



CRANBORNE CHASE AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Annual Report

2015-16



Includes:

'Countryside
Centre' for
volunteering,
training and
visitors

Cranborne
Chase
Landscape Trust

Foundations of
Archaeology

International
Dark Sky
Reserve bid

Farmland
Conservation
Project

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AONB**

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Cranborne Chase

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Naturally Beautiful, Nationally Protected

The AONB is a cultural, living landscape by virtue of both the species and habitats within it but also due to its special qualities, that human activity maintains. The natural beauty of the AONB is a blend of both the rich natural, historic and cultural heritage. The AONB Partnership believes that the presence of the expansive, open downlands; the many historic and literary associations; and the high levels of tranquillity, comprise important elements of the natural beauty of the AONB. Those who manage the land are central to the future of this landscape. It is inevitable that this cultural landscape will continue to develop but this needs to be in ways that conserve and enhance its special qualities.



A summary of work 2015-16.

The small AONB team comprises 4 full time equivalent staff members currently working from a small office in Wimborne, on the southern edge of the AONB. One additional part time member of staff is 100% funded by Wessex Water.

There are a large number of regular day to day activities that the team undertakes to 'conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape' – the primary purpose of the AONB designation.

At the same time, there are several large scale projects underway, at varying stages of development.

Below is a summary of progress so far during this financial year, whilst the AONB Partnership Annual Report for 2014-15 can be found after this brief summary.

Planning and Landscape Advice

Richard Burden (PT) provides planning application responses on behalf of the AONB Partnership as well as responses to planning and transportation policy consultations. He has inputted to many Appeals and Inquiries over the years.

This is a vitally important part of the work of the Partnership to help 'conserve and enhance the landscape'. Richard responds, on average, to 250 + applications per year. During 2015-16 to date he has almost reached that figure. Some are relatively straightforward responses whilst some are extensive, very detailed and long running applications processes.

Richard has drafted four new AONB Position Statements and two new Good Practice Notes to assist planners and the general public understand the *likely* position of the AONB Partnership to given topics. This bring the list of Position Statements to nine and Good Practice Notes to eight. These latest additions will be brought before the Partnership Panel in November for its approval. They are:

Position Statements:

- Good Enough to Approve
- Affordable Parking at Transport Nodes
- Farm Diversification
- Renewable Energy (Update)

Good Practice Notes:

- Good External Lighting
- New Agricultural Buildings

Richard has also drafted 'Conservation and Enhancement of the Rural Road Network of the AONB' for adoption by the four County Councils of the AONB, after considerable consultation. This will also be taken to the Partnership Panel for endorsement in November.

2. AONB 'Countryside Centre'

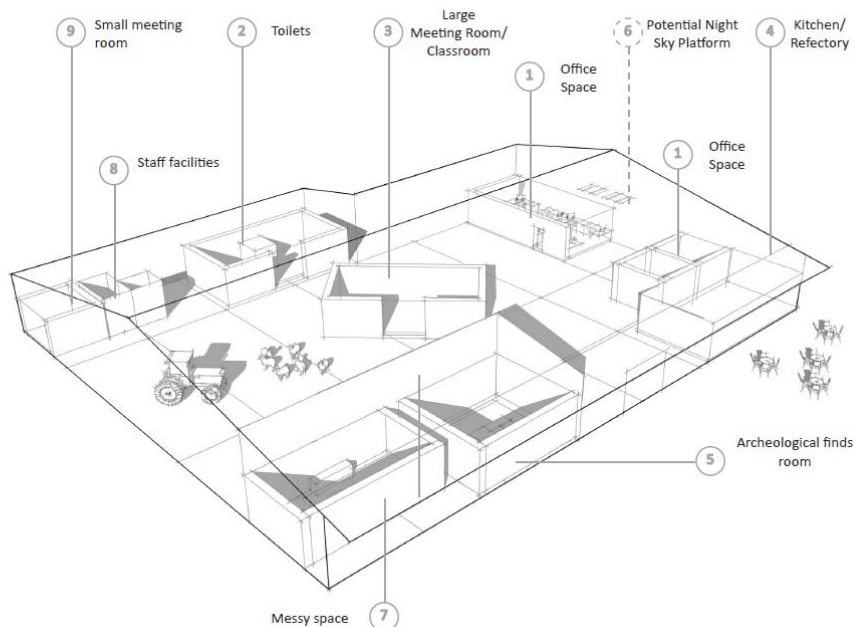
The AONB was designated in 1981 and the AONB Partnership's primary aim is to ensure that these exceptional landscapes are conserved and enhanced for future generations. National designation of this deeply rural AONB is founded on its being a vibrant, living, working landscape. Agriculture, forestry, related rural industries and all its local communities are central to its conservation and enhancement into the future.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, AONBs are tasked with having 'particular regard to promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment'.

It has been a long held view of the AONB partnership that a well-trained volunteer force would greatly assist in the task of conserving and enhancing this wonderful landscape, raising awareness and understanding of it and helping local communities and visitors to enjoy it.

A **centre for volunteering and training** in countryside skills would provide opportunities for groups who currently have little access to the countryside and training and would enhance peoples understanding and enjoyment of this amazing area.

Future Requirement



Architects impression

The AONB has approximately 300+ volunteers on its data base who are interested in a variety of activities. The AONB team are currently looking into the feasibility of creating a multipurpose 'Countryside Centre' that would provide vocational training courses, special interest courses, environmental education, volunteering opportunities and a range of visitor opportunities to explore the surrounding countryside.

Funding is being sought to refurbish / restore a redundant agricultural building or to build a 'green' build on a brown field site. The ideal location for the centre would be near one of the main roads that cross the AONB and preferably on or near a bus route. Defra are supportive of the idea in principle.

The AONB team are currently exploring a possible location opportunity that has arisen almost in the centre of the AONB. Two previous sites have fallen through for different reasons and the team is extremely pleased that the aim of developing this centre may indeed now be in sight.

Funding has been recently sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) 'Heritage' funding programme to build and manage that volunteer force and provide training opportunities and encourage understanding and enjoyment of the landscape, archaeology, heritage, wildlife and culture of the area.

The initial 'expression of interest' has been submitted (for around £700,000) and HLF are making an initial visit in November to discuss the proposal with Linda Nunn and Anne Carney, the project leaders. Linda and Anne hope to have encouraging news for the Partnership Panel at its next meeting.....

Watch this space!!

3. Cranborne Chase Landscape Trust

Volunteer trustees have come forward to form the Cranborne Chase Landscape Trust and have undertaken a massive amount of work in a short time, to submit their application to the Charity Commission.

This is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) that is independent of the AONB but that has developed 'charitable objects' that enable it to complement, assist and further work that will assist in the conservation and enhancement of the Cranborne Chase AONB.

Reasons the AONB Partnership wish to create a new charitable body:

- To access funding for projects that is not available to the AONB Partnership as a public body
- To attract more donations from business and individuals through being a charity
- To gain benefit from donations through gift aid and business tax relief
- To accept legacies, potentially including property
- To simplify administration of small payments and receipts
- To employ staff and own or lease property

Examples of activities the charity could potentially undertake with assistance from the AONB team:

- Administration of the AONB Sustainable Development Fund
- Apply for a range of capital, revenue and project funding
- Help establish and manage 'Cranborne Chase Volunteers' - the AONB has approximately 50 volunteers on its database who are interested in a variety of activities. The AONB team currently do not have the capacity to harness and nurture this resource except in a very limited capacity



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Nick Smith 03-6774



- Assist in the establishment and management of the 'Cranborne Chase Countryside Centre' - this project seeks to adapt, convert, or rebuild redundant farm building/s to create a Countryside Centre. The centre will provide vocational training courses, special interest courses, environmental education, volunteering opportunities and a range of visitor opportunities to explore the surrounding countryside
- Support and promote Cranborne Chase Woodfair which is held biannually and attracts nearly 7,000 people over the weekend. It promotes every aspect of wood including big forestry machines, horse logging, bio fuels and a wide range of traditional skills and crafts. Visit <http://www.woodfair.org/> for further information
- Assist in organising an events programme e.g. walking or archaeology festivals

A logo competition is underway for the new Trust as is construction of its new web site. By the time of the Woodfair 2015, trustees hope that formal charity registration will have been granted by the Charity Commission. It is a very exciting time as the Cranborne Chase Landscape Trust (CCLT)

enthusiastically moves forward into developing its own projects and engaging with the communities of, and visitors to, the AONB.

4. Foundations of Archaeology

Bringing local people and archaeological expertise together, this two year project seeks, through field walking and archaeological survey, to explore the legacy of the founding fathers of British archaeology, to raise awareness of conservation issues for archaeological sites and to promote access and engagement in the heritage-rich landscape of the AONB. David Blake, together with contracted project leaders Emma Rouse and Phil Planel, will between them train up teams of volunteers, familiarising them with some of the basic skills of archaeological field survey and encouraging them to 'read' their local landscapes. The project will use the Chalke Valley History Festival as the principal means of engagement and dissemination.

The project has 65 or so volunteers already signed up to help undertake work on the ground and the first guided walk took place from Ashcombe Bottom a couple of weeks ago.



5. South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project...

This project continues to enjoy great success. However, the need for it has never been greater, as attested to in “*Wild Bird Populations in England, 1970 to 2013*” (published by Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) which was released on 24 October 2014. It makes for uncomfortable reading, particularly the section on farmland birds. “*By 2013, the England breeding farmland bird index had fallen by 56 per cent to a level less than half that of 1970. The largest declines in farmland bird populations occurred between the late seventies and the early nineties, but there has been a statistically significant decline of 7% between 2007 and 2012.*”

Funding was from Natural England and Wessex Water. Tracy Adams achieved very significant successes over the last 5 years. Since August 2009, Tracy provided advice and continuing support to 147 farmers covering an area of 24,000 hectares (about 60,000 acres).

She has spoken to over 600 people at events, appeared on TV twice, made 2 videos for You Tube, taken 14 walks for the public, written 16 articles for the press and instigated the monitoring of target species on 6 farms.

Most importantly, she has helped create over 1,000 hectares of new habitat for the six target species of farmland birds in steepest decline.



The Bowland Award

The Bowland Award is awarded annually by the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) for “***the best project, best practice or outstanding contribution to the wellbeing of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)***”.

Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership's South Wiltshire Farmland Birds Project was announced as this year's recipient at the National Association of AONBs annual conference.

The Award was presented to Tracy Adams, South Wiltshire Farmland Birds Project Manager. Michael Mounde, Chairman of the Cranborne Chase AONB, said, *"I am absolutely delighted that the South Wiltshire Farmland Birds Project has been honoured and recognised in this way. It is a testament to the hard work and dedication of Tracy Adams, but also to our partners: the farmers, who create the birds' habitat and Wessex Water plc who provide funding for the work."*

NAAONB Chairman, Mr Philip Hygate said *"The South Wiltshire Farmland Birds Project is a very worthy winner of the Bowland Award and it is fitting that this year's recipient is a project that has contributed an outstanding environmental contribution to the well-being of the Cranborne Chase AONB, by sharing, learning and inspiring. I congratulate them on their achievements"*.

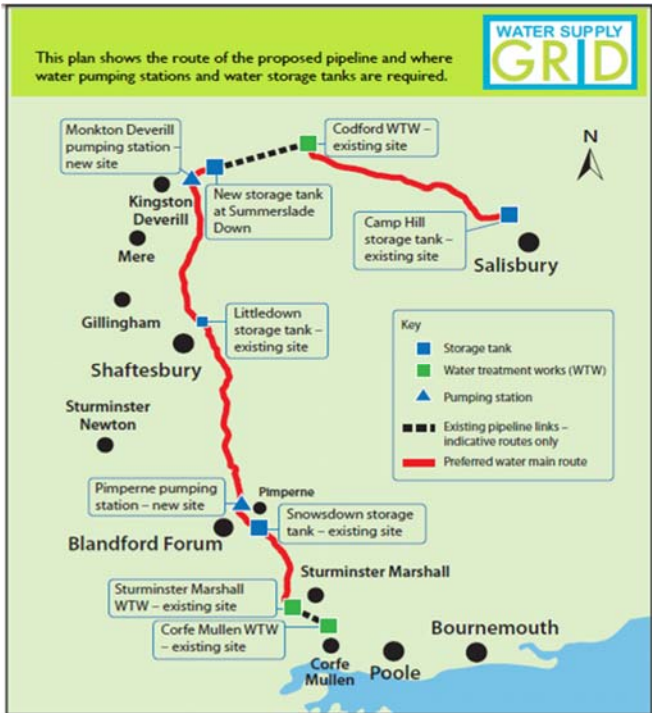
Needless to say, the entire team and Partnership are exceptionally pleased for Tracy. Well deserved!

...South Wiltshire Farmland Conservation Project The project has now 'metamorphosed' into the South Wiltshire Farmland Conservation Project, fully funded by the private sector partner Wessex Water: partly through their Partner's Programme and partly through a mitigation measure that was part of the planning permission for the Water Supply Grid Project in South Wiltshire.

A bid to the Wessex Water Partners Programme 2015 – 2020 was successful. This will bring in £15,000 per year to support Tracys work, an increase of £5,000 per year from this source. The project's emphasis will remain on building excellent relationships with farmers in the AONB, but with broader aims:

- Farmer ownership of environmental issues.

- Building on the relationships forged over 6 years.
- Priority habitats and species conserved.
- Reduced diffuse pollution from agricultural land.



The project will use the 'farm cluster approach' to secure farmer involvement and sustained interest. We will also work more closely with the Catchment Partnerships.

'International Dark Sky Reserve' status



Knowlton Church – N Ball

Dark night skies are one of the very special qualities of the Cranborne Chase AONB. National data continues to show the general loss of dark night skies across the country and an increasing risk of light pollution across the AONB.

In order to conserve and enhance the quality of our night skies the AONB's Management Plan 2014-2019 has a clear objective to apply for the prestigious Dark Night Sky Reserve status for the AONB.

Linda Nunn is working in close collaboration with Bob Mizon of the British Astronomical Association's 'Commission for Dark Skies' on this inspiring project.

There are many benefits of dark night skies; cost savings for local authorities; a contribution through tourism to the rural economy (particularly in the slower winter months); ecological benefits; and enhanced tranquillity resulting in a positive influence on people's physical and psychological well-being.

Other benefits include being an educational resource for local schools, and peripheral enterprises such as telescope hire, star camps and astronomy-based events and retail have all been successful in night-sky-protected areas.

Cranborne Chase AONB plans to apply to for International Dark Sky Reserve status to the International Dark-Sky Association by the end of 2016.....

Cranborne Chase Woodfair 2015

This event takes place every other year and is intended to be a family friendly weekend, showcasing the fabulous woodland craftspeople and skilled woodmen & women of this AONB. With much to see and get involved in, the team wishes all our visitors and guests a very enjoyable and memorable day!!!



Woodfair and our team of enthusiastic and willing volunteers. Couldn't hold the Woodfair without them!

The Cranborne Chase AONB team looks forward to 2016-17, as we progress with the projects highlighted here and many others besides.

Please do explore your AONB web site **www.cranbornechase.org.uk** and watch out for AONB events; keep in touch through social media and sign up for the regular E Bulletin.

Any queries:

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