

# Sustaining Rural Communities

*'You Name It,  
We've Got It!'*





“  
We take barley mash  
from the brewery,  
feed it to the pigs on the farm,  
and they come back as  
**sausages**”

*Alasdair Large, Keystone Brewery*



...Up the High Street



This sunny Saturday in Tisbury



Sue, the hairdresser

# You Name It, We've Got It!

'Tis The Season'  
This sunny Saturday in Tisbury.

Paul takes us on a tour,  
First stop Beaton's Café,  
Bookshop, Gallery.

Up the High Street  
We meet Sue, the hairdresser,  
Cyril, the shoemaker  
Jimmy, the Cricketer.

In the Bennett Arms  
Welcomed by Alisdair,  
For a pint of Bedrock Bitter  
And home fattened sausage rolls  
It's not just a local thing.

At the top of the hill  
Is Heaton's,  
Ros gives us a look  
"Many hidden secrets here"  
I wouldn't dare disagree  
Dealers come  
From all over the world  
Looking for them.



It's not just a local thing



Jimmy, the Cricketer



"Many hidden secrets here"

# 14. Sustaining Rural Communities

**The low population density, absence of large settlements within the AONB and daily commuting outside the boundary mainly for work, all potentially threaten the economic viability of remaining local services such as post offices, pubs, doctors' surgeries, village shops and village halls. Alongside the key land-based industries of farming, forestry, game management and related businesses, the rural economy of the AONB comprises a range of small to medium sized businesses. The high quality environment offers immense opportunities for the further development of low impact, sustainable, rural tourism.**

- 14.1. Special characteristics and qualities that make this AONB special, as a whole, with regards to sustaining rural communities:
- Sparsely populated AONB with an absence of large-scale settlements, reinforcing a deeply rural 'sense of place' amongst AONB communities.
  - Community spirit is strong in many settlements, as demonstrated through participation in 'Village of the Year' competitions, restoration of lost parish features and organisation of annual fetes, festivals or traditional events.
  - Many AONB Parishes have taken the opportunity to express their aspirations by producing Neighbourhood Plans.
  - Community enterprise thrives in the AONB through a range of initiatives, including the development of several Community Land Trusts and at least nine community owned and run village stores, each providing other services in addition to retail.
  - Generally, however, the majority of employment opportunities are either outside the AONB in the boundary towns or further still afield, with a concentration of employment through a few large employers.
  - Strong 'high tech' business growth also occurs at the periphery of the AONB where broadband speeds are generally higher.
  - The diverse landscapes, wildlife, historic and cultural features are very attractive to visitors, along with a number of notable visitor attractions.
  - Artists, authors and musicians are also known to be attracted to this stunning landscape to work.
  - The seasonal game sector supports several high-end hospitality businesses, primarily 'boutique' style public houses and accommodation providers.
  - With 96% of the AONB under agriculture or forestry, there are a number of locally based allied services such as vehicle repair/servicing businesses, currently two livestock markets on the periphery, various timber yards, feed millers/merchants and local craft / food producers.



## Ambition:

- 14.2. A thriving rural economy ensures economic and social wellbeing and helps sustain the landscape. Local communities appreciate and care for the AONB; residents enjoy a high quality of life.

## Key Achievements

- **Rural Development Programme England** - this AONB has a successful record over a decade of gaining European LEADER funding and facilitating the utilisation of it.
  - **Sowing SEEDS** Local Action Group (2009 -13) - the AONB team along with partners helped to secure £1.5m of LEADER funding to improve the economic and community wellbeing of the area. The Local Action Group area covered the whole of the AONB and parts of North and East Dorset. Over 30 projects were funded during the programme. (See Appendix 18).
  - **The Heart of Wessex** Local Action Group (2015-20). The AONB team and partners secured £1.87m of European LEADER funding to improve the economic and community wellbeing of the Wiltshire part of the AONB. The north and east Dorset areas of the AONB are covered by The Northern Dorset Local Action Group and the Hampshire section by the New Forest Local Action Group. At least seven projects within the AONB have received grants totalling £145,661. These include a 10th Anniversary refit for Wrens Shop in East Knoyle and the restoration of Springhead House, a centre for creative and sustainable living in Fontmell Magna.
- **Sustainable rural tourism** – The ‘Discover Nadder’ initiative developed during 2012-13 with funding from Sowing SEEDS LEADER programme. ‘Discover Chalke’ followed in 2014-15 through AONB funding and a grant from the South West Wiltshire Area Board. The ‘Discover’ initiatives aim to encourage networking, sharing best practice and collaborative working to offer ‘visitor packages’ within the AONB comprising arrival pick up, travel between B&Bs and pre-planned walks/routes to explore.
- **Taste the Chase** – First held in April 2016 this first local food producers’ event received very good reviews from businesses who valued the opportunity to meet new potential sales outlets in the morning (shops, pubs, B&Bs) and the chance to market their wares to the public in the afternoon. Similar but expanded events to include craft producers are planned.
- **A marketing package** was distributed to AONB businesses during 2016-17 including an AONB ‘locator logo’ to utilise on packaging or products and a ‘Sense of Place’ cd containing copyright free photos, village, views and landscape descriptions, together with quotes from local communities for businesses to use in their own marketing. Evaluation of its potential usefulness to producers and recognition by consumers is ongoing, in advance of a revision in 2018/19.



Chalke Valley Stores



- **Community shops** – East Knoyle, Hindon, Maiden Bradley, Semley, Coombe Bissett, Wylde, Dinton, Witchampton and Broadchalke have community shops, primarily run by volunteers. Five were supported with AONB Sustainable Development Fund grants and several won LEADER support. The award winning Chalke Valley Stores in Broadchalke has a multi-functional ‘hub’ comprising a community shop, post office, café, archive area and office space through the multi-use of the United Reform Chapel. This still functions as a chapel on a Sunday. Shortly after opening, the store was voted the winner of the Daily Telegraph/Countryside Alliance competition for the Best Village Shop and Post Office in the UK. The centre is extremely well used with support from around 95 volunteers.
- **Mastless mobile phone coverage** – A few years ago, 3G mobile phone reception was achieved by the local estate and businesses in Cranborne via a trial Vodaphone ‘Femto’ system using unobtrusive aerials on buildings rather than tall masts. In early 2018, the CH4LKE Mobile<sup>59</sup> began trialling similar independent 4G to serve Bowerchalke and surrounding villages.
- **Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)** – This AONB fund supports projects that bring social, environmental and economic benefits to the AONB and that help to conserve and enhance its culture and heritage. It aims to develop and test new methods of achieving a more sustainable way of life. Communities value it as it enables them to restore local features, increase the resilience of local services and find new uses for redundant entities  
 Since its creation in 2005, 116 projects have benefited with SDF expenditure of just over £345,000. After local match funding, the total value of all projects was nearly £2,813,000 demonstrating the efficient and effective use of SDF leveraging in new resources at a rate of 1 to 8.1. However, budget reductions over time have reduced the available SDF funds to £3,000 in 2018/19.

## Key Issues

1. Leaving the EU will undoubtedly lead to a period of uncertainty for many businesses and communities within and around the AONB. This may preclude some business start-ups, hinder expansion of others but may also provide new opportunities. Successive LEADER programmes have brought a considerable boost to many AONB businesses through grant aid. On leaving the EU, the LEADER funding programmes will no longer be available to the UK.
2. ‘Green’ sustainable tourism within the AONB, which can provide an income for local people and support awareness and enjoyment of the landscape remains, as yet, under-developed. Increased income from tourism is also hampered by a scarcity, and lack of variety, of visitor accommodation available.
3. There remains a lack of consistent and focussed marketing promoting the wealth of local products and services on offer within the AONB.
4. Generally, poor broadband speeds and mobile reception continue to hamper the growth of rural businesses. The average broadband speed across the UK is 6.5 megabits per second. In the AONB, many people cannot access an acceptable level of broadband service; it can be less than 2 megabits. Without careful design and planning, and the consideration of technologies, the infrastructure to deliver improved services can degrade the natural beauty.
5. Achieving sustainable communities – Local people have a range of housing needs. Property values in the AONB are generally, and noticeably, higher than just outside it and there is a lack of affordable housing within this designated area.

<sup>59</sup> CH4LKE MOBILE is a Community Interest Company set up to provide 4G mobile and fixed wireless broadband services to the Chalke Valley and surrounding area, see. <https://ch4lke.co.uk/>



6. Local facilities and services - Many communities value and prefer to use local facilities that they can access easily, without the need to use a car. It can be difficult to supply facilities and services cost effectively to a dispersed and sparse population. It is a major challenge to secure a full range of services for all to access.
7. Influencing the planning system - Local people want to influence the future of their Parish and the outcomes of the planning system. Individual development proposals can create divisions. Neighbourhood plans, village plans<sup>60</sup> and village design statements are all ways for local people to get together and set out a vision for their area<sup>61</sup>. Grants are available, but communities need support in putting these plans together.

## The Issues Explained

- 14.3. In the period of the run up to Brexit, there has been new thinking in relation to agricultural and environmental policy. Apart from the land based sector, other rural businesses make a substantial contribution to the national economy with 19% of the country's output coming from rural businesses<sup>62</sup>. With LEADER and other rural development funding ceasing after leaving the EU, any successor funding is not yet detailed or confirmed.
- 14.4. Land based employment within this AONB is mainly focused within the productive aspects of farming and forestry; the seasonal game sector and the allied service/product businesses. Other employment comprises those businesses that provide a range of services to local communities and some largely tourism focused attractions that gain their income mainly from visitors from outside the area.
- 14.5. Many of these businesses depend on the high quality natural environment that the landscape provides, but they can also help maintain and enhance those environments. Attracted by the qualities of this landscape, creative businesses such as arts and crafts enterprises, are also flourishing.<sup>63</sup>
- 14.6. This AONB provides a high quality setting for the tourism sector. As well as several outstanding National Trust properties and Longleat Safari Park, there is a very strong business case to have the AONB at the heart of 'green' tourism. There are many sustainable, low impact tourism opportunities in the area including walking, cycling and horse riding, visiting historic sites or enjoying the range of local events. The creation of an International Dark-Sky Reserve status could give a huge boost to the 'astro' or 'green' tourism sector. Even as the bid is developed, the promotion of the undoubted dark skies of the AONB is extensive. (See Dark Night Skies chapter 11).
- 14.7. Until the 2012/13 Sustainable Rural Tourism Project there had been little promotion or marketing of the opportunities. Local tourism networks are still only now just emerging. The sector can improve the quality of the visitor experience and the quality of life of the local community.
- 14.8. Past campaigns such as 'Taste of the West' encourage consumers to purchase locally sourced food. This helps forge closer links between producers and customers. The 'Taste the Chase' initiative in Cranborne Chase AONB increased consumers' understanding of the

60 Village plans have different names within the 4 counties e.g. in Hampshire they are Parish Plans or Community Plans

61 These matters are set out earlier in greater detail in paragraph 5.4

62 Professor Mark Shucksmith, Centre for Rural Economy.

63 So Much More Than the View – material published by National Park England and the NAAONB



countryside; how food is produced; and where food comes from. Several thriving community shops stock and promote mainly local produce.

- 14.9. Promoting the AONB with a strong brand linked to the AONB's special qualities could considerably increase the contribution that tourism makes to the rural economy.
- 14.10. Good communications are essential if the local economy is to grow. Superfast broadband allows easier and more efficient ways to do business and makes it possible to work from home. Good communications can also help reduce rural isolation and digital exclusion. People can be in touch with family and friends. They can find new ways of receiving public services. The challenge is to encourage provision without the use of intrusive masts, or other infrastructure in the landscape that would have a detrimental effect on the scenic beauty of this AONB.
- 14.11. There is a lack of affordable housing for youngsters or those wishing to come into the AONB for work. People with higher than average incomes are attracted by the beauty of the AONB landscape as a desirable place to live. This has led to a consequential rise in house prices. Houses in this AONB cost in the order of 26% more than comparable properties outside<sup>64</sup>. There is a gain in value simply by being in a protected landscape. A percentage of that gain could be utilised to help manage the landscape of this AONB.
- 14.12. Affordability is an acute issue for newly forming households and many young people move away to find more affordable properties in the bordering market towns or further afield. This can lead to an imbalance in the age and social structure in rural communities, with less support for services such as schools, shops and a loss of social networks. There have also been changes in consumer behaviour (e.g. online shopping) and cuts to public funding (e.g. public transport routes). Both can lead to the closure of local facilities and services with fewer people using services and facilities.
- 14.13. The loss of a rural Post Office can also work against small local businesses that use postal/delivery services to receive materials and to distribute services and products. However, the growing numbers of community-run village shops have taken some of the AONB's stand-alone Post Offices in-house.
- 14.14. Many people want to exercise their right to get involved in development decisions that affect them. The Localism Act 2011 gave people more input to the development of their local area through the creation of Neighbourhood Plans or Neighbourhood Development Orders. Support and encouragement is needed to enable communities engaging with the planning process and their local planning authority, to ensure that they meet statutory requirements and take account of all aspects of what makes rural communities viable. This AONB has offered advice and helped input to 8 Neighbourhood Plans to date.

64 See research by Savills at <http://www.savills.co.uk/blog/article/200876/residential-property/the-value-of-our-natural-heritage-in-property.aspx>



## Objectives and Policies

OBJECTIVE		POLICIES	
<b>SRC A</b>	Local communities benefit from a sustainable rural economy, based on the resources of the AONB, that also conserves and enhances its landscape character and special qualities.	<b>SRC1</b>	Utilise funding initiatives that emerge to help achieve the needs of the local economy without compromising the special qualities of the AONB landscape and environment.
		<b>SRC2</b>	Work collaboratively with landowners, farmers and allied businesses to improve the land-based sectors resilience and profitability whilst helping to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB landscape.
		<b>SRC3</b>	Encourage efforts to provide superfast broadband to all AONB communities that avoid adverse impacts on the habitats and scenic beauty of the AONB.
		<b>SRC4</b>	Support the development of appropriate recreation and tourism facilities, including a range of quality accommodation, that support a sustainable visitor economy whilst promoting and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB.
<b>SRC B</b>	The AONB is promoted as a high quality Sustainable Rural Tourism destination.	<b>SRC5</b>	Signpost AONB tourism businesses to information and skills training, support, and advice to enable their businesses to be more sustainable and to better promote the special qualities of the AONB to visitors.
		<b>SRC6</b>	Continue to develop the AONB brand, locator logo and an Ambassador Scheme for communities and businesses to inspire a strong sense of place, encouraging high quality, green tourism initiatives and marketing that contribute to the understanding, conservation and enhancement of the area.
		<b>SRC7</b>	Work with businesses and artists to develop a public art trail for 2020 that encourages increased footfall to business within the AONB whilst raising the profile of the AONB.
<b>SRC C</b>	Proactive and cohesive communities enjoy a high quality of life.	<b>SRC8</b>	Work with partners to increase the provision of affordable housing in and around the AONB where that is consistent with the primary purposes of AONB designation.
		<b>SRC9</b>	Formulate, with relevant partners, a developer contribution scheme to secure monies from the enhanced property values in the AONB to support the management of the AONB's character, qualities, and landscapes which bring about those heightened values.



OBJECTIVE		POLICIES	
<b>SRC C</b>	Proactive and cohesive communities enjoy a high quality of life.	<b>SRC10</b>	Support community initiatives that promote sustainable lifestyles such as those embracing community shops or combined/mobile community facilities, appropriate renewable energy schemes, energy efficiency, community woodlands, recycling and community transport in order to encourage and maintain the viability and diversity of rural community life.
		<b>SRC11</b>	Encourage and support additional communities to engage with the Neighbourhood Plan process, taking account of the wider landscape, environmental, cultural and historic aspects of their community area as well as the social and economic factors that may affect it.

*(Additional Information: Viable Rural Communities Appendix 34)*

