

VERGING ON THE RIDICULOUS

That's what many people think during the summer, when the grass on the verges of country roads is so tall. But the verges are a haven for wildflowers, where they can grow relatively undisturbed. These plants would have been common in pasture fields before the agricultural revolution of the 1960s and '70s. The need for food production led to heavier grazing rates and the improvement of pastures with fertiliser – and the wildflowers simply couldn't compete.

A survey of road verges in the AONB carried out in 1998 revealed many important stretches. The best verges had up to 80 species of plants.

Apart from common plants such as knapweed, scabious and birdsfoot trefoil, there were also rarities such as orchids and the strange knapweed broomrape. This is a parasitic plant that grows on the roots of greater knapweed and the specimens in the Howardian Hills are the most northerly recorded in England.

Cutting road verges is often an emotive topic – people feel that they're either cut too often or not enough. And some verges are mown so that they resemble lawns.

Verges are cut either by the County Council (as the Highway Authority) or by the landowner.



Meadow cranesbill – a typical flower of roadside verges. (J. Dicker)

The County Council has a prioritised hierarchy for all roads. A 2.4m strip on the verges of 'A' and 'B' roads is cut twice a year. On all other roads, cutting is only carried out on visibility splays at junctions, next to chevron signs and on some rural footways.

Landowners are free to manage the vegetation on verges adjacent to their property – some people cut regularly, some in autumn, some not at all. In general wildflowers can survive periodic cutting, no matter what time of the year, but regular mowing to create lawn-like conditions gives no opportunity for growth or seeding. Tidiness might be a nice aspiration within villages, but in the open countryside it can give a rather incongruous and suburban feel.

The AONB Unit, in partnership with the North York Moors National Park and Ryedale District Council, has just produced a leaflet for Parish Councils on managing road verges for wildlife. If you would like to become involved in managing verges in your Parish, please contact your Parish Council or the AONB Unit.

50 OUTSTANDING YEARS

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are just that! They contain our country's finest landscapes and countryside and are home to some of our most exquisite and unusual wildlife species.

Created by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 (England and Wales) and the Amenity Lands Act 1965 superseded by the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order 1985 (Northern Ireland), there have been 50 AONBs designated since 1956 (36 in England, 4 in Wales, 1 straddling the English/Welsh border and 9 in Northern Ireland).

AONBs are quite diverse in character: areas of lowland heath; upland mountains; gently rolling hills; coastal plains and shingle beaches; each containing unique and fascinating landscape features.

2006 marks the 50th Anniversary of the first AONB to be designated, Gower. To mark this milestone, there is an exciting programme of events and activities taking place in AONBs nationwide throughout the year. Many partner organisations are joining in the celebrations with themed walks, cycle rides, local food festivals, photographic competitions, tree planting, talks and a huge range of other activities. An AONB-wide programme of all the 50th Anniversary celebration events is available on a special section of the National Association for AONBs' website www.visitaonb.org.uk



Gower – the first AONB in the UK. (© City & County of Swansea)

Millions of people, both local residents and visitors, enjoy Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty every year – many without realising they are in a protected landscape. This year's celebrations will provide the perfect opportunity to discover – or rediscover – what the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have to offer.

UNIQUE TREE MAKES A COMEBACK

The next stage of our bid to save one of Ryedale's rarest trees is now in motion. The tree in question is the native black poplar, which was once common in lowland areas of England. However, as marshy fields were drained and hedges removed to improve the land for farming, so the trees gradually disappeared. A second blow is that the tree cannot now reproduce from seed, therefore greatly limiting its ability to regenerate.

The only known and authenticated specimen of the native black poplar in the AONB is at Stonegrave. The main tree blew down over 10 years ago but since then we have been tending the re-growing suckers to prevent them being damaged by hedge-cutting machinery. The time has now arrived when we can take cuttings for propagation and then subsequent planting-out on farms.

Cuttings were taken in March by the Thirsk Community Woodland Group, for growing-on in their nursery.



Planting-out the black poplar cuttings. (M. l'Anson)

We hope to have approximately 5 new trees available for the winter of 2006/07, to plant out within the AONB. Any farmers interested in planting these unique trees on their land should contact the AONB Unit. You need to have some low-lying ground, ideally silt over gravel, as the trees need damp but not waterlogged conditions.

VILLAGE BUS SERVICES

Do you know what buses run from your village? Could you use these to travel in a more convenient or sustainable way? Remember that people over 60 are now eligible for FREE travel on all bus services! For details of bus services running in the AONB please ring Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or visit their website www.yorkshiretravel.com Details of the seasonal Moorsbus service, run by the North York Moors National Park, can be found at www.moors.uk.net/discover

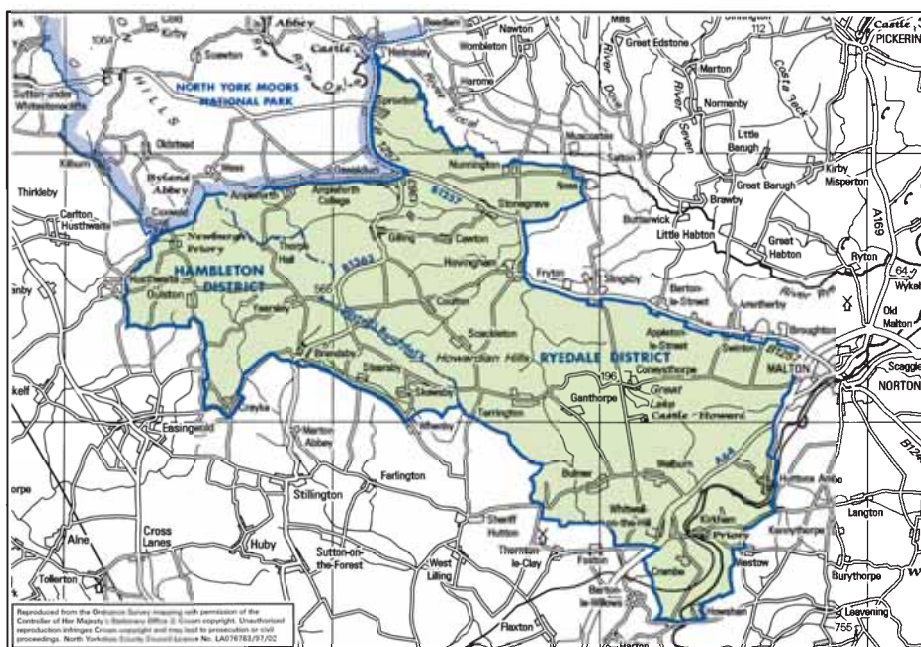
ECO-RENOVATION SURVEYS

An initiative targeting village halls has been launched as part of the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

Halls in the AONB can apply for 100% funding towards a survey and expert advice on how to manage or renovate their halls in a sustainable way. Options suggested include the use of woodfuel boilers or stoves, sheep's wool insulation, low-energy light bulbs, double glazing and low water-usage appliances. Many of the halls in the AONB have already taken advantage of this offer and are now looking at making further applications to the SDF to implement some of the suggestions. We feel that the halls are important to their communities – often they are the only remaining community facility and many are of historic importance. The AONB has seen the closure of many of its village shops, Post Office counters and petrol stations over the years. We hope that this initiative will make village halls more economic, and sustainable, to run as viable propositions.

If you manage a village hall and have not yet taken advantage of the help on offer, then please contact the AONB Unit.

The Howardian Hills AONB FACT FILE



- The Howardian Hills covers 204 sq. km (79 sq. miles).
- The area was confirmed as an AONB in 1987.
- About 5,800 people live in the area.
- Over 15% of the area is wooded.



This Newsletter has been produced by the Howardian Hills AONB JAC

AONB Contacts

AONB Officer

Paul Jackson

paul.jackson@northyorks.gov.uk

Assistant AONB Officer

Liz Bassindale

liz.bassindale@northyorks.gov.uk

AONB Administrative Assistant

Sue Wright (part-time)

Sue.E.Wright@northyorks.gov.uk

The Mews, Wath Court
Hovingham
York
YO62 4NN
Telephone (01653) 627164
Fax (01653) 627167
www.howardianhills.org.uk

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Howardian Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

AONB NEWS

Issue 7

October 2006

YOUNG SHOOTS

The first year of the AONB's new Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) has seen a number of innovative projects completed. One of them was the creation of a vegetable garden and wildlife area at Welburn County Primary School.

Supported by parents and teachers, the children have transformed part of the school grounds into a multi-activity area, with the help of a £1,350 grant from the Sustainable Development Fund. One area has been set aside as an organic kitchen garden, where the children have been growing vegetables for sale to parents and to use in school dinners. The garden has been divided into plots, each growing a different family of vegetable and tended by a group of children, who are now becoming experts in their chosen vegetables! A second area has been turned into an oasis for wildlife with a pond (complete with dipping platform), native hedging, bird/bat boxes and a wildflower meadow.

The project has had tremendous local support. Parents and local people turned out in force to help with the heavy landscaping work, their time counting towards the school's contribution of 25% of the cost of the project. Local companies also pitched in, with Travis Perkins and Yates' in Malton providing equipment and pond liners and the Castle Howard Estate giving the native hedging plants.

"The whole scheme will have immense value for our children, in terms of science studies and as an enterprise project, costing and selling the vegetables – and it all helps in our campaign for healthy eating" said Head Teacher Mrs Helen Thomson.

Welburn has been a hot-bed of activity recently. As well as the Primary School project, the Sustainable Development Fund has helped the Village Hall Committee design and now build an eco-friendly new hall.

If you would like further details about the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund or would like to apply for funding for a project, then please contact the AONB Unit.



Children and parents working on the new pond and wildlife area at Welburn School. (AONB Unit)

ANNUAL REPORT April 2005 - March 2006

In this regular feature, we tell you about the work that the AONB Unit completed during the last financial year.

Landscape

- 1.1km of new hedge planting and gapping-up grant aided by the Joint Advisory Committee.
- Repairs/maintenance to 500m of roadside walls also grant aided.
- 26 specific Planning proposals scrutinised. Comments submitted on 14 schemes, where a potential impact on the AONB landscape was identified or support was given.

Landscape/Biodiversity

- Advised 17 farmers/landowners about Entry Level or Higher Level Stewardship.
- Prepared 3 Farm Environment Plans for Higher Level applications.
- Submitted 3 English Woodland Grant Scheme applications.
- Appraised 2 Environmental Stewardship applications.
- 12 EWGS consultations appraised for impact on the AONB; comments submitted on 6 schemes.
- 37 consultations on other Development (mainly within roads or verges) also scrutinised.
- Advice to farmers on re-cycling waste plastic.
- Business Plan for apple juice-cider-brandy production.

Biodiversity

- Grant aided the planting of 85 individual trees, to conserve or enhance 13ha (32 acres) of wood pasture.
- Surveyed 4 SINC's and 12 potential SINC's; also heathland restoration feasibility on Yearsley and Grimston Moors.
- Conservation grazing of 7 SINC's or other important sites by Exmoor ponies.
- Management of scrub/vegetation on 5 SINC's.
- Management works on 60 Special Interest Road Verges.
- Propagated cuttings from the black poplar tree at Stonegrave.

Cultural Heritage

- Installation of new waterwheel and generating equipment at Listed Howsham Mill.
- City of Troy Maze maintained.
- Repairs to 48m of historic Park wall grant aided.

- Structural Engineer's reports on 3 Listed Buildings at Risk.
- Major repairs to Listed pigeon cote.
- Roof repairs to a derelict Listed farmhouse.
- 2 traditional direction signs repainted.
- 4 mileposts repainted; 1 Listed milepost in process of repair.
- Trees growing on the shell of Welburn Mill removed.
- Trees growing on 4 old lime kilns removed.
- Restored the dam and outfall of a Parkland lake.
- Prepared a management plan for a historic orchard.
- Hydro-power survey of former mill sites.
- Orchard restoration training day.

Recreation and Access

- New fingerposts and gates installed at various locations, continuing the improvement programme.
- 8 volunteers recruited to survey the condition of Rights of Way.
- Litter removed from at least 12 sites, on a regular basis.



Listed building restoration, Oswaldkirk. (AONB Unit)

Schools/Community

- 136 pupils on 6 AONB Discovery Days.
- 128 children and 27 parents on 5 Young Ranger Club sessions.
- Creation of wildlife garden at 1 primary school.
- Repairs to 1 village Band Room.
- Eco-renovation survey of 1 village hall.
- Architect's fees for designing new village hall.

Publicity

- Maintained 14 AONB Gateway Signs.
- At least 48 known press mentions for projects/AONB, worth at least £44,000 in advertising space.
- Commissioned a new set of display boards.
- Published and distributed a new general information leaflet about the AONB.
- Maintained the AONB website, receiving 24,000 visits.
- AONB News published and distributed, October 2005.

AONB Management Plan

- Activity now concentrating on implementing the current Management Plan.
- Countryside Agency developing guidance on how to review Management Plans, for process starting in 2008.

AONB Unit administration

- AONB Unit staff remained unchanged throughout the year.

Income and Expenditure

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Countryside Agency	175,938	Staffing	80,229
North Yorkshire CC	42,644	Office costs	12,782
Ryedale DC	6,885	Partnership running costs	2,855
Hambleton DC	5,800	Publicity	13,671
Environment Agency	2,500	Countryside Management	35,825
Heritage Lottery Fund	7,470	Access & Interpretation	8,895
FEP preparation fees	1,323	Community Initiatives	3,240
		Sustainable Development Fund	72,904
		Carried forward (HLF project)	4,489
Brought forward	1,907	Carried forward	9,577
	£244,467		£244,467

WHERE THERE'S MUCK, THERE'S... NEW REGULATIONS

Important new regulations on the treatment of agricultural waste came into force in May this year and we think it's important to remind farmers so that they don't fall foul of the new rules. Farm tips/dumps should not now be used and the burning of plastics and other materials that could give rise to pollution and/or harm should also have stopped. Remember that you also have a Duty of Care when storing or passing your waste to someone else.

Many practices that might be considered part of normal farming activity will require Exemptions and there is only a limited period in which to apply for these. Activities needing Exemptions include:

- Burning waste plant material, such as hedge clippings or broken straw bales.
- Chipping/shredding plant material and any subsequent storage.
- Spreading ditch dredgings.
- Tipping waste plant material, such as rotten/waste potatoes.
- Re-using waste materials – e.g. tyres on silage clamps, silage additive drums as water containers.
- Using building rubble from your demolished buildings to improve farm tracks, muddy gateways, etc.
- Slurry and manure are NOT agricultural waste, as long as they are used as a fertiliser.

You only have until 15 May 2007 to comply with the new rules and to register for any waste Exemptions – it's likely that every farm will have to apply for at least some Exemptions. These will be FREE of charge for agricultural waste and you only have to register them once, using the Exemption Pack to do this.

This information has been taken from the Environment Agency website – please check it out if you have any queries (www.environment-agency.gov.uk) or ring the Helpline on 0845 603 3113 (Mon-Fri, 8-6) to order Exemption Packs.

The Howardian Hills Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) provided a grant to a plastics re-cycling company based near Whitby, to allow them to promote their service to farmers in the AONB. Any farmers wanting advice or a local collection service for waste farm plastics can contact David Brown at Agriplass Ltd on 0777 342 6821.

FLOWERS AND FRIDGES

What have Todd Wood, Scar Wood, Sandlands, Terrington Moor and Wath Beck got in common? They are all places in the AONB that Basics Plus have had the privilege of working on. We've pulled Himalayan balsam, removed tree guards, raked hay meadows, cut down willow scrub and brought the remains of an old mill back to daylight.



Basics Plus students raking the hay meadow at Fairy Dell SINC. (AONB Unit)

So who are Basics Plus? We are a social enterprise which enables people with special needs to work within the community. As well as conservation tasks we also grade and re-cycle waste paper, deliver leaflets, produce fire-lighting sticks, garden for the elderly, collect and re-cycle furniture and white goods and are involved in many other community-based projects.

We have recently received a grant from the Howardian Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to collect paper/magazines for re-cycling and also furniture and white goods for re-sale in our warehouse. And have you noticed? Some of the picnic areas and lay-bys in the AONB are looking a little tidier – that's us again on one of our litter picking sessions. Give us a wave if you see us....!

If you have old but serviceable furniture or white goods that could be re-used, or paper/magazines for re-cycling, then please contact Peter Scott at Basics Plus on (01723) 371335. There is a regular collection service throughout the AONB.



The start of undergrounding work, Terrington. (So-PR)

OVERHEAD ELECTRICITY CABLES

Following survey work of overhead electricity lines in all AONB villages by the AONB Unit, a prioritised list of schemes for undergrounding was passed to Northern Electric in November last year.

Readers will remember that this is part of a 5-year initiative to underground 1.5% of all the overhead electricity lines in AONBs and National Parks. The Northern Electric region, which has 7 AONBs and National Parks, has a budget of £5.5 million for this. The first village in the Howardian Hills AONB to have electricity lines put underground under this new scheme will be Terrington, where work started in early September.

CREATING A VISIONARY LANDSCAPE

Local people are being invited to get involved in a unique partnership with an ambitious shared vision in the northern part of the AONB and south west corner of the adjacent North York Moors National Park.

The CAN DO (Cultural and Natural Development Opportunity) partnership is working alongside individuals and agencies to create an exemplar landscape that will benefit both people and wildlife. Launched in 2005, it is already starting to make a significant impact and reap substantial rewards.

A vast range of partners are involved and by working together they are able to pool resources, influence the landscape on a much bigger scale and create an example that others can learn from and hopefully replicate elsewhere.



Community consultation event in Helmsley. (AONB Unit)

Since the article in last year's AONB News, the partnership has achieved some notable successes:

- A new leaflet is encouraging local Parish Councils to care for roadside verges.
- Local people have been undertaking practical work to manage wildlife.
- A survey of former heathland, now planted with commercial forestry plantations, has identified opportunities for heathland habitat re-creation.
- New walking opportunities between Helmsley and Rievaulx are enabling people to explore how this special landscape has been shaped over time.
- A £50,000 planning grant has recently been awarded to the partnership by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to complete work on a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnership Scheme in 2007.

AONB YOUNG RANGER CLUB

Now in its third year, the Young Ranger Club is part of the Howardian Hills Discovery Project. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and run in conjunction with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, local children can learn about the things that combine to make the AONB unique.

The Project includes biennial visits to primary schools in and around the AONB during the summer term, working with 7-11 year olds. YRC sessions for a wider age range during the holidays this August included pond dipping, hedgerows and mini-beasts, meteorology and geology.

Five sessions with a wintry feel will take place in the Christmas holidays (18th-20th December) at Castle Howard Arboretum. Why not join us to get festive making natural decorations, learn how to help the birds in the winter or find out why we can see so many stars in the sky over the AONB. Parents need to stay with the under-8s, but if your children are over eight then how about taking this opportunity to get in a couple of hours (last minute) Christmas shopping at Castle Howard?

For more information or a booking form please contact the AONB Unit.

VOLUNTEERS PUTTING THEIR BEST FEET FORWARD

Work to maintain and improve the Public Rights of Way network in the AONB has been boosted over the last year by the increasing involvement of the Howardian Hills volunteers and NYCC's Countryside Volunteer service.

The volunteers, led by Countryside Ranger Steve Green, have undertaken many practical tasks on the network. These include replacing stiles with more accessible gates, surfacing, clearance and work to repair historic culverts. Some volunteers have also undertaken strimmer training and for the past few months have been helping to keep on top of seasonal overgrowth on paths.

As well as linking-up with the Countryside Volunteers for joint practical tasks, the Howardian Hills volunteers are playing an important part in surveying every route in the AONB on a regular basis, to ensure any problems are recorded and resolved quickly.

With such a large network to look after there is always a wide range of tasks to get involved in; anybody interested



A Howardian Hills volunteer surveying the condition of path furniture. (AONB Unit)

in helping on future tasks or surveying paths should contact liz.bassindale@northyorks.gov.uk or steven.green@northyorks.gov.uk for details of the upcoming work programme.