovoltaic and thermal panels and a multifuel burner. One year on, Keith says energy bills have reduced by up to 90%. His ‘green’ investment should pay off by 2016, when he will move into profit by supplying excess electricity to the National Grid (case study details at www.tvenergy.org).

Government-supported guaranteed renewable energy tariffs are making such microgeneration an attractive financial proposition for many people. “There are many microgeneration systems including ground and air source heat pumps, solar and small-scale hydro, and wood fuel heat and energy systems that can often be easily accommodated into the AONB and will not harm the landscape,” says AONB Planning Advisor Andrew Lord.

Is it too far-fetched to imagine that alternative energy might one day supply a whole community? Apparently not. A feasibility study has already been put forward for Brightwalton to implement a wood-fired district energy scheme that will supply the local school, church, village hall, and social and private housing in the village. “People like to buy locally produced food; why not enjoy local heating as well as local eating?” suggests Keith Richards.

Not that the AONB is behind the times. There are increasing numbers of farms and homes in the AONB using solar power for hot water and electricity. Biomass burners also provide heat and hot water at the Northmoor Trust at Little Wittenham and for the Living Rain Forest, Hampstead Norreys. There has been a fairly well concealed wind turbine at Faccombe for many years.

The North Wessex Downs AONB has historically been a good source of wood fuel and there is a strong re-emergence of this market for domestic log burners and new log, wood-chip or wood-pellet boilers. Sheepdrove Organic Farm near Lambourn champions sustainability and self-sufficiency by using solar heating to reduce fuel needs for its farm offices and conference centre; heat exchangers within...
its kitchen; and an array of solar cells at
the farmhouse. “Generating its own energy
gives independence and stability for a rural
business,” says Jason Ball of Sheepdrove,
“but we have to respect the limitations of a
very special landscape character, rich in
cultural and natural heritage.”

The North Wessex Downs AONB has
already published guidance on the
sensitivity of local landscapes to wind
turbines, while a position statement on
renewable energy schemes is being
produced.

As well as guidance, the North Wessex
Downs AONB has provided positive
support through its SDF grants. For
example, the Goring and Streatley
Sustainability Group plans to harness
the Thames to produce clean, green
hydro-electric power from its local weirs
(pictured) for more than 500 homes.
Other smaller hydro-electric projects
are currently being considered on the
River Kennet.

European LEADER funding has assisted
groundsource heating at Milton Lilbourne
village hall and businesses like Wessex
Biofuels, Thomas Owen, the Seasoned
Timber Company and Frank Haigton
Forestry as they expand to supply a
growing wood fuel market.

These examples show how, with careful
thought, renewable energy can work in the
North Wessex Downs AONB without
harming the natural beauty of the
landscape.

Next time that ever-rising fuel bill drops
through your door, why not ‘think global,
act local’ and consider taking control of
your own energy production?

“In years to come they won’t be
alternative energy sources,
they’ll be the ordinary ones.”

Jason Ball,
Sheepdrove
Organic Farm
Sparsholt College Hampshire

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The North Wessex Downs AONB is one of 46 AONBs in the UK—each with the objective of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of their region. It covers 668 square miles (1,730 sq km) and is the third largest in England.