

Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership



Annual Review
2003-2004



A year in the life of the BHRP

Last year saw the Partnership office established at full strength, and beginning to fulfil its core purpose: 2003/4 has seen its work progress really well. A huge staff effort produced the "Blackdown Hills Plan", which spelt out comprehensively what we and our partners will do in the next five years to care for the Blackdown Hills. Meanwhile a growing list of events in the area proved that we are committed to making things actually happen.

As before, the Honiton Show last year was our most visible contact with the public - about 8,000 of them passing through our tent, despite temperatures inside that were more Barbados than Blackdowns. Later in the year, the Community Conference could have used some of that heat on a notably cold day, but still generated an enthusiastic discussion on the theme of 'Branding for the Blackdowns', as a result of which some distinctive plans are afoot. Nothing so predictable as a logo, but look out for some very subtle sculptures, coming to a hedge near you soon. Other memorable events include the Historic Building Repair Day - a sell-out, with 40-plus people squeezed into the Kings Arms skittle alley, and later exploring some local buildings: further 'traditional repair' days are planned for the autumn.

The over-subscription of our outdoor activities - from butterfly walks to archaeology - confirms that public interest in the landscape has never been higher. The new C.A.P. proposals seem to acknowledge this, but will farmers continue to be drowned in bureaucracy, while only receiving a fraction of the price their products earn in the supermarket? While these questions remain, nationally, unanswered, the Partnership is getting on with developing and promoting local products, through our European Leader+ funding. With projects as diverse as Cross-country courses and refrigerators, we are doing what we can to see that the people who ultimately look after the landscape are able to stay in business. It's that simple.

Of course not everything goes as planned, and during the year we reluctantly dropped our plans for a Blackdown Hills Centre. The process was useful - confirming that our most effective work is often dispersed, not centralised, so a 'Centre' was not the best use of our resources: however, we DO still need more appropriate staff accommodation, should anyone have a free office in the Hemyock area! We also had a hiccup in our national funding, which remains less than secure. A pity: as it is increasingly clear that the Partnership's work is excellent value for money for all the local authorities whose interests it represents.

On top of our normal work, the coming year will see a review of the governance of the Partnership, and a fresh look at our 'Forum' format: most of our member organisations are well involved with the (twenty or so!) Working Groups which deal with specific subjects, and don't need a 'big tent' meeting, so stay away in droves. We would be interested in any suggestions for evolving a more useful format - or whether we need the forum at all? This much I do know: the structure of an organisation is less important than the quality of its staff and members; and in that respect we are truly fortunate. Thank you all - paid and unpaid - very much indeed.

Somerset County Councillor David Gordon, Chairman, Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Gordon". Below the signature is a horizontal line.



Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The Blackdown Hills were designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1991. They form a cohesive and readily identifiable landscape block straddling the border of Somerset and Devon, stretching from the M5 in the north, to Honiton and Axminster in the south, and from Chard in the east to Culmstock in the west. The AONB covers 360sq.kilometres and sits between 150 and 310 metres above sea level. It is characterised by a sense of relative remoteness and tranquility and embraces a diverse range of landscapes. From the dramatic steep north facing scarp, the AONB dips gently southwards as a flat-topped plateau, deeply dissected by valleys. On the tops there are wide open windswept spaces, whilst in the valleys nestle villages and hamlets surrounded by intricate and ancient patterns of small-enclosed fields and a maze of winding high-hedged lanes.

The Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership (BHRP)

The Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership is a partnership of six local authorities, national agencies and local communities (40 parishes plus many other village and community based organisations) working together to promote environmental, social and economic initiatives in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Core funding is drawn from the local authorities and the Countryside Agency whilst resources for projects and initiatives are secured from a wide range of grants and other organisations. Delivery of these initiatives and projects is achieved through working closely with our partner organisations.

The BHRP is structured so that the local communities have a clear influence in the work of the Partnership and indeed the BHRP is nationally recognised as setting the trend for this type of work.

The Blackdown Hills Management Group (BHMGM)

Is the main decision making body of the organisation and also acts as the Local Action Group (LAG) for the LEADER+ funded Local Products Strategy. During the past year the BHMGM met 5 times as a formal group. Key items that were discussed in 2003-4:

- The budget and resources of the Partnership
- The development and subsequent adoption of the Blackdown Hills Plan 2004-9
- Decisions on major structural fund allocations for LEADER+
- Agreed position statement on wind energy in the AONB

Membership

Mr David Allen	Parish Representative
Cllr John Berry	Devon County Council
Cllr Paul Diviani	East Devon District Council – Vice-Chair of BHRP
Mr Frank Edwards	Parish Representative
Cllr David Gordon	Somerset County Council – Chair of BHRP
Ms Amanda Grundy	Countryside Agency
Mr Mike Hudson	Parish Representative
Mr David Jackson	Parish Representative
Mr Richard Kallaway	National Farmers Union
Cllr David Lamb	South Somerset District Council
*Mr Richard Lambirth	DEFRA
*Ms Amanda Newsome	English Nature (Devon)
Cllr Anne Priscott	Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cllr Frank Rosamond	Mid Devon District Council
Mrs Heather Stallard	Blackdown Hills Business Association
Mr Geoffrey Sworder	CPRE
*Mr Andrew Tucker	Parish Representative
Ms Judith Ward	Womens Institute

* New Members elected May 2004

Partnership Forum

The Forum met twice in the year to help develop ideas and actions for the Plan and also to exchange information and discuss issues of common concern across the Hills. Attendance at the two Forums was lower than previous years and subsequently the Partnership will be considering the role and function of the Forum during 2004-5.

Community Conference

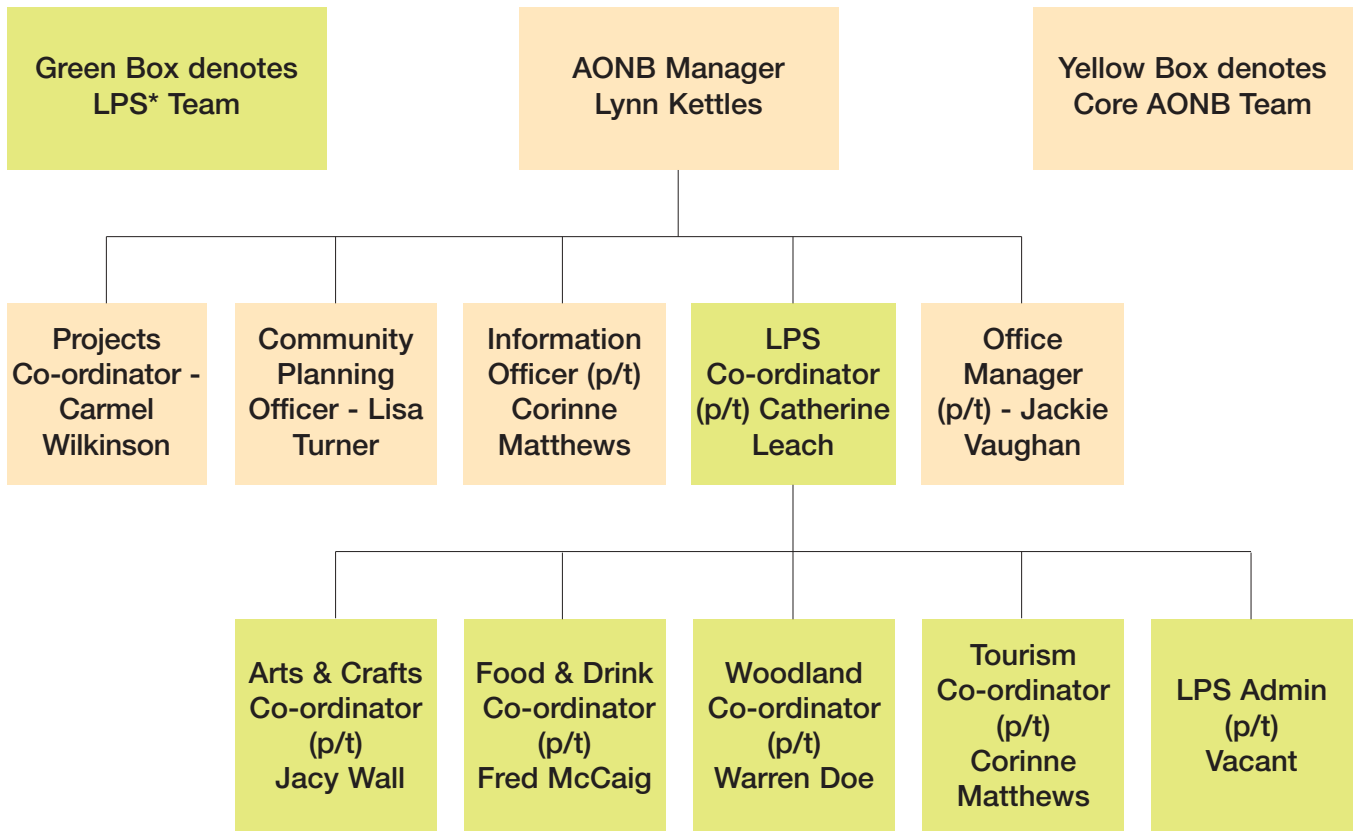
The Community Conference was held in March 2004 at Coldharbour Mill. This was an excellent day attended by over 70 people representing a diverse range of organisations and businesses. The Conference discussed the issues around branding and marketing the Hills and this work is currently being overseen by a small working group where the results will be presented to the next Community Conference in March 2005. The conference also reinforced the idea of developing gateways to the Hills and this is being developed around the theme of hedgerows and hedgerow sculptures - look out for the autumn newsletter for more information.

Staffing

There were considerable staffing changes in 2003-4 with the departure of Jo Wall and Sarah Cookson in June 2003 and the arrival of Carmel Wilkinson as AONB Projects Co-ordinator and Catherine Leach as Local Products Strategy Programme Manager in September 2003. Jackie Vaughan joined the team in October as Officer Manager and the final addition was Jacy Wall working for Somerset Arts Week who started work in November. Since then we have enjoyed a stable team and somehow managed to squeeze in and work productively in the relatively cosy confines of Halifax House!



Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership – Staff Organisation Chart



*LPS—Local Products Strategy Leader+ funding programme

OTHER INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

Blackdown Hills Centre

After a year of work and discussion the Management Group finally resolved not to proceed with developing our own purpose built centre – a hard decision for the Group given that building a Centre has long been a clear aspiration of the Partnership. However in investigating the feasibility it became clear that the initial level of investment and the degree of risk involved was too great for the Partnership at this time. The Partnership remains on the look-out for suitable premises to rent or convert in order to deliver some of the original aims of a purpose-built centre.

Neroche Land Heritage Bid

Over the year we have worked closely with Forest Enterprise as they develop a £3 million bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for enhancement, access and interpretation work on the Neroche scarp. Proposed projects include developing the Ridge Route, habitat restoration, training and apprenticeships for woodsmen alongside an outdoor classroom and new interpretation and recreation facilities for residents and visitors.

Market Towns

We have worked actively with Cullompton and Chard Market Town initiatives as they develop their town plans and strategies and tangible projects are beginning to emerge such as the Culm Valley guide.

South West Protected Landscapes Forum (SWPLF)

The South West Protected Landscapes Forum (the 12 AONBs and 2 National Parks in the South West) continues to deliver real benefits for the Hills – from securing important datasets from national and regional partners, organising training for AONB staff to running publicity events and preparing promotional material. SWPLF is enabling the AONBs to work collectively and to negotiate and lobby as one increasingly powerful voice across the region with the main regional and sub regional agencies.

COMMUNITY PLANNING

AONB Management Plan & Community Strategy

In March 2004 the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership published the Blackdown Hills Plan 2004-9 which was prepared in response to the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) and Local Government Act (2000) putting forward a strategy and action plan for the Hills. The Plan was developed through the extensive consultation and involvement of many interested groups and organisations. Successful fulfilment of the Plan relies on many partners, organisations, agencies and groups continuing to be active within the Hills. The Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership will lead the delivery and review of the Plan and seek to secure many of the resources needed for individual actions and projects.

The key aims of the Plan are:

- To recognise, understand and enhance the diversity and distinctiveness of the nationally important landscape resources of the Blackdown Hills AONB.
- For the land and natural environment to be actively managed, appreciated and understood for its contribution to the landscape character and distinctiveness of the AONB
- To have flourishing and cohesive communities with access for all to a range of services and facilities.
- To have a thriving local economy with jobs for local people, that makes wise use of local resources, benefits the community and conserves and enhances the landscape and environment
- To ensure that all necessary new development enhances the landscape, reflecting the strong rural vernacular and contributing to the social, economic and environmental well-being of the Blackdown Hills.

Some of the key stages in producing the Plan were:

- Attendance at a range of community events including school fetes and annual parish meetings
- Consultation draft agreed by Management Group and local authorities
- Formal consultation period: 250 copies sent out and 40 responses received
- Final draft approved by Countryside Agency and English Nature and adopted by all six local authorities during March.

Preparation of the plan was supported by a community planning working group, bringing together specialist officers from partner authorities, management group representatives and from the local strategic partnerships (LSPs). Work was also undertaken with the South West Protected Landscapes Forum (SWPLF) on specific aspects such as developing a common approach to monitoring and evaluation amongst south west AONBs and linking with regional bodies.

Contributing to other local community planning activities has been developed through involvement with both East Devon and Mid Devon LSP Environment sub-groups and by advising and liaising with communities preparing parish plans and market town plans.

Planning

The aim this year was to re-establish regular planning officers meetings, and in November officers from five of the partner local authorities met with staff to share information and discuss common issues, with a view to developing a productive working relationship between BHRP and local planning authorities. Throughout the year responses were made to development plan consultations and to draft national planning guidance. Planning applications in the AONB were monitored and comments submitted in a number of cases.

Keeping abreast of current issues and sharing best practice in planning was ensured by working with others in the region and nationally, including:

- Involvement in SWPLF events
- Working with Somerset AONBs
- Presence at inaugural South Downs Planning Conference
- Attending GOSW Devon Rural Planning Event
- Delegate at 2003 National AONB Conference 'Planning for the Future'

Affordable Housing

One of the main concerns to emerge during the preparation of the plan was the issue of affordable housing. In response to this, the rural community councils' Rural Housing Enablers and Rural Housing Development Officers employed by two of the district councils have agreed to work together with the BHRP to look at the Blackdown Hills area in a co-ordinated way. Work has been progressing with identifying a variety of housing and planning related information about the area, to assist with targeting future work.

PROJECT CO-ORDINATION

The Partnership leads on a range of projects, the majority of which fall within the following headings:- Access; Biodiversity; Heritage; Otterhead and Youth. Working groups deal with these specific areas of interest on behalf of the Management Group. All have clear terms of reference to share information, promote matters of interest to each group and disseminate their findings to the wider Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership.

Individually the groups main purposes are:-

Access

The access working group meets to ensure that all six administrations are in harmony on rights of way and countryside access matters relevant to the Blackdown Hills AONB.

Following the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) most Highway Authorities are preoccupied with the production of Rights of Way Improvement Plans and managing Local Access Forums which is reflected in the activity of the working group.

Since April 2003 the group has:-

- Continued to meet regularly and share information relevant to the Blackdown Hills
- Responded to consultation on the Somerset County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Responded to consultation on the Devon County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- Responded to consultation on the BHRP Management Plan

Ridge Route

The Ridge Route is a specific project within Access. A steering group has continued to meet regularly as the project develops to form a key part of the Neroche Heritage Lottery Fund bid. Some of the areas worked on include:-

- Landowner consultation and negotiation
- Checking the suitability of routes on the ground
- Developing aspects of the HLF bid
- Liaison with partners including Forest Enterprise
- Research into other promoted equestrian routes

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is of key importance within the Blackdown Hills and a major reason for its designation as an AONB. There are several strands to the projects under this heading including:-

- Development of the new Environmental Stewardship scheme has been ongoing. A group responded to a series of agri environment consultations from DEFRA.
- Contributed to Blackdown Hills ESA group meetings.
- Biodiversity Working Group continued to meet regularly and share information relevant to the Blackdown Hills.

Heathlands

Tomorrows Heathland Heritage (THH) is a Heritage Lottery Fund project supporting the restoration and management of the beautiful and threatened remnants of heathland on the Blackdown Hills, our equivalent of the tropical rainforest. Outputs include:-

- Membership of THH Steering Group
- A programme of practical winter works was carried out including swayling, scrub clearance and bracken management
- Grazing is an essential element in heathland management. English Nature organised a Grazing Animals Conference from which a group was established to look at this issue specifically with reference to the Blackdown Hills
- Recruited and trained butterfly recorders to monitor Blackdown Hills sites as a measure of their ecological health
- A heathland booklet was published, to be launched at Honiton Show (August 2004)
- Worked with Commoners groups (Luppitt and Stockland Turbaries) to achieve conservation and management of commons



Heathland Book

Tomorrow's Heathland Heritage has funded this booklet at the end of a successful project to introduce heathlands and their unique species and habitats to a wider audience, which if you are reading this means you! It has all the information you will ever need to understand heathlands in the Blackdowns and East Devon skilfully condensed into lavishly illustrated bite-sized chunks. Rest assured there is no dumbing-down, it has been written with academic rigour but without the fine detail that frankly most of us do not need to know.

We hope that readers will enjoy this booklet and be inspired by the raw beauty of the heaths and the amazing plants, birds and animals that depend on them for survival. Remember though, this is just the start, heaths took hundreds of years to form but can be destroyed in a fraction of that time. THH is not a miracle cure for heathland loss but it is a start if we have the desire to protect our natural heritage for future generations.

Pete Gotham - RSPB

Heritage

The outstanding natural and built heritage of the Blackdown Hills is at the core of its description as a finest landscape. A Heritage Working Group is the active arm of the Management Group in these matters.

Actions include:-

- A Heritage Awareness Day in July 2003 at Broadhembury, displays, walks, talks and cream teas.
- A Heritage Building Awareness Day in March 2004, using Stockland as base visiting properties in the area, a mixture of theory and practical.
- Heritage Lottery Funded Community Landscapes Project run by Exeter University continued encouraging local people to get involved in surveying and investigating their local archaeology.
- The Heritage Working Group continued to meet regularly, sharing information and planning activities.
- Heritage Working Group responded to consultation on the draft BHRP Management Plan.

Otterhead

Otterhead has much to offer in terms of natural and built heritage and steady progress has been made towards the establishment of a not-for-profit company (limited by guarantee) with charitable objects to take over the lease from Somerset Wildlife Trust.

Actions include:-

- A programme of six guided walks on the site between May and October 2003
- A successful application to join Countryside Stewardship
- Completion of the Restoration Plan, which will be used as guide for work and to support any funding bids
- A detailed civil engineers condition survey of the walled garden, a hugely important piece of work. It will be useful as a record of the condition of the garden, will guide work plans and be an important component in funding bids
- The Otterhead Working Group continued to meet regularly and enthusiastically progress a range of issues
- Terms of reference were adopted



Work with Young People

Young people are hard to reach but we keep on trying.

Actions include:-

- The Youth Working Group continued to meet and adopted terms of reference
 - Project Officer attended other youth network meetings
 - Working Group responded to the draft Management Plan
 - A successful Youth Activity Programme in summer 2003 gave 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
 - Analysis of Blackdown Hills village profiles and production of statistical report for youth activity and provision in the Blackdown Hills
- Analysis of existing information and additional research resulting in a report that establishes the need and sets out the case for a roving youth worker in the Blackdown Hills
 - Work continued to secure a roving youth worker for the Blackdown Hills. This worker would support: existing youth clubs; communities without youth provision; and disengaged young people. This is an exciting advancement to the youth programme and could help many of the communities in the AONB
 - Dunkswell Community Initiative was undertaken in Spring 2003 with the aim of identifying the main issues affecting that community and building their capacity to provide education, support and development around wider teenage issues. The project included young people making a video about their thoughts and perceptions of life in a rural community; a youth drop-in was established with arts, drama skills development and issues awareness sessions





A snapshot of the Blackdown Hills

Top Row: Fertiliser - Wambrook,
Baling - Membury, Farm heritage - Culmstock,
Telephone Box - Dalwood.

2nd Row: Coldharbour Mill - Uffculme,
Petrol Pump - Stockland, Bridge - Culmstock.

3rd Row: Turkey - Churchinford,
Wall - Hemyock, Green Lane - Whitestaunton,
Flower Festival - Stockland,
Sow and piglet - Churchinford.

Landscape - Sheldon.





PUBLICITY, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership (BHRP) recognises that effective communication is vital to assist the smooth process of partnership working as well as keeping the Blackdown Hills community informed about our role, responsibilities and activities.

We have established a communications framework and obtained a commitment from the staff team that we embed communications in all that we do.

During the year we have:-

- Produced three editions of the Newsletter, with a circulation for each issue in excess of 4,000 copies.
 - Initiated a fortnightly electronic newsletter that is circulated to Partner Organisations
 - Refreshed the design and the navigation of the website www.blackdown-hills.net
 - Run a very successful guided walks and activity programme under the Blackdown Tales banner
 - Responded to requests from Parish Councils and Community Groups for presentations about the work of BHRP
 - Attended a number of community events (with display material) as part of the Blackdown Hills Plan consultation process
 - Held major displays at Honiton Show and the Blackdown Hills Hedge Event
 - Held smaller displays of photographs and literature at a variety of community events.
 - Produced a comprehensive diary of community events that is regularly updated on our website and distributed in paper format several times a year
 - Contributed articles about the AONB to a variety of external publications
 - Continued to support a network of eight Village Information Agencies
- Produced a minimum of one press release per month relating to our activities and events
 - Provided local experts for the Country File programme that focussed on a farm for sale in the AONB
 - Given radio and TV interviews relating to specific projects and activities
 - Handled media interest relating to specific AONB issues
 - Continued to deal with a large number of general enquiries received on a daily basis by telephone, letter or email

Our Information Officer has actively participated in the following networks:-

- The Editorial Board of Outstanding the magazine produced by the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Member of the South West Protected Landscapes Communications Officers Group
- Member of the National AONB Communications Group
- Presented to the SE Communications Officers Group
- Assisted in the organisation of the NAONB stand at the Great Outdoors Show held at the NEC Birmingham



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE OFFICE MANAGER

Jackie Vaughan took on the role of administrator at the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership in October 2003 and immediately found out there is much more to living in the Blackdowns than coffee mornings and fetes as she relates here:-

“As an administrator, you might imagine that I sit in the office for 3 days a week shuffling pieces of paper around a desk, however, although some shuffling happens the job is much more varied and interesting than that.

With 9 staff, in a very small office, I aim to achieve some sense of organisation which ranges from ordering the stationary through to managing the IT and any equipment we can squeeze into such a small place!

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that the team is well travelled and gets to see as many of the delightful village halls as possible. I therefore arrange the various meetings and conferences, held throughout the year, at every far flung corner of the Blackdown's that I can find. This of course also gives the team the opportunity to raise awareness of the work being carried out by the

partnership. The meetings held are summarised in light reading called minutes and I have the pleasure of compiling these.

I get to deal with money, so the many years of working for a bank have come in useful at last! Alas most of it is paper based in the form of invoices, bills and more invoices although, I do look at these very carefully and ensure we are getting value for money wherever possible.

Responsibility for a budget makes you very aware of what you are spending and I don't intend to go over mine!

Health and Safety is a priority for us all at Halifax House and I am trained in First Aid and Health and Safety in the workplace so the staff can rest assured that if they need a plaster they will be OK. I wish it was as easy to fix a computer!

I also have other projects to work on to keep me out of trouble like looking at the corporate image of the Blackdown Hills Rural Partnership and learning magic so that I can make the many years of filing and publications disappear in to 3 filing cabinets.

No two days are the same in this role but I wouldn't have it any other way - just the view from the office window makes it all worthwhile.”



THE LOCAL PRODUCTS STRATEGY (LPS)



The Blackdown Hills Local Products Strategy is a six year programme funded through the European Union's LEADER + initiative. This is a European Fund for assisting rural communities in improving economic prosperity and the general quality of life in the area by

- Enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the Blackdown Hills
- Reinforcing and strengthening the economic environment
- Encouraging greater community involvement with the local economy

Four key product sectors have been targeted with the aim of stimulating new economic activity and growth in these areas.

- Food & Drink
- Tourism and Recreation
- Arts & Crafts
- Woodland & Forestry

Cross Sector projects are also supported to assist the whole range of business activity in the area.

The programme runs from 2002-2008

Programme Management

The main activity of LPS is overseen by a Steering Group.

- The Steering Group met 10 times in the year and considered 47 project applications to LEADER+. Of those submitted 31 projects were approved
- Terms of reference were worked up and agreed by the Steering Group
- Five new community representatives were recruited to the Steering Group
- Two successful project tours took 28 people (members of the Steering Group, Management Group and Appraiser Network) to see a number of projects in the Hills
- 9 new appraisers were recruited and 5 of those trained
- A targeting statement was produced to guide funding decisions
- Additional funds were bid for
- Started to resolve some of the historical problems of the LPS programme

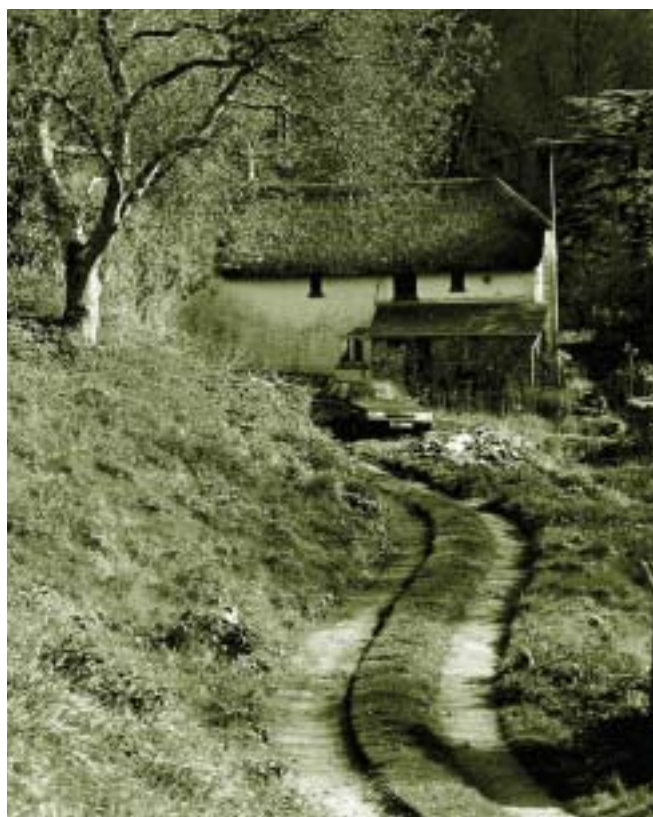
Programme Highlights

- Highest spending L+ project in the SW (85% spend last year)
- Local Products Strategy Co-ordinator appointed
- Arts and Crafts Sector Co-ordinator appointed
- Rationalised process and systems to ensure more effective delivery of LPS
- Encouraging developments in the capacity and systems of the Blackdown Hills Business Association (BHBA), with a number of events delivered for local businesses
- Successful in a bid for additional funds, resulting in LPS drawing an additional £98,000 into the Blackdown Hills on top of the existing budget for remainder of 2004 and 2005

Networking

The Local Products Strategy Co-ordinator is involved with the following networks

- East Devon Economic Overview Committee
- BHBA
- Regional LEADER+ Network
- Transnational Project Working Group
- Local Products Strategy Appraisers Group
- Local Authority Economic Development Officers Group
- Government Office SW
- LRDP (the agency that manages the Leader+ programme for the UK Government)
- Local Products Strategy Steering Group



Cross Sector Projects

These are projects that aim to support or add value to all businesses/sectors of the community.

Honiton Show - Funding for Blackdown Hills marquee at 2003 Honiton Show.

BHBA Capacity Building Grant - A two year project to help develop the Blackdown Hills Business Association into a professional and sustainable organisation that is able to represent and address issues raised by the varied businesses operating in the Hills.

Churchinford Pre-school Development Worker - The project aims to work with existing pre-schools in the Blackdown Hills, identifying opportunities to improve and extend the service they offer, enabling young mothers to return to work. It will also look to establish a new initiative that may provide a new source of income for pre-schools in the Hills.

Arts and Crafts Sector

The post of Arts & Crafts Co-ordinator is hosted by Somerset Artweek Ltd. the visual arts development agency for Somerset. Through this partnership all Blackdown Hills artists and craftspeople, in Devon as well as Somerset, are able to participate in the celebrated bi-annual Somerset Artweeks in September 2004. The Local Product Strategy supported a small new group of Blackdown Hills artists to develop their participation in the Artweeks by being able to exhibit in a fully accessible venue, and run workshops for the local school and community.

Other successful arts projects include the Somerset Artweek Ltd. Blackdown Journeys project, which is running arts workshops with local people to develop ideas to feed eventually into the development of the Ridge Route.

Whilst encouraging new projects in the sector in 2004 the main emphasis this year has been to develop new partnerships between key arts organisations in Devon and Somerset to work together, across the county borders.

Food and Drink Sector

An active Food & Drink working group supported by the Food & Drink Sector Co-ordinator has been identifying projects that will have a long term sustainable effect on behalf of the food and drink producers. Meeting monthly, it identifies project activity and identifies the necessary processes that will deliver the projects with the maximum efficiency.

The result of this has been for example, a better understanding of the various needs of the sector and the priority for action. This in turn will lead to a more efficient use of meat cutting capacity in the Blackdown Hills, more local products of village shops and through a film project, a better understanding of the values and benefits of choosing a locally produced and naturally fresher product. Similar activity has developed to allow the name of the Blackdown Hills to be associated with the food and drink products that are made, grown and raised in the AONB.

Through work with the Somerset and Devon Food Links, Taste of the West, English Food and Farming Partnerships, Farmer's Markets and Local Authorities, producers in the Blackdown Hills are now having more of an opportunity to attend events to promote their products and the overall quality of Blackdown Hills food and drink.



Tourism and Recreation Sector

The Tourism & Recreation Sector Co-ordinator has been setting up or developing existing networks to ensure that the Blackdown Hills become part of the local tourism product. This is being achieved by:-

- Raising the profile of the aims of the Local Products Strategy
- Raising the profile of the Blackdown Hills as a distinct area (with the emphasis on its protected area status) as quality visitor destination for the sustainable tourist.
- Cross referencing with Local Authority Tourism Strategies to see how we can link to their initiatives. An immediate example of this is with Devon County Council's Discover Devon campaign.
- Providing input to regional policy such as South West Tourism's 10 Year Plan
- Sharing information and ideas for potential projects with existing Tourism Providers working towards potentially establishing a Tourism Association for the area.
- Improving communications - An example of this is holding regular meetings of all the Local Authority Tourism Officers who cover the AONB, providing networking opportunities and adopting a cohesive approach to tourism within the Blackdown Hills.

The following projects supported by the Tourism & recreation Co-ordinator have successfully received funding during 2003/04

- Hedge Association Short Break Holiday
- BHS Equine Research Project
- Heathland Conservation Leaflet
- Uptontery Circular Walks Leaflet
- Timber framed roof for Churchinford Recreational Pavilion.
- Tourism Information Folder
- Blackdown Hills Cross Country Course
- Coldharbour Mill - Renovation of a Resources Room and a Production project that included the development of a Blackdown Hills Tartan.

The Tourism & Recreation Officer is actively involved with the following networks

- Somerset Tourism Partnership
- Opportunities for Equine Tourism in Somerset Group
- Countryside Recreational Network
- SW Tourism - Tourism Officers Group
- South Somerset Tourism Forum
- East Devon thematic sector groupings.



Woodlands and Forestry Sector

The Woodland & Forestry Sector Co-ordinator has been extremely busy over the past 12 months working with representatives of the local timber industry to generate project aimed at increasing the productivity and capabilities of businesses within the Blackdown Hills.

Major projects that have been funded through the LEADER+ initiative have included:

Blackdown Hills Woodfuel projects - a suite of projects to encourage the use of local timber as an alternative fuel for heating have occurred in the past year. A survey of public buildings to assess their heating requirements, condition of existing heating systems and match a modern automated system, was carried out. This was followed with a number of awareness raising and training events to engage local farmers, contractors, woodland owners and heating engineers. Finally, a project to install a number of heating systems was instigated taking advantage of a combination of grants available.

A continuing theme for the Blackdown Hills is the use of local timber for construction. Through LEADER+ the Local Product Strategy has funded 15 local saw millers and staff to carry out training to be able to visually grade timber for the construction industry. This has enabled local sawmills to tap into a new market and added to their skills base a very marketable service.

Training and the provision of protective equipment for chainsaw users is another successful project that has enabled local businesses and woodland owners to benefit from this funding.

A second Woodland Forum was held and a number of smaller group meetings throughout the year have taken place. Local business, craftsmen et al are working together to create a local woodland and coppice group which hopefully will constitute itself and act as a co-ordinating body to represent the local timber and forest industry.



Financial Information

AONB Income

Source	Amount
Local Authorities	76,380
Countryside Agency	162,861
Other Income	23,239
Total	£262,480

AONB Expenditure

Item	Amount
Staffing	134,360
Accommodation/office	13,443
Partnership Budget Includes publications, events, research)	29,181
Management Plan	13,628
Projects	71,868
Total	£262,480

Local Products Strategy Funding Information Financial Summary

2003	Budget	Paid	Balance
EAGGF	135,964	111,617	24,347
Defra	62,754	57,044	5,708
Other	50,042	50,042	0
Total	£248,760	£218,703	£30,055



Blackdown Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



KEY	
	AONB Boundary
	County Boundary
	Roads
	Rivers



www.blackdown-hills.net



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