

2009/10

wye valley
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

dyffryn gwy
Ardal o Harddwch
Naturiol Eithriadol

Annual Report Adroddiad Blynyddol

Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol Dyffryn Gŵy

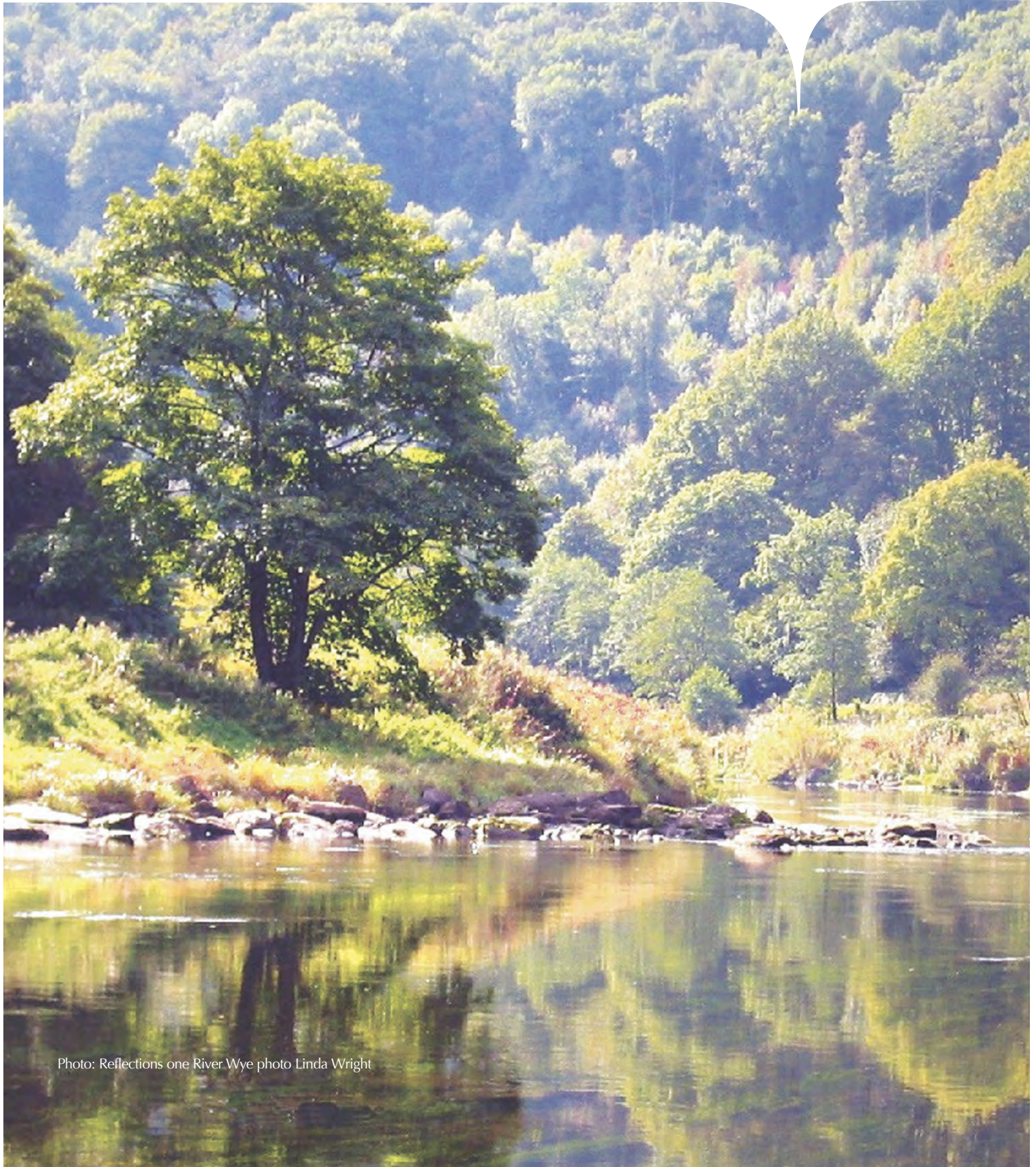


Photo: Reflections on the River Wye photo Linda Wright



Ashley Thomas Chairman, Cadeirydd plays host to Monmouth Comprehensive school children

Chairman's Foreword

Welcome to the 2009/10 Annual Report.

Once again I am proud to present the achievements of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), the AONB Unit and our partners in this Annual Report for 2009/10.

This has been a particularly significant year as the second statutory five year AONB Management Plan (2009-14) was finalised and signed off by the JAC. But there was also the usual dynamic mix of projects and partnerships focused on engaging people in conserving and enhancing the outstanding natural beauty of the area. For instance the Forest Schools initiative was rolled out into Gloucestershire, having been previously successfully piloted with primary schools in Monmouthshire then Herefordshire. Meanwhile the InsideOUT initiative was launched at a site near Bracelands connecting disadvantaged people with both the creative and natural environment. The 'Overlooking the Wye' scheme successfully completed its first year and the first million pounds of spend. And throughout the year a wide range of people attended walks and talks and volunteers embarked on conservation task days organised by the AONB Unit and the Overlooking the Wye team. This all generated much positive media coverage, capped by the AONB Farming Awards presentations at the Monmouthshire Show and BBC 'Countryfile' and 'Country Tracks' programmes focused on the AONB.

A major change for the AONB Unit was Barbara Atkins's retirement after 19 years working in the AONB office. Her contribution to AONBs locally and nationally should not be underestimated, through her quiet dedication and efficiency in supporting two AONB Officers and two chairmen of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB). We wish her well and welcome Sharon Seymour in her place.

I continued my role as chairman of the NAAONB, overseeing the change of Chief Executive Officer and the negotiations with the political parties in the run up to the general election. I always drew on the strength and knowledge of how well we work in the Wye Valley AONB. We excel in nurturing cross-border partnerships and drawing in fresh resources to make the best of living in and from such outstanding countryside without compromising the natural beauty.

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Wye Valley being designated as an AONB we face interesting and uncertain times. But we are most fortunate in having deeply committed staff and partners, who appreciate what a pleasure and an honour it is to be involved in conserving and enhancing this most beautiful part of Britain for future generations.

Rhagair y Cadeirydd

Croeso i Adroddiad Blynyddol 2009/10.

Unwaith eto rwy'n falch iawn o allu cyflwyno cyflawniadau'r Cydbwyllgor Ymgynghorol, Uned yr AHNE a'n partneriaid yn yr Adroddiad Blynyddol hwn ar gyfer 2009/10.

Bu hon yn flwyddyn arwyddocaol iawn gan y cwblhawyd fersiwn derfynol ail Gynllun Rheoli statudol pum mlynedd yr AHNE (ar gyfer 2009-14) a'i gymeradwyo gan y Pwyllgor Ymgynghorol. Ond fe gafwyd hefyd y cymysgedd deinamig arferol o brosiectau a phartneriaethau a oedd yn canolbwyntio ar gael pobl i gymryd rhan mewn gwarchod a gwella harddwch naturiol eithriadol yr ardal. Er enghraifft cyflwynwyd y cynllun Ysgolion Coedwig yn swydd Gaerloyw, ar ôl cael ei dreialu'n llwyddiannus gydag ysgolion cynradd yn Sir Fynwy ac wedyn Swydd Henffordd. Yn y cyfamser, lansiodd y cynllun InsideOUT ar safle ger Bracelands sy'n cysylltu pobl dan anfantais â'r amgylchedd naturiol a chreadigol. Cwblhawyd blwyddyn gyntaf y cynllun 'Overlooking the Wye' yn llwyddiannus ac fe wariwyd y filiwn o bunnoedd cyntaf. A gydol y flwyddyn fe fynychodd amrywiaeth eang o bobl deithiau a sgysiau ac fe gyflawnodd gwirfoddolwyr ddiwrnodiau tasgau cadwraeth a drefnwyd gan Uned yr AHNE a thîm 'Overlooking the Wye'. Arweiniodd hyn i gyd at lawer o sylw cadarnhaol yn y cyfryngau, gan gynnwys cyflwyno Gwobrau Ffermio'r AHNE yn Sioe Sir Fynwy a rhaglenni 'Countryfile' a 'Country Tracks' y BBC yn canolbwyntio ar yr AHNE.

Newid mawr i Uned yr AHNE oedd ymddeoliad Barbara Atkins ar ôl 19 mlynedd yn gweithio yn swyddfa'r AHNE. Ni ellir pwysleisio gormod ei chyfraniad at Ardaloedd o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol yn lleol ac yn genedlaethol drwy ei heffeithlonrwydd a'i hymroddiad tawel yn cefnogi dau swyddog yr AHNE a dau gadeirydd Cymdeithas Genedlaethol yr Ardaloedd o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol (NAAONB). Dymunwn bob llwyddiant iddi a chroesawn Sharon Seymour yn ei lle.

Yr wyf wedi parhau yn fy swyddogaeth fel cadeirydd yr NAAONB, gan oruchwylio'r newid yn swydd y Prif Weithredwr, a'r trafodaethau gyda'r pleidiau gwleidyddol yn y cyfnod yn arwain at yr etholiad cyffredinol. Roeddwn bob amser yn manteisio ar y cryfder a'r wybodaeth am ba mor dda yr ydyn ni'n gweithio yn AHNE Dyffryn Gwy. Rydym yn rhagori ar feithrin partneriaethau ar draws ffiniau a sicrhau adnoddau ffres er mwyn gwneud y gorau a chael y gorau o fyw mewn ardal mor eithriadol heb niweidio'r harddwch naturiol.

Wrth inni nesáu at ddeugeinfed pen-blwydd Dyffryn Gwy fel AHNE rydym yn wynebu amseroedd diddorol ac ansicr. Ond rydym yn ffodus iawn fod gennym staff a phartneriaid llawn ymroddiad, sy'n gwerthfawrogi'r pleser a'r fraint o fod yn gysylltiedig â gwarchod a gwella'r rhan odidog hon o Brydain ar gyfer cenedlaethau'r dyfodol.

Background

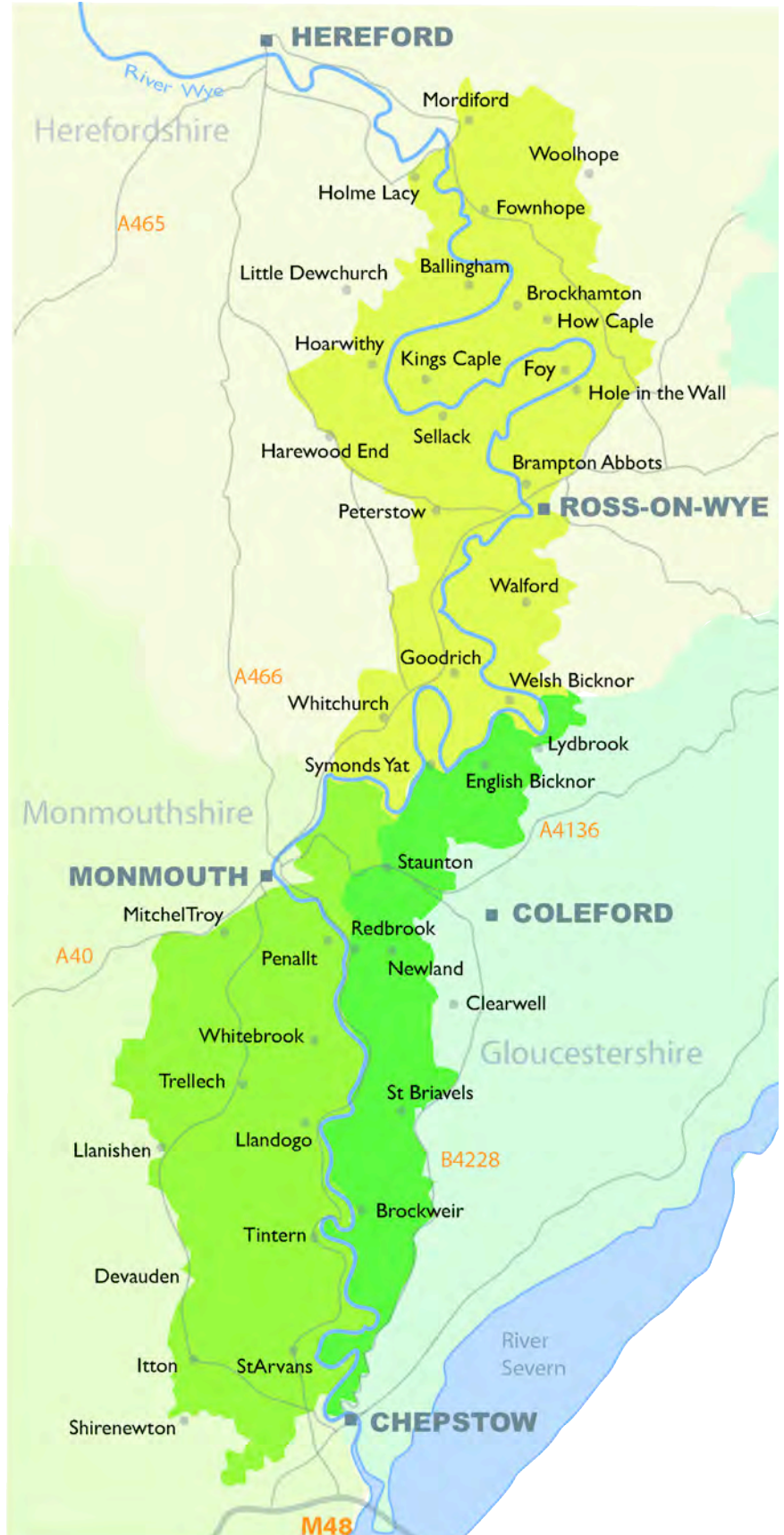
The designation order for the Wye Valley to become an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was issued on 24th February 1971. The Secretary of State for the Environment signed the Order on 13th December 1971. It was the 28th AONB to be designated at that time. There are now 47 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Alongside National Parks the AONBs are nationally treasured landscapes protected by law for future generations.

Unlike other AONBs and National Parks, the Wye Valley is unique being the only protected landscape to straddle the border of two countries – England and Wales.

The AONB Unit is core-funded by Forest of Dean District Council, Herefordshire Council, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire County Councils, Natural England and the Countryside Council of Wales.

Wye Valley Facts

- Although farming remains important, the Wye Valley is probably the most wooded AONB in Britain 48% of the Wye Gorge is woodland compared to the national average of 11%
- In area, the Wye Valley is 326km² (128 square miles) covering a 92 km stretch of the River Wye as its spine.
- Divided between three counties, 46% is within Herefordshire, 36% in Monmouthshire and 18% in Gloucestershire.
- Approximately 26,000 people live within the AONB although Ross-on-Wye is the only town of significance as Chepstow, Monmouth, Coleford and the city of Hereford all lie just outside the boundary.
- The Wye Valley is noted for its abundant wildlife. Within the protected area there are 3 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), over 40 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 4 National Nature Reserves (NNR).
- There are about 2.5 million visits to the Wye Valley annually. Most visitors come for walking and sightseeing although there is significant interest from cyclists, cavers, climbers, canoeists and fishermen.



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Conserving the landscape

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area for current and future generations. This is a duty placed on all public bodies and the Wye Valley AONB unit works with agencies, organisations and individuals to help achieve this.

Priority Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Habitat Mapping

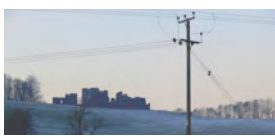
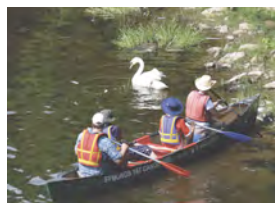
In 2009 the AONB contracted the South East Wales Biological Records Centre (SEWBRc) to undertake a study to identify the extent of Priority BAP Habitats in the Monmouthshire part of the AONB. Using existing survey data and aerial photographs 997 separate sites were identified that appeared to satisfy national BAP Habitat criteria. These are predominantly woodland and grassland habitats but rivers and streams, open water and other wetland habitats were also recorded. This contributes to an ongoing compilation of BAP habitat records in the AONB.

Woolhope Dome to Malvern Hills Landscape Link

The AONB Development Officer chaired a partnership initiative with Malvern Hills AONB, Herefordshire Nature Trust, Forestry Commission, Natural England and Herefordshire Rural Hub to develop a project linking the biodiversity areas of the Woolhope Dome and Malvern Hills.

Much of the land between the two AONBs has become more intensively managed in recent years, making wildlife movement across the landscape more difficult. The project seeks to create a landscape link to enable species movement and create a robust biodiversity resource against environmental pressures. This will be delivered by working with local landowners, supporting Higher Level Scheme applications, administering habitat and heritage grants and providing training opportunities for land managers and woodland owners. Additional benefits include assistance for green enterprise and business, support for community initiatives, increased access and educational opportunities and creation of community volunteering opportunities

Throughout 2009/10 the project progressed the early feasibility and developmental stages. An £497,700 application submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme was unsuccessful



Above left: Across to the Malverns from Wye Valley AONB

Top right: Canoeists at Lydbrook Bottom right: Pylons at Goodrich before undergrounding

This is a new way of working for AONBs. We feel this outward looking approach will be increasingly important in tackling pressures on the countryside.'

paul esrich Malvern Hills AONB officer, Landscape Link initiative

Canoe Access Initiative

The AONB Unit worked with the Environment Agency, the British Canoe Union and Herefordshire Council to improve canoe launch and access facilities on the Wye at Ross-on-Wye and Kerne Bridge, including provision of disability access. A new launch at Backney Bridge was also investigated. The project will provide a visitors guide book, interpretation boards and freely available canoeists 'Code of Conduct' literature. A grant application, submitted to Natural Assets, an Advantage West Midlands funding initiative administered by Natural England, was approved.

Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants

The AONB Unit continued to provide a grant scheme for the conservation of landscape features and wildlife which was fully subscribed. Funding contributed 50% of the total works costs up to a maximum of £1000. Ten applications enabled the following outputs:

20 orchard trees planted, 358 metres of hedgelaying, 403 metres of hedge planting, 0.7 hectares of woodland creation, 0.1 hectares of coppicing, 7 trees pollarded, management of 9 veteran trees, installation of 39 bird/bat boxes, construction of 4 amphibian refuges, 0.3 hectares of scrub control.

A total of £7,250 was made available through the scheme which contributed to £14,615 of work.

Undergrounding overhead electricity

As part of its section 85 Duty of Regard to the AONB OFGEM, the official regulator for gas and electricity industry, provided a framework for allowing power distribution companies the discretionary option to underground overhead power lines. Central Networks (responsible for approximately 60% of power lines in the AONB) adopted the scheme in 2005 and have worked with AONB partners across the West Midlands to progress schemes. Western Power (responsible for the remaining 40%) who initially opted out of the scheme are now working with AONB and National Park partners across South Wales on undergrounding schemes.

Working with Central Networks, a powerline was placed underground on floodplain fields near Kerne Bridge. The work has dramatically improved the landscape in that locality improving views to Goodrich Castle from the Wye Valley Walk.

Two undergrounding proposals have been submitted to Western Power at Trellech and Llandogo. Both schemes are currently going through consideration. The Wye Valley AONB Development Officer organises and minutes meetings on behalf of the South Wales Protected Landscapes

Sustainable Development Fund

The Wye Valley AONB Unit administered £70,000 in the Welsh part of the AONB and £57,425 in the English part of the Wye Valley AONB. The Wye Valley AONB unit assessed 12 projects for the Welsh SDF and 18 for the English. In Wales 7 projects approved, while in England 13 projects were granted funds.

SDF grants totalling £63,000 in Wales and £54,127.10 in England were awarded. The total granted in England and Wales £117,127.10

Examples of Successful Projects :

30 projects assessed, 20 successful (grant awarded).

Ross Christmas Energy Outreach Project- £3,000
Run by Ross Town Council to raise awareness of the need to reduce carbon emissions. The one year project focused on the challenging Christmas period, seeking to cut emissions without detracting from seasonal celebrations. An innovative public awareness campaign was launched which included a low carbon touring exhibition to demonstrate that energy saving could also be fun and engaging. The Council will reinforce the message in 2010

Staunton Health and Heritage Walks – £507.52
Through local community consultation, the Parish Council established the desire to produce a local historical walking leaflet. A working group implemented the project and a route was selected and thoroughly researched by the local community. The leaflet is available at TIC's

Penterry Church website and calendar - £2,450
To raise funds for on-going maintenance of St. Mary's Church, the Church Committee launched a successful photographic competition in 2008. A calendar incorporating the winning photographs was launched at an exhibition. In 2009 an improved calendar was produced together with the a new website designed to reach out to the community. This quality calendar, increased the communities fund raising capacity and new skills and abilities developed to communicate new initiatives.



Top: Nigel Hands from Whats That Snake shows a grass snake to a young enthusiast

Thanks to grant aid we have been very successful in bringing our community together, and in raising funds to help maintain Penterry Church.

chris balmer

Monmouth Film School - £3,500

This project continued to build on the previous year's success of hosting a film making summer school for young people. Professionals from dramatic and media backgrounds mentored youngsters in a range of film making skills. Script writing, camera work, locations manager and wardrobe were just some of the areas in which new skills were acquired. The films, including a dramatic piece set in the heart of the Wye Valley, were premiered at the Monmouth Savoy Cinema and a DVD showcasing the work was sold to the public.

Other successful projects

- Overlooking the Wye £79,733.44
- Gwent Living Churchyards £2,363.46
- Mitchel Troy Website £25
- Tintern to Chepstow Multi-Use Path Public Consultation £8,150
- What's That Snake Project £2,550
- Caring for God's Acre £6,170
- Dean Community Foods Feasibility Study £2,178
- Climate Change in Agriculture Two £3,025.79
- Inside Out £1,900
- Brockweir and Hewelsfield Playground Project £656.89
- Ross Walkers are Welcome £918

The grants awarded demonstrated benefits in several of the following areas:

46% of grants were awarded directly to communities

26% benefited young people

80% assisted the management or interpretation of the landscape within an AONB

66% demonstrated partnership working



Right Monmouth Film School awards

Overlooking the Wye is a Landscape Partnership Scheme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and managed through the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. A three year scheme it has completed the second financial year from April 2009 to March 2010

The scheme is structured in five programme : Hidden Industry, River Connections, Viewpoints, Hillforts and Outreach and Interpretation and has undertaken work which has been a mixture of completing sites started in year one and adding year two sites.

Hidden Industry – Refurbishment of the 'new' railway carriages at Old Station, Tintern was completed for re-opening at Easter 2010. The carriages house the 'Destination Wye Valley Exhibition', displays about the Overlooking the Wye scheme and the Wye Valley.

The first phase of archaeological excavation at New Weir Forge, provided an opportunity for volunteers to get a sense of the ironworks dating back to the 1600s.

Detailed specifications of works at Angidy Furnace, Lower Wireworks and Lancaut churchyard wall were created and the selection of contractors held through a tendering process prior to appropriate planning consents.

Conservation works were completed at four limekilns – Coppett Hill, Little Doward, Symonds Yat West and Tintern.

River Connections – The conservation works at Monmouth Quay and Brockweir Quay were completed with the latter re-opened in Oct 2009.

Viewpoints – The works on the viewpoints at Piercefield near Chepstow continued in the second year, adding to Eagle's Nest and The Alcove with The Platform, The Grotto and Lover's Leap. This section of the Wye Valley Walk was then re-opened in March 2010.

The plan to protect Offa's Dyke from further erosion at and around the Devil's Pulpit viewpoint fell into difficulties when planning permission for the proposed viewing

platform was refused in Dec 2009. Following discussions with various interested parties an alternative solution was subsequently devised. Pupils from the Kymin View primary school braved the snow in February to celebrate the completion of works improving the driveway, signage, footpath and railings at The Kymin.

Hillforts – When a large beech tree fell over on Little Doward hillfort, the cavity left by the root ball created an irresistible opportunity for Herefordshire Archaeology department to investigate. They found evidence of human habitation in the form of post holes for an Iron Age hut, many bone fragments with butchery marks and a decorated deer antler 'toggle'. Restoration of historic deer park walls was completed at Little Doward and cattle started grazing on site.

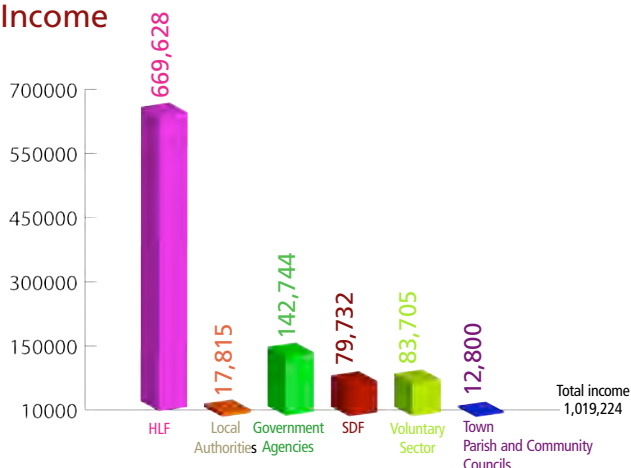
Outreach and Interpretation – An extensive range of walks, talks, training courses and events were held in order to inform both local residents and visitors about the work of the scheme. One of the largest was a Hillforts seminar organised by Chepstow Museum. 123 people attended, providing very positive feedback. Two Year 7 Summer Learning activity days were held for Monmouth Comprehensive at Tintern and Llandogo. In total over 1000 people engaged with the scheme during the year

The Outreach and Interpretation Officer within the Overlooking the Wye team took maternity leave starting in Feb 2010. To assist the team, Ros Daniels was appointed as an external consultant to create educational resources for the scheme.

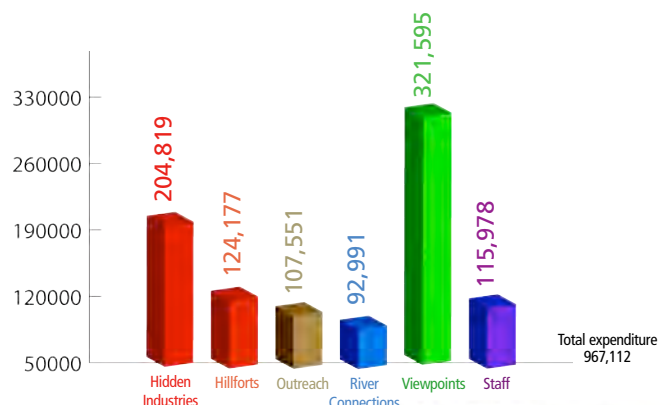
Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund was matched by contributions from a large range of partners including public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Works are proceeding at a steady rate and progress is monitored intermittently by the Technical Group (of partner organisations), the Consultative group and the Partnership Board (representing public, private and voluntary sectors), chaired by Cllr Phil Cutter of Herefordshire Council.

Financial Accounts

Income



Expenditure



Working with local communities

People living and working in the AONB are of crucial importance in conserving and enhancing this outstanding landscape. The Wye Valley AONB Unit works with a wide range of local individuals, village and community organisations in order to help them achieve this.

Volunteers

Conservation: Wye Valley volunteers had a busy year working on projects alongside a variety of organisations.

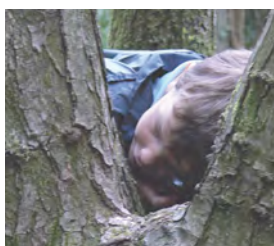
April – Vegetation was cleared from a wildlife pond at Peckett Stone for the Forestry Commission. **May** – Two task forces worked at Staunton Meend one constructing refuge for reptiles, the other clearing an area of bracken to improve nightjar habitat. **June and July** – Work removing birch saplings was supervised by staff from the Countryside Council for Wales at Cleddon Bog. Areas in good condition were identified, mapped and cleared of purple moor grass competing with the fragile bog flora. **September** – A stonewalling course, led by Chris Hodges, tackled the basics of walling **October** – Five metres of wall was re-instated, alongside the planting of heather cuttings in areas that had been previously cleared of bracken at Staunton Meend **November** – Volunteers joined forces with the Coppett Hill Common Trust where steps to the lime kiln, conserved through the Overlooking the Wye Project, were constructed, and vegetation was cleared. A section of drystone wall, bounding the Coutfield Estate was also re-instated. **December** – Sycamore saplings were removed from the slopes of the woodland at Manor Brook conserving the woodland flora. **February** – the group were directed by staff from Herefordshire Council at Kerne Bridge in a general tidy up of the site. Steps were replaced and vegetation cut back. Volunteers also set up a work bench and prepared timber for bird box construction that would form part of a family event later that month.

Other Voluntary Work:

Distribution and Public Engagement Liz and Dave Berry assisted throughout the year delivering publications 'Picturesque, Wye So Special and Walk this Wye, to a range of venues. Liz was also interviewed for the BBC Countryfile programme in the spring and attended the Monmouth Show in August 'manning' the AONB stand alongside Dave Berry, Yvonne Thompson artist, and our youngest volunteers Ceyrene Powell and Greg Smith.



Above Left: Coppett Hill volunteers



Above Right: Young participant in the Tutshill Forest School taster session

'It was lovely to see children learning practical skills in a wooded 'outdoor classroom' and taking part in team building activities in the Forest School head, Tutshill Church of England School

Interpretation In July a group of volunteers was formed to research walks for the booklet 'Walk this Wye' and joined by representatives from a range of walking groups: Lower Wye Ramblers, Ross Ramblers, Ross Walkers are Welcome, and the Mitchel Troy Community Group.

Event support A new volunteer group to assist on family events was formed and in February five volunteers supported a range of activities; nest box and bird feeder construction, a bird quiz and owl pellet dissection at an event to link in with National Nestbox Week held at the Orchard Trust Lydbrook.

Project support In July a group of volunteers joined Chris Hodges at the Little Doward to assist in placing the final cope stones to the wall that had been part of work made possible through the Overlooking the Wye Project.

Volunteers assisted the Inside Out Project run by the Wye Valley AONB unit at Bracelands, Gloucestershire. A log circle was constructed to facilitate a focused area for workshops. A 30 strong group of year 12 students from King Edwards School, Oxford also visited the site to assist with clearance.

A hedgelaying course was held in March and tutor John Flower was ably assisted by a new volunteer Simon Johnson, who also works as a professional hedge layer. Simon also contributed his professional skills and equipment at an earlier conservation task at Cleddon Bog.

Forest Schools

The Forest School Project in Gloucestershire was launched in Autumn 2009, delivered by the Forestry Commission Education Ranger Rachel Giles and managed and supported by the Wye Valley AONB Community Links officer. Three new Forest School sites were established at English Bicknor, Tutshill Primary schools and Lakers Secondary School. 170 children from the three schools took part in over 26 taster sessions and a pattern of regular use of the new sites was established. Each school held a celebration event where staff, pupils and many parents took part. At Lakers 385 pupils participated alongside teaching staff and support workers. Long term sustainability of the project was planned schools have been offered the opportunity to take up Forest School training in 2010.

Education

In September a Forest Celebration day, organised through the Forest Education Initiative Group, was held to raise awareness of the forest environment as an education resource for schools. Primary and secondary schools from the AONB and Forest of Dean attended Beechenhurst Forestry Commission site to enjoy a wide variety of activities. The AONB unit led one hundred and twenty students from four secondary schools through a successful coppicing activity.

Enjoying the AONB

Opportunities for enjoying the natural beauty of the Wye Valley are superb. The AONB Unit works with a wide variety of people within tourism, recreation and interest groups to help individuals experience and enjoy the AONB in ways that help conserve its natural beauty.

Wye so Special Interpretive Events and Activity Programme

Interpretive Walks: Twelve themed walks were organised for the 'Wye So Special' programme with 245 participants attending. Walks were spread across the AONB and encompassed a wide variety of themes. The hidden industrial heritage of the Lower Wye Valley was explored by two walks led by the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Green Badge Guides to Whitebrook Paper Mills and the Angidy Valley furnace. A trip along the Wye from Lydbrook to explore river fisheries with water bailiff George Woodward and a tour of Broome farm's traditional orchards to view the production of local cider were popular. An illuminating tour led by Nic Howes covered aspects of geology in the Woolhope and Ben Giles, Stephanie Poulter and Heather Hurley led fascinating walks interpreting historical features in the landscape. Other walks included a Wild Food Forage with Raoul Van Den Broucke and two further walks led by the Green Badge Guides, exploring river views from English Bicknor and Yat Rock, and from Coppett Hill and Goodrich.

Family Activities: Six family events were held throughout the year. These were attended by over 129 children and their families, and supported by five enthusiastic AONB volunteers. In April a pond dipping event explored aquatic habitats at Gadr Farm. In June families were invited to meet the AONB Farming Awards winner 2008 - Henry Rudge, and enjoy a guided tour of his Balingham farm as part of the national campaign Open farm Sunday. This included highlights for the younger visitors including the opportunity to take the driving seat of a tractor, getting lost in the hay bale maze, strawberries and cream and apple juice. During the summer holidays a sculpture building activity at Whitestone Woods proved popular. Thirty children braved a deluge to help to create the 'Hart of the Wye Valley' a natural deer sculpture, that also delighted visitors in the AONB display at Monmouth show.



'certainly one of the toughest, but most fantastic holidays I have ever had'

walker completing the Wye Valley Walk

Families enjoyed two festive events. Christmas wreaths were created at the market in Ross town centre and the arts of felt making and willow weaving were explored at a workshop in Brockweir.

Courses: Drystone Walling – 2 courses were held in May and July at Underhill, Brockweir where 14 participants re-instated 25 metres of wall. The courses enabled local people to acquire the basic skills and knowledge to embark on private projects or contribute to community initiatives.

Hedgelaying – One course was held at Bracelands Adventure Centre in March. Two tutors and 6 participants laid 36.5 meters of hedge over two days in March.

Wye Valley Walk

The Wye Valley Walk continued to be popular throughout 2009/10 and 692 copies were sold. The marketing of the passport scheme resulted in further increases and 42 passports were issued within the year.

Negotiations were started with book publishers to produce a new and updated version of the Guide. After deliberation the publishers Cicerone were chosen to work with the partnership on the new book. The work will be produced throughout 2010 with a publication date of Spring 2011.

The 'Easy Access' Walks leaflet was reprinted and together with 'From Rhayader to the Source' proved very popular.

insideOUT

The inside OUT project, to encourage under represented groups into the landscape and explore social and health issues through creative workshops, was launched in the spring with an invitation to creative practitioners, local government officials and health and social care providers to join a workshop at the Bracelands site, Gloucestershire. Links were established with agencies which resulted in five organisations including the Forge Centre for the Visually Impaired, Orchard Trust, Coleford House and Grapevine Care using the site. A partnership event with Gloucester based Art Shape charity brought groups from Tewkesbury and Lydney in to work with creative practitioner Louise Spira. From this a sculptured seat was produced by metal worker Matthew West which was unveiled in November by Councillor Marilyn Smart at the official opening and exhibition. Over 100 people have taken part in drama, art, sculpture and poetry workshops at the site.



Left: Understanding where food comes from on the Balingham Farm walk, Above left: Matthew West, sculptor at the unveiling of Wyeman at the inside OUT site
Above right Amy Creed from the Forge enjoys a percussion workshop with inside OUT

Increasing awareness

The AONB unit works through a variety of local and national media to increase awareness. Work is also constantly being developed with local individuals, schools, community and interest groups to help inspire locals and visitors to appreciate the area better, and helping conserve it.

Publications

6000 copies of **Picturesque** were printed in the Autumn and Spring. The newsletter incorporated Overlooking the Wye articles and updates. Article contributions were from Nigel Hands , Whats That Snake , Nick Hudson Countryside Council for Wales, Dave Sykes Forestry Commission and the Wye Valley Society.

15,000 **Wye So Special** Events leaflet covering the complete year were printed and including Overlooking the Wye events. Most events proved popular and fully subscribed.

30,000 new Wye Valley Map and Guides were designed and printed and updated with Overlooking the Wye information.

The Wye Valley AONB co-ordinated the submissions by the Welsh AONB for inclusion in the Living Landscapes, Breathing Spaces which was produced in partnership with the Association of National Parks.

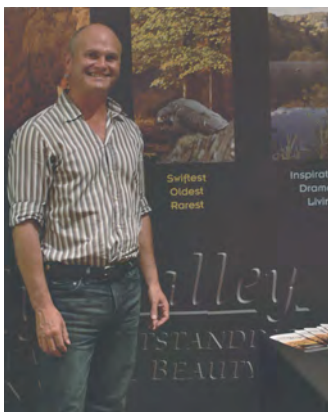
Information

The Information Officer dealt with over 700 enquiries for information and publications via email and telephone.

Media Radio interviews were given to Forest of Dean Radio, and BBC Hereford and Worcester. AONB staff contributed to Country Tracks and Countryfile programmes. Information was also contributed to the BBC Programme Rivers with Gryf Rhys Jones.

Press Releases: 20 press releases were sent to local and national papers throughout the AONB resulted in a take up of 75% with articles generated in news and media.

Adverts: Adverts were placed in Scenic Britain by Bus, Scene Magazine and Hereford Times Green Supplement



Above Simon King



Above middle Artist Yvonne Thompson with her deer sculpture at Monmouth Show

'finding a place that we never knew existed where we we can now go and watch wildlife'

participant, Nightjar Walk

Shows and exhibitions The Wye Valley AONB attended 6 book signing events in collaboration with Chepstow Bookshop throughout 09/10. These gave the opportunity to promote the area to a specific audience. Celebrities included Simon King, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Clarrissa Dickson-Wright and David Attenborough.

Monmouth Show was successful, with the stand winning the Best Educational Display Award. Popular children's activities were developed by the Community Links Officer. The show was attended by all AONB officers, the team from Overlooking the Wye and volunteers.

Talks and Presentations

A range of talks and presentations were made by AONB officers these included:

Dornington and Mordiford Parish Council

Caring for Gods Acre

West Midlands Biodiversity Partnership

Kings Cople Parish Council

Trellech Vegetable Club

Parish Grasslands

Delegation from Telemark, Norway

AONB Farming Awards

The second Farming Awards attracted a record entry. The competition for small farms under 100 hectares had the added interest of £50 of vouchers contributed by Countrywide and the design of a new Farming Awards sculpture by Forest of Dean blacksmith and metal worker Steve Bluett provided an attractive and unique trophy.

Mike Williams (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group), Henry Rudge (winner of the 2008 award), Andrew Blake (Wye Valley AONB Officer) and Stuart Thomas (NFU representative and Vice Chairman of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee) judged the farms. The awards were presented at the Monmouthshire Show in August and the overall winner Alan Morgan from Gadr Farm, Monmouthshire received a cash award of £500, and £100 worth of Countrywide vouchers.



Above Right: Farming Awards from left: Mike Johnson (Broome Farm), Judge Henry Rudge (Ballingham Court Farm), John Childs Cowshill Farm, Judge Stuart Thomas (NFU), winner Alan Morgan (Gadr Farm), Judge Andrew Blake (AONB Officer) and Ashley Thomas Chairman Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee

Thank you for your support and help with planting my traditional orchard. Working with the AONB and getting a grant was a straightforward user-friendly process.' jacki ballantyne

Achieving together

Strong partnerships are at the heart of the AONB with the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) overseeing the work of the AONB Unit and providing a focus for many organisations and agencies, who in turn carry out vital conservation and enhancement work.

The JAC and the AONB Unit work closely with other bodies at local, regional and national levels promoting the protected landscapes.

Partnerships

The work of the AONB Unit involves a significant number of partnership projects and initiatives. Not only do these often consist of multiple partners but also complex funding arrangements. Nevertheless, the benefits to the landscape and local economy are manifold. Some examples of these are:

- Overlooking the Wye with Cadw, Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), Forestry Commission, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council, Monmouthshire County Council, Woodland Trust, numerous Parish and Community Councils and local interest groups and individuals.
- Woolhope Dome Project with Herefordshire Nature Trust, Forestry Commission, Malvern Hills AONB, Natural England and Herefordshire Rural Hub
- Wye Valley Walk Partnership with Herefordshire Council and Gloucestershire, Monmouthshire and Powys County Councils and Cicerone.
- Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants with private landowners



Left: Woolhope Dome photograph by Archie Miles

Liaison: [making friends & influencing people]

The AONB unit maintained strong links with a multitude of organisations and individuals across both countries, both Government regions in England, the four local authorities and the 40 Town, Parish and Community Councils covering the AONB.

Nationally: Ashley Thomas, JAC Chairman, was re-elected chairman of the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB). Nikki Moore, AONB Information Officer also sits on the NAAONB Communications Working Group. The AONB had good representation at the 11th Annual AONB Conference in Northern Ireland, supporting the 9 AONBs there. The JAC Chairman and AONB staff also work closely with fellow Welsh AONBs including on direct liaison with the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and CCW.

Regionally: Andrew Blake, AONB Officer continued to participate in the West Midlands Protected Landscape Forum and the South West Protected Landscapes Forum. Close liaison and joint workings were maintained with the Malvern Hills AONB, with the continued sharing of the services of a planning consultant who prepared responses to a range of regional consultation documents. Andrew Nixon, AONB Development Officer, engaged fellow protected landscapes in South Wales with Western Power and with Central Networks in the West Midlands over the undergrounding of overhead electricity cables in the AONB. Meanwhile Andrew Blake continued to sit on the West Midlands Regional Forestry Forum.

Locally: AONB staff actively participate in local fora such as the Monmouthshire Environment Partnership Board and Monmouth Town Forum, and attend Town, Parish and Community Council meetings when required. The AONB Unit also share a seat with the Malvern Hills AONB on the Vital Herefordshire Local Action Group.



Right: Landscape Enhancement Grant aided Orchard planting at Harewood End by Heritage Environmental Contractors

Achieving together cont. .

Management and governance:

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) continued to be a strong partnership of local, regional and national organisations and agencies. It guided the management of the Wye Valley AONB, advising the constituent authorities and partners and directing the work of the AONB unit. It is supported by the Technical Officers Working Party (TOWP).

Many issues were discussed at the three JAC meetings. Some of the highlights were:

- Ashley Thomas re-elected as chairman of the JAC and Stuart Thomas, National Farmers Union, as vice-chairman.
- Endorsing the finalised AONB Management Plan 2009-14 along with its Action Plan, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment.
- Discussing the compilation of Highway Design Guidance for the highways authorities in the AONB and general draft design guidance for the AONB.
- Endorsing new initiatives such as the Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme and canoe access enhancements for Natural Assets funding.
- Endorsing the decisions of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Assessment Panel

Planning Applications and Strategic responses

There were 474 planning applications in the AONB (down from 640 the previous year) with 108 in Gloucestershire, 237 in Herefordshire and 129 in Monmouthshire. Of these 109 were assessed for the AONB Unit (higher than last year) and 22 responses made by the AONB Officer. Much of this work was carried out by Colin Blundel of The Planning Company, who was contracted to provide comment, and where necessary prepare appropriate responses.

The continuing partnership with the Malvern Hills AONB over the shared use of The Planning Company has enabled a co-ordinated approach to be taken to strategic

We support the objectives, which are balanced and consistent with the purpose of the AONB.' CPRE

consultations in Herefordshire, Forest of Dean and Gloucestershire relating to the two AONBs.

During the year there were 12 consultations on planning and strategy documents on which the AONB sent substantive responses. In several cases the response was sent jointly with the Malvern Hills AONB Unit. Consultations relating to the Local Development Frameworks/Plans included the 'Place Shaping' consultation from Herefordshire Council and the 'Preferred Strategy' questionnaire from Monmouthshire County Council.

AONB Management Plan 2009-14

The CRoW Act 2000 (Sections 89 and 90) require local authorities to publish AONB Management Plans, at not more than five year intervals, which formulate their policy for the management of their AONB and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it. The AONB Unit, on behalf of the local authorities, prepared and consulted on the Management Plan, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and the Environmental Report.

Following a five week consultation period in April and May comments on the SEA Scoping Report were received from Cadw, CCW and Natural England. There was a three week consultation with CCW and Natural England on the HRA. Following this the Post HRA and SEA Consultation draft Management Plan (October 2009) and Environmental Report (November 2009) were published, with a four week public consultation period on both documents. Comments were received from 12 organisations or individuals supplying 80 suggested amendments. In January 2010 JAC members received electronically the finalised Management Plan and Report of Modifications. There were four further comments which were assimilated. The Action Plan for the implementation of the AONB Management Plan was also finalised. The JAC Chairman and Vice-Chairman then approved sign off of the Management Plan on behalf of the JAC and recommend it to the local authorities and government agencies for adoption.



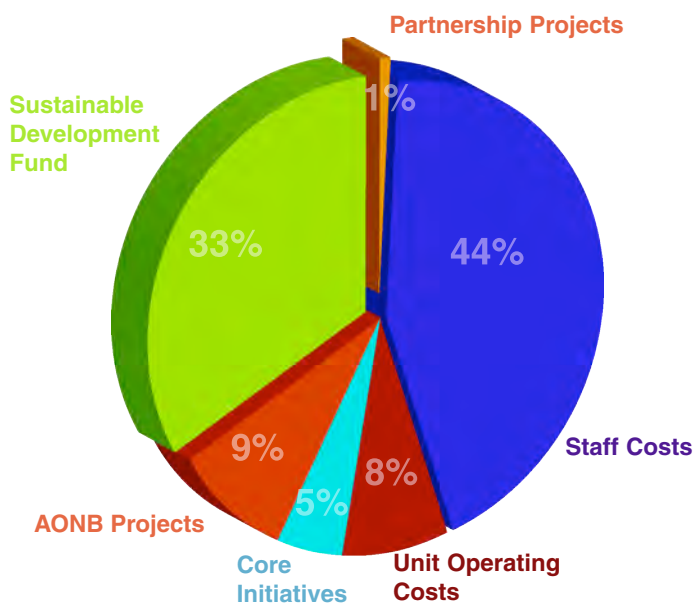
Left: Canoe Access

Above: Ashley Thomas Chairman of the Joint Advisory Committee on JAC Tour

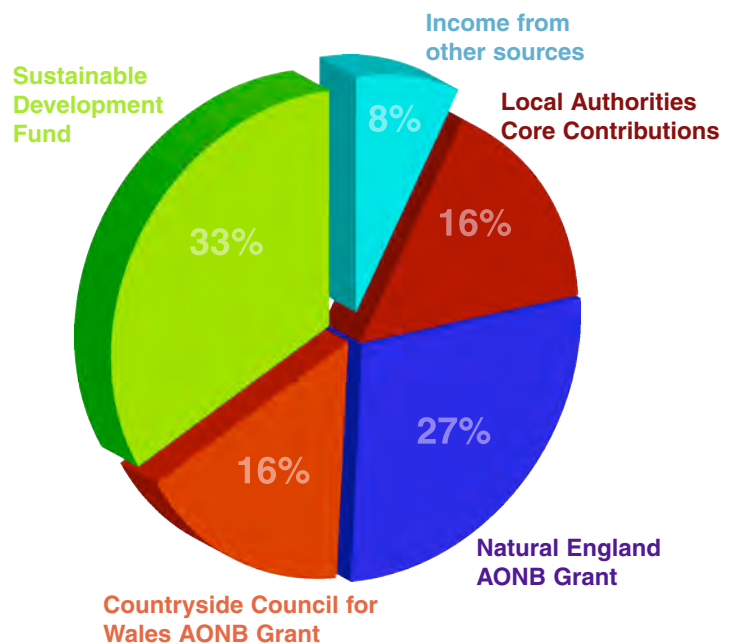
Budget 2009/2010

Expenditure	£	Income	£
Staff costs	180,144	Local Authorities core contributions	64,300
Unit Operating costs	31,123	Natural England AONB grant	109,462
Core Initiatives	18,353	Countryside Council for Wales AONB grant	64,366
AONB Projects	34,997	Sustainable Development Fund	135,297
Sustainable Development Fund	135,297	Income from other sources	31,351
Partnership projects	4,862		
TOTAL	404,776	TOTAL	404,776

Expenditure



Income



Leverage

A total of nearly £1,186,000 was levered into the AONB. This represents a multiplier of nearly 3 times the total AONB budget. When considered with the Natural England and Countryside Council for Wales grant aid and other income sources this means that for every £1 of the Local Authorities' core contributions £21.63 is levered into the AONB.

This leverage was generated by the following partnerships and initiatives:-

- Overlooking the Wye levered £967,112 into the AONB
- The undergrounding of cables by Central Networks levered in £96,000
- SDF projects in Wales levered in £51,638.53 (excluding Overlooking the Wye) with £5,650 from the public sector, £530 from the private sector, £7,500 from the voluntary sector, £16,659 from European funding, £5,650 from the Lottery and £15,650 from volunteers and in-kind contributions.
- SDF projects in England levered in £67,414.50 (excluding Overlooking the Wye) with £13,500 from the public sector, £20 from the private sector, £6,640 from the voluntary sector, £31,968 from the Lottery and £15,287 from volunteers and in-kind contributions.
- The AONB Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants levered in £3,771 from private landowners
- Countrywide donated £50 of vouchers towards the AONB Farming Awards

Who's who

AONB Staff

AONB Officer	Andrew Blake
Finance /Administration Officer	Sharon Seymour [appointed July 09]
Co-ordination Assistant	Barbara Atkins [retired July 09]
Community Links Officer	Sarah Sawyer
Development Officer	Andrew Nixon
Information Officer	Nikki Moore

'Overlooking the Wye' Team

Scheme Manager	Sue Middleton
Project Officer	Kate Biggs
Outreach and Interpretation Officer	Victoria Oaten
Finance and Administration Officer (f.t.e 0.6)	Julie Godfrey



Photo: Re-opening of Piercefield Walks by Mrs Francis on March 16, 2010.

The work of the Wye Valley AONB has been supported by:



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Joint Advisory Committee

Local Authorities (voting)

Forest of Dean District Council

Councillor Mr Terry Hale
Councillor Mr David Thomson

Gloucestershire County Council

County Councillor Mr Terry Glastonbury
County Councillor Mr Brian Thornton

Herefordshire Council

Councillor Mrs Jennifer Hyde
Councillor Mr John Jarvis
Councillor Mr Phil Cutter
Councillor Mrs Anne Gray

Monmouthshire County Council

Councillor Mr Alan Wintle
Councillor Mrs Liz Hacket Pain
Councillor Mr Armand Watts
Councillor Mrs Ann Webb

Co-opted members (voting)

Herefordshire voluntary conservation sector

Mr Ben Nash

Monmouthshire voluntary conservation sector

Mr Ashley Thomas, (Chairman)

Gloucestershire voluntary conservation sector

Dr George Peterken

County Land and Business Association

Mr Simon Dereham

National Farmers Union

Mr Stuart Thomas (Vice Chairman)

Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils

Mr Basil Whittington

Herefordshire Association of Local Councils

Mr Richard Gething

One Voice Wales

Mr Anthony Newman (appointed March 09)

Co-opted members (non-voting)

Gwent Wildlife Trust

Dr Stephanie Tyler

Lower Wye Valley Society

Dr Roger Morgan

River Wye Preservation Trust

Mr Simon Dereham

Recreation Representative

Mr Arthur Lee

Local Tourism Representative

Mr John Sterry

Photo overleaf : Tintern Abbey Mist photo Linda Wright