

Financial Information

Finances 2002/3

AONB

Core costs (Staffing, premises etc) 156 100
Projects 53 857

Total 209 957

Income

Countryside Agency 150 558
Devon CC 10 000
East Devon DC 10 000
Mid Devon DC 10 000
Somerset CC 10 000
South Somerset 10 000
Taunton Deane BC 10 000
RSPB (Towards Tomorrows Heathlands) 6 000

Total 216 558

(surplus of £6 601 comes from LA contributions and have been rolled forward to 2003/4)

Local Products Strategy

Expenditure £72 000

Income:

6 funding Local Authorities £12 421
Countryside Agency £14 165
Forestry Commission £5 000
LEADER + £40 414

Total £72 000

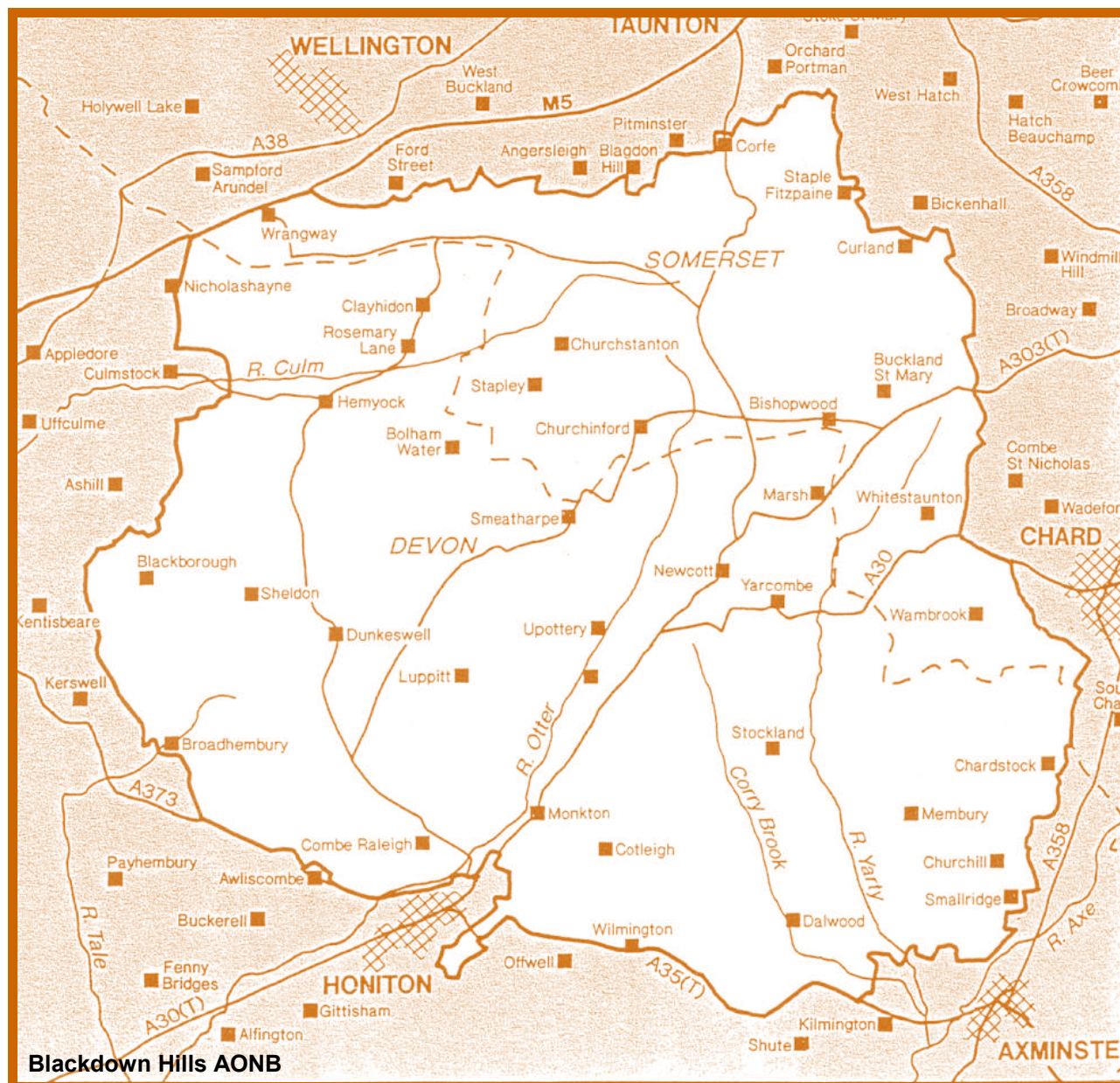
BLACKDOWN HILLS RURAL PARTNERSHIP

ANNUAL REVIEW 2002 / 2003



Local Authorities, National Agencies and Local Communities Working together to promote environmental and economic initiatives. In the AONB Funded by Devon and Somerset County Councils, East Devon, South Somerset, Mid Devon District Councils, Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Countryside Agency.

For more information about the projects or general enquiries relating to the work of the Partnership please contact the Project Team at Halifax House, Hemyock, Cullompton, Devon EX15 3QW – Telephone / Fax 01823 680681
Or visit our website www.blackdown-hills.net



Blackdown Hills AONB

**A Year in the Life of the Blackdown Hills
Introduction by David Gordon – Chair of the
Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership**



What a Year it has been! The Partnership and its staff have undergone a change at least as radical as that which the caterpillar undergoes in its chrysalis. We started 2002 with 2.5 Staff and 2003 sees us with a total of 12 full-and part-time bodies. In the interim we have seen AONBs' importance confirmed in the CROW Act, and won a valuable Leader+ contract of Euro-money. This, along with the Memorandum of Agreement signed by all our funding partners, has given us a degree of financial security we have never had before, and enabled us to plan more for the future.

The tangible results of all this reorganisation, apart from having a great team of friendly and skilled staff, are now beginning to appear. Perhaps the most popular event of the last year was our sponsored Blackdown

Hills tent a huge attraction at the Honiton Show. With funding from the Countryside Agency we were able to commission a year's photography of the area, culminating in Pauline Rook's wonderful exhibition, and giving us a 3000-photo record of the Blackdowns in 2002. The Local Products Strategy has begun to build contacts and deliver projects which help market goods and services. At a smaller scale we have seen progress on many projects, including Otterhead Lakes, the Ridge route, the first Woodlands forum and - my own special interest - the heritage group, co-ordinating work to protect the built heritage of the hills, whether an old barn or a prehistoric site, and also running workshops on the repair of traditional Blackdowns buildings.

I was honoured to be invited to represent the BHRP at the Palace of Westminster, at a reception to raise MPs awareness of work in AONBs. Timing was not on our side, sadly, as it was arranged for March 17th - the day the Commons debated the war on Iraq. Attendance was reasonable, considering, but I felt that Members' minds were elsewhere!

Amidst all this comes a little bit of news that is somehow of special significance: after 3 years of our heathland project, rare plant and bird species are returning to sites they had left. A perfect reminder of why we do this work, and proof that it CAN make a difference. The coming year should see more of our projects bear fruit.

David Gordon – May 2003

Photo Credit – The majority of the images used in this publication have been captured by Pauline Rook ©Countryside Agency



Blackdown Hills Hedge Association Facilitation Day



Dunkeswell Youth Project – Open Day

Local Products Strategy

ARTS & CRAFTS

Danny Hughes was employed as part time Arts & Crafts Co-ordinator from November 2003. His primary task has been to help set up the Blackdown Hills Creative Arts Forum, currently over 60 local artists and crafts people living in the Blackdown Hills are actively involved. In addition he has helped to compile:

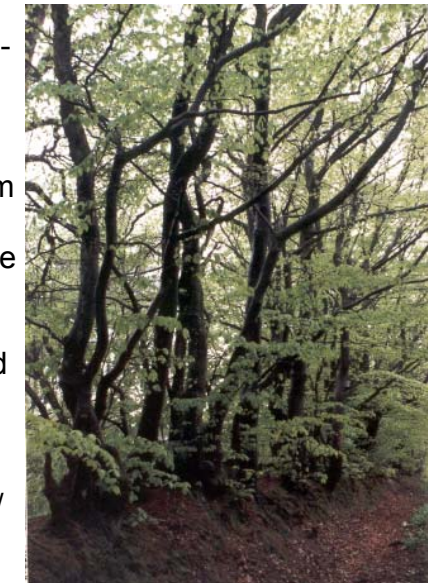
- Arts Library – continued updating and circulation of information relevant to artists.
- Database of active arts & crafts people within the Blackdown Hills
- Database of Exhibition Sites within the Blackdown Hills where local artists can display their work
- Directory of Opportunities & Events/ employment, training, and arts based events

One interesting project was the Movable Feast, a workshop for artists in the Blackdown Hills which was held in November. The Feast was part of a national programme run by performance artists and puppeteer Tony Gee. The aim was to provide an opportunity for artists to meet and gain first hand experience of their own creativity, collaborate on developing new ways of working together and create new projects. 25 artists attended and the consensus was that it was a great beginning! A follow up meeting was held where it was agreed that a working group and seminars should be convened through the BHRP to bring artists and crafts people of the Blackdown Hills together.

Local Products Strategy

WOODLANDS & FORESTRY

The Woodland & Forestry Sector Co-ordinator Warren Doe, came in to post in August 2002. The main aim in the first six months was to raise the profile of the Woodlands & Forestry sector and the potential for funding projects through the Local Products Strategy / LEADER+. In February 2003 the first Blackdown Hills



Beech Trees – Culmhead

Woodland Forum was held. This well attended meeting staged at Luppitt Village hall saw over eighty members from the local woodland industry discuss the current state of the industry and how the available funding might help towards improving its lot. It is hoped to make the Woodland Forum an annual event aimed at reviewing the past year and looking forward to the next.

One of the major outputs of the Woodlands & Forestry sector to date has been the report by the Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development on the potential for utilising timber on the Blackdown Hills in the construction of local housing. Recommendations from this report are already being implemented, such as the training of sawmill staff in visual timber grading skills to open up new markets and increase profitability.

The next year is set to be extremely productive with some major projects aimed at adding value to low grade timber, establishing the Blackdown Hills as a example of best practice for woodheat systems, promoting the certification of woodlands and wood processors, encouraging sustainable woodland management and encouraging more co-operation between timber producers, consumers and retailers. All hopefully contributing to improved utilisation and promotion of local timber and timber products.



Potters Studio – Clayhidon

Local Products Strategy

TOURISM & RECREATION



Local tourist attraction – Culmhead

Corinne Matthews took up the post of Part-time Tourism & Recreation Co-ordinator in March 2003. One of Corinne's first tasks was to ensure that the *Enjoying and Exploring* section of the Blackdown Hills website was an exciting and useful source of information for potential visitors to the area.

A number of projects, many of which were highlighted in the original development plan are currently at the initial stages including Weekend breaks for Hedgerow Craft enthusiasts, a parish walks publication, and promoting equine tourism opportunities in the area.

Corinne has developed a network of Local Authority Tourism Officers to help raise the profile of the AONB as a great visitor destination for the sustainable tourist. Corinne also sits on the SW Sustainable Tourism Forum.



Cyclists at Jacks House, Smeatharpe

Local Products Strategy

FOOD & DRINK

Since October last year, Fred McCaig has started working for Devon Food Links in the Blackdown Hills. Fred has contact with the Food and Drink organisations working across the two counties and has developed working relationships with them. This has allowed for a more consumer led focus for the Food and Drink sector.

An awareness raising programme is being developed that will provide information on the values and benefits of making use of the food produced within the AONB and how to find it. This works in parallel to a project that will encourage the village shops, pubs and other outlets to make more use of local suppliers.

The Food and Drink sector is a vibrant and enterprising sector with the producers from the AONB driving their businesses hard to satisfy the demand. Projects currently under development will bring more locally produced food and drink to the village shops and ensure that the schools can have the opportunity to make the use of food and drink an essential part of their curricular activities.



Local Producer at Honiton Farmers Market

HONITON SHOW

One of the highlights of last Summer was the Blackdown Hills Marquee at the this premier West Country one day Agricultural Show . The Marquee was organised by the Blackdown Hills Business Association, funded by LPS, and was used to launch the Local Products Strategy. The tent was filled with over 70 local businesses and attracted over 10,000 visitors.



Blackdown Hills Marquee – Photo by F McCaig

About the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership



The activity of the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership is focused on the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and seeks to safeguard the distinctive landscape, wildlife, historical and architectural character of the AONB whilst fostering the social and economic well being of its communities.

Formed in the mid 90s, the Partnership evolved from the Joint Advisory Committee and brings together public bodies, local organisations and voluntary groups with an active interest in the Hills. Members of the Partnership work co-operatively to an agreed five year Management Plan and annual Business Plan, with the key funders being signatories to a six year Memorandum of Agreement.

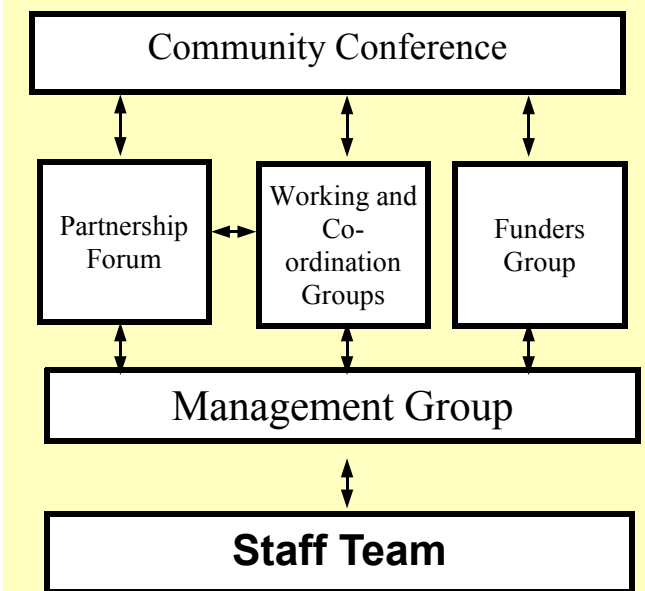
The structure of the Partnership is designed so that local people, businesses and organisations can share decision-making and project delivery with the public bodies and land managers. An annual Community Conference is held every March and Partnership Forums held every six months. Decisions about policy and use of

AIMS

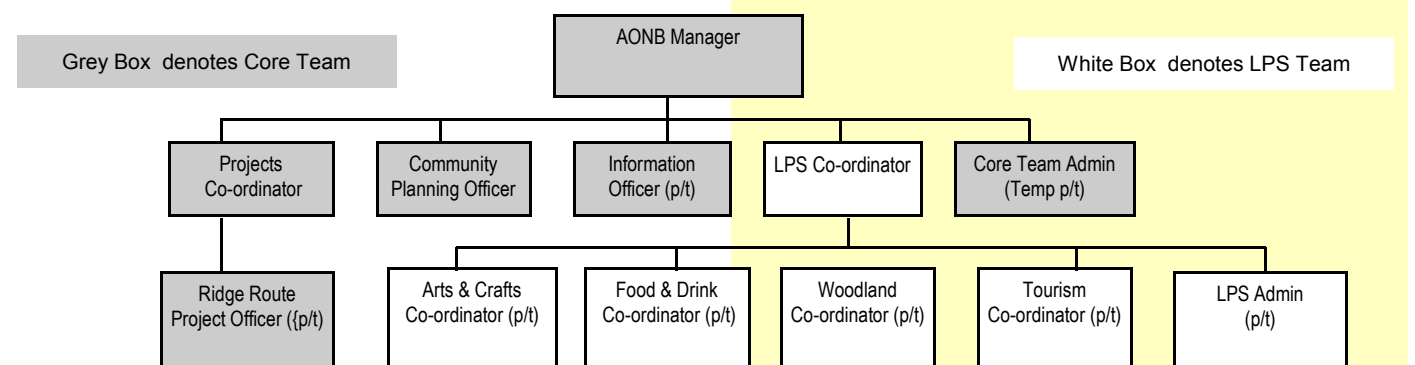
- ◆ To promote and protect the environmental and cultural heritage of the Blackdown Hills
- ◆ To support community activities and initiatives in the Blackdown Hills
- ◆ To communicate the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills
- ◆ To foster sustainable economic development and encourage local enterprise in the Blackdown Hills
- ◆ To ensure the continued development of the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership

resources are made by the Management Group, which consists of representatives of the seven key funders plus 8 representatives drawn from the Partnership Forum. The Partnership is currently chaired by Somerset County Councillor David Gordon. The office and staff team are based in Hemyock in the heart of the AONB.

How The Partnership Works



Staff Team with members of the Management Group



Highlights for 2002/03

Resources

The Partnership is funded by seven core funding partners and draws in other resources from a wide variety of partner organisations and the community on a project by project basis. Core funders are Countryside Agency, Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset County Council.

Working in Partnership

There are currently over 75 member organisations of the Partnership Forum and over the past year they have actively helped to shape the design of major projects such as the Local Products Strategy as well the more detailed delivery of smaller projects. A number of Working and Co-ordination Groups have also been active including:

- Biodiversity, Heritage and Access Co-ordination groups
- Formation of new Working groups for the Blackdown Hills Centre and the AONB Management Plan (Community Strategy)
- Steering group for the Local Products Strategy
- Honiton Show Committee
- Otterhead Steering Group
- Youth Steering Group
- Photographic Project Steering Group

The Management Group in 2002/3 consisted of:

Councillor David Gordon (Chair) Somerset CC
Councillor Paul Diviani (Vice Chair) East Devon DC
Councillor David Lamb South Somerset DC
Councillor Frank Rosamund Mid Devon DC
Councillor Anthony Drake Devon CC
Amanda Grundy Countryside Agency
Geoffrey Sworder Council for the Protection of Rural England
Henry Trott Country Landowners Association
Richard Kalloway National Farmers Union
Judith Ward Womens Institutes
Heather Stallard Blackdown Hills Business Association
Frank Edwards Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
David Allen Stockland Turbaries Management Committee
Jo Gunner Devon Youth Association
Mike Hudson Parish Council representative
David Jackson Parish Council representative

Projects

GRASSLANDS

The biodiversity of unimproved grasslands within the AONB is generally little known. This project was initiated in June 2002 as an outcome of the Business Plan review in December 2001.

The project aims to map sites and identify:

- The location of unimproved grasslands within the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- The biodiversity within each of the sites
- Areas of historical and archaeological importance
- The diversity of species on the different alkaline, acid and neutral soil types

Greater knowledge of the grassland resource within the AONB will help determine appropriate management. The Partnership is currently working with the Somerset Environmental Records Centre, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, and DEFRA to obtain data on the species and sites of this important habitat.



Water Meadow – Membury



Buckland St Mary – Golden Jubilee Celebrations

Projects

HERITAGE

The heritage of the Hills and especially the architectural and built heritage were identified in the original AONB designation papers as one of the four defining features of the landscape making it worthy of national designation. The Heritage Co-ordination group met for the first time in late 2002 and immediately came up with a long list of potential projects for the Partnership ranging from investigating the traditional style of gates in the Hills to running training days in traditional building techniques.

The Historic Farmstead Survey continued with a further 50 farmsteads being completed in 2002.



Local Products Strategy



The Local Product Strategy funded from the LEADER+ programme is in place to improve the long-term sustainability of the area in economic, social and environmental terms. It also aims to stimulate new economic activity and product sector growth. The strategy was written following much local consultation

The strategy focuses on four main sectors for support:

- Food and Drink
- Tourism and Recreation
- Arts and Crafts
- Woodlands and Forestry

There will also be support for local business including services to assist their growth and to

stimulate new economic activity. development, sharing ideas and experiences good and bad, creating a strong identity for the area and bringing people together. We also welcome projects that cross or fall between these areas.

There are two ways to access the funding. The Key Fund is for grants of less than £8,000 and the structural fund is for larger grant requests. 11 projects have been funded through the Key Fund. The Structural Fund is a more complex process. A number of Organisations including the Blackdown Hills Business Association and the Blackdown Hills Hedge Association are developing projects to be submitted in 2003.

Leader+ is a Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership project, although LPS has very specific targets to achieve, delivery is very much a full team effort. All sectors link closely with the core activities such as the community planning process, information provision, the Ridge Route and the project co-ordination. LPS has provided an opportunity to develop ideas beyond previous barriers .



Blackdown Hills Hedge Event 2002



Local Brewery – Luppitt

Projects

RIDGE ROUTE

As a result of the Feasibility Study for a recreational route along the Ridge of the Blackdown Hills, and the support shown by local landowners, businesses, Local Authorities and interest groups, during its preparation, an Action Plan was commissioned in April 2002. The aim of the project is to develop a high quality, sustainable and safe recreational route that causes minimum disturbance to wildlife and current land use while, at the same time, realising the economic and cultural benefits such a route could bring to the area.

The action plan outlines a series of recommended actions for a phased development of the Route over 5 years. A Ridge Route officer tasked with for implementing the first year of a five year action plan was employed by BHRP in January 2003, funded by Devon County Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council, Somerset County Council BHRP and the Countryside Agency. The role includes research and development, advocacy and promotion, consultation and negotiation and project management for the implementation of Phase 1.



Wild Garlic – Castle Neroche



Sustainable transport!

Projects

WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

As youth clubs continue to close around the AONB, the Youth Steering Group has been identifying methods to support young people.

Youth Activity Programmes: During Summer 2002, BHRP supported Honiton Youth Service prepare an activity programme for young people. Given its success and the results of consultation confirming the need, we have run a subsequent winter and spring programme. The programmes aim to give the young people in the Area the opportunity to take part in different activities, events, courses and workshops such as music, arts, drama, outdoor pursuits. The activities aim to be fun but also give the opportunity to learn and pick up skills along the way and encourage adult participation and involvement.

Roving Youth Worker: Research was undertaken from September to December and village profiles were prepared. These profiles identified many issues facing young people throughout the AONB including the lack of services, facilities, activities and transport. Funding has been identified for a roving youth worker for the Blackdowns. This is supported by the statutory youth services who form part of the Youth Steering Group. Such a worker would support: existing youth clubs; communities without youth provision; and disengaged young people.

Dunkeswell Community Initiative: Funded through the East Devon Drugs Implementation Group, BHRP has undertaken a project with the community of Dunkeswell. The aim of the project was to identify the main issues affecting the community and build their capacity to provide education, support and development around wider teenage issues and substance misuse. The project included the young people making a video of their issues and perceptions of life in a rural community; a youth drop-in, detached work, arts, drama and skills development and issues awareness sessions. A model for community development work in rural areas resulted from this project.



Young People making music at Dunkeswell

Working in Partnership

COMMUNITY PLANNING

Community Strategy for the AONB

The new post of Community Planning Officer was agreed and Lisa Turner was appointed in August 2002, with the main task to oversee the preparation of a combined management plan for the AONB and community strategy for the area. Time has been spent building relationships with colleagues in local authorities and other agencies, many of whom have not previously been closely involved with the Partnership, and acting as advocate for the joint process. One particular aspect was to liaise with both County Councils over the collation of data about the area to support and inform the process, and the results were presented on Devon County Council's web site. Research was undertaken to identify issues and concerns evident from previous research and consultation exercises and work ongoing in the area. Two major consultation exercises were run with this year's Partnership Forum and Community Conference to identify and verify issues for the plan to address.



Planning

Having a dedicated officer to deal with planning matters means we are able to monitor planning applications more effectively and have a greater input into the planning system. To support this, steps were taken to ensure that the library of planning documents is up to date. We submitted comments on the Devon Structure Plan to 2016 and received consultation copies of Mid Devon Local Plan Revised Deposit, Somerset Waste Local Plan and Devon Waste Plan First Deposit. We have kept abreast of planning applications received by the district planning authorities and responded to 13 development control applications in the period between August and April. Useful discussions were held with the Quantock and Mendip Hills AONBs over planning matters of mutual interest.

Working in Partnership

CREATING A CENTRE FOR THE BLACKDOWN HILLS

The Partnership is investigating the development of a Blackdown Hills Centre, which has been identified as a high priority at recent Community Conferences. A Feasibility Study prepared by Land Use Consultants identified the need and selection criteria for a Centre. The final report was completed in May 2002. In November 2002, Clive Jones and Associates, were commissioned to help the Partnership clarify what was required from a Centre, potential partnerships and possible funding sources. They have assessed the legal, planning and commercial issues related to a range of options including 2 private farms, 3 village halls and 2 brown field sites in a variety of locations. Outline architectural proposals have been prepared together with indicative budgets for construction and running costs. Exemplary design, use of local products and appropriateness to the location are all considered essential to the Centre and its setting.



Information

NEWSLETTER

Four editions of the newsletter were produced last year – including a special one for the Honiton Show which was handed out to visitors to the Blackdown Hills Marquee. The circulation is now in excess of 4,000 copies.

WEBSITE

The website is regularly up-dated and carries a range of information about the work of the Partnership. www.blackdown-hills.net

VILLAGE INFORMATION AGENCIES

Eight village stores located throughout the Blackdown Hills operate as Village Information Agencies carrying a selection of community and tourist information.

Information

PHOTOGRAPHIC RESIDENCY

The BHRP had a photographer in residence for 12 months funded by the Countryside Agency. Pauline Rook was given the brief of capturing the *spirit and essence* of the Blackdown Hills throughout the year.

During her time with us Pauline produced over 3,000 images which have been used in a variety of our publications, display material and the website. The images are also available for use by other organisations. A hugely successful exhibition of her work took place at the end of the contract and was attended by over 400 people.



Lead me to the Hills! Lane at Whitestaunton

PUBLICITY, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

Regular press releases are issued relating to the work of the Partnership and specific events. We also use the extensive network of Parish Magazines to keep parishioners informed about our activities. There was much interest in the Photographic Exhibition with one local newspaper giving it a two page spread. We have contributed articles about our activities to a variety of external publications including the Defra produced Blackdown Hills ESA Newsletter. Project Staff and members of the Management Group have given presentations to local groups and parish councils. We took part in the Somerset Countryside Conference where we exhibited a range of material.

Information

FIRST STOP FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Numerous general enquiries relating to the work and activities of the Partnership are received by telephone, letter and email and dealt with promptly or channelled to appropriate partners.

BLACKDOWN TALES

This is our opportunity to communicate the special qualities of the AONB to others by commissioning a variety of experts to lead guided walks and activities. For the first time two family focussed events were held – *Bugs in the Bog* and *A Mushroom Foray*. Other walks included a study of the Landscape as painted by the Camden Artists, Whetstone Mines, Hedges and Heathland conservation.



From the top – Whetstone Mines, Camden Artists and Bugs in the Bog - Blackdown Tales Summer 2002

Projects

HEATHLANDS

Management: The area of dry heathland and springline mires being actively managed continues to increase throughout the AONB. Management by local farmers, contractors, organised volunteer groups and local residents is being funded through the Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage (HLF funded) project. We are just over half way through the 6 year project which is administered by the RSPB.



Management, Stockland

Surveys: BHRP is expanding its programme of monitoring the effects of management. Dr David Allen, a local ecologist, has completed exploratory assessments and quantitative surveys of 17 commons and turbaries to increase knowledge of the biodiversity within the AONB. An MSc student worked with the Partnership in the summer on Hense Moor to assess effects of management on biodiversity and local attitudes to this type of work. Results indicate the bio-diversity of the managed heathlands is increasing and species have been recorded after an absence of many years.

Pony Grazing: Grazing is an important element of heathland management. With the changes in agriculture it is becoming more difficult to find farmers with stock to graze these small and isolated areas. In July, we followed the example of National Parks et al and began grazing with ponies as a pilot scheme. Six hardy native ponies were purchased by a local farmer and leased to the Partnership. Their effectiveness surpassed expectation and, if successful, it is hoped these ponies will provide a resource for parish councils and commoners to maintain the benefits of the active management well into the future.

Heathland Booklet: A local ecologist has been commissioned to prepare a heathland pocket sized booklet to communicate the special qualities of heathland to the general public. It is a collaborative project between the Partnership and the East Devon AONBs which together form an effective heathland unit.

Projects

OTTERHEAD

The Otterhead Estate is often considered to be the honeypot of the AONB. It is a popular venue for informal recreation – walking, fishing and bird watching much valued by local people both from within the AONB and from the surrounding towns for its wild unspoilt charm and variety of interesting features. The lakes provide water to the Fulwood Water Treatment Works for public supply.

The Conservation Plan: After many delays, consultants have been appointed to prepare a Conservation Plan for the site. This plan, funded through Countryside Stewardship, will provide guidelines for work to conserve the existing and potential assets of the site over the next 10 years.

Surveys and Data Collection: The Steering Group comprising: the local authorities, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Gardens Trust, Forest Enterprise, Wessex Water, parish council representatives, a local historian and BHRP continues to carry out surveys and build upon knowledge of the ecology, heritage and recreational potential of the site. This data will be included in the Conservation Plan.

Otterhead Work days. A programme of work days to include surveying the house site, propagating rhododendrons, coppicing and conservation management ran through the Spring and Summer. These practical sessions were intended to encourage public participation in the management of the site and proved very useful.

Otterhead Trust: Draft approval has been given for the setting up of an educational trust by the Charities Commission. The trustees will be local people with an interest in the estate and will be supported by a technical management group. This should be finalised by mid 2003.

