

Howardian
Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Report

2015/16

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HOWARDIAN
HILLS
One of the
AONB family

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in welcoming you to the 2015/16 Review of the work of the AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

It's been a busy year, with an unexpected bonus as regards funding and a change of home for the AONB Staff Unit. We also started a major new project, in the shape of the Scheduled Monument Management Scheme.

Having resolved at the Joint Advisory Committee meeting in March 2015 that the AONB Unit office should move to the headquarters of the North York Moors National Park Authority, this was achieved in December 2015. The move has cut our annual office costs by 75%, as well as putting the AONB Unit staff closer to National Park staff. They already worked very closely on joint cross-border projects and the office move will only benefit this relationship.

Welcome but unexpected news then came from the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. We had been anticipating further cuts to our Defra funding but instead were very pleased to hear that funding to AONBs and National Parks was being protected. We have however re-structured the AONB Staff Team to be more flexible and resilient, concentrating resources on the two core Officers supported by temporary project staff to deliver more work on the ground.

Although conceived before the Budget announcement, our new Scheduled Monument Management Scheme is a good example of partnership working and efficiency. Historic England funding is being used to support the AONB Officer post, to deliver a programme of survey and practical management works for the 79 Scheduled Monuments in the AONB. All the survey work was completed during 2015/16, with management work also starting, and I look forward to seeing further good results in the coming years.

C. S. Cookman

Cllr Christine Cookman
Chairman, Joint Advisory Committee

ADMINISTRATION

Local Authorities are responsible for the management arrangements in the AONB, which falls within the County of North Yorkshire and the Districts of Ryedale and Hambleton. AONB policy and programmes of work are overseen by a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), supported by Officer groups. The Core Partners Group consists of representatives of the 4 main organisations (see list below). The AONB Partnership Group takes in a wider range of organisations and interests and helps with developing ideas/projects.

The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

During 2015/16, the members of the JAC were as follows:

North Yorkshire County Council –

Cllrs Caroline Patmore & Clare Wood

Ryedale District Council –

Cllrs Robert Wainwright & Fiona Farnell

Hambleton District Council –

Cllr Christine Cookman

Natural England –

Rosy Eaton & Justine Clark/Margaret Trigg

Parish Councils (Ryedale) – Sally Brown

Parish Councils (Hambleton) – Chris Stratton

Country Land and Business Association – Sir William Worsley

National Farmers Union – Rob Hicks

Ramblers – Philip Catterall

Forestry Commission – Jim Smith

The JAC met twice in 2015/16:

29th October 2015: Hovingham Village Hall. Christine Cookman continued as the JAC Chairman and Robert Wainwright as the Vice-Chairman. Members discussed the proposed 2016/17 JAC budget, particularly noting the likely significant reductions in funding from NYCC and Defra. There was also a 'virtual tour' of the work carried out by the Staff Unit during 2015/16, which replaced the traditional July bus tour.

4th April 2016: Hovingham Village Hall. Members discussed the work achieved in 2015/16 and approved the Business Plan and Action Programme for 2016/17. They also received details of a re-organisation of the AONB Staff Unit structure and details of proposed new ways of working.

Officer Steering Groups

The Core Partners Group convened on its regular quarterly cycle. No meeting of the AONB Partnership Group was held in spring 2016.

The AONB Unit

In 2015/16 the Unit comprised:

AONB Manager Paul Jackson
(1 FTE)

AONB Officer Liz Bassindale
(0.8 FTE)

AONB Assistant Maggie Cochrane
(0.5 FTE)

AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Management Plan is the key document setting out specific objectives for the sustainable management of the Howardian Hills AONB. Engaging in the strategic plans and actions of other organisations, to promote the Objectives contained in the Management Plan, is an important role for the AONB Unit. The Plan must be reviewed every 5 years, by law.

In 2015/16 we:

- Continued with delivery of the 2014-19 Management Plan

FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2015/16

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Defra	116,109	Staffing	89,538
North Yorkshire CC	57,616	Office costs	35,610
Ryedale DC	5,066	Partnership running costs	3,485
Hambleton DC	5,800	Publicity/Research	5,693
Historic England	22,588	Management Plan	0
National Centre for the Uplands	2,146	Natural Environment projects	18,752
Donations	0	Historic Environment projects	11,516
		Sustainable Development & Rural Economy	10,477
		Young People (JRC, etc)	166
In-year	£209,325	In-year	£175,237
Brought forward – General Fund	(53,510)	Carried forward – General Fund	(76,761)
		Carried forward – Historic England	(10,838)
Total	£262,835	Total	£262,835
		(Resources from grant recipients, volunteers, etc)	94,377
		Total Value of AONB Unit Activity in 2015/16	£269,614

CONSERVING AND ENHANCING NATURAL BEAUTY

This is the primary objective of AONB designation and the JAC attaches great importance to carrying out work on the ground in the AONB, working in partnership with local farmers, landowners and communities.

Work funded or facilitated by the JAC in 2015/16 included:

- 265m of hedge planting/gapping-up
- 242m of wall restoration
- Continued control of Himalayan balsam at Fairy Dell, Jeffrey Bog and Mugdale/Barker Woods SINCs. Started control work on the River Derwent SSSI
- Continued control of rhododendron in and adjacent to Yearsley Moor Woodlands SINC and at Grimston Moor SINC
- Conservation grazing of 6 SINC or other important sites by Exmoor ponies
- Management of species/vegetation on or affecting 7 other SINC or SSSIs (by volunteers or contractors)
- Management works on 45 Special Interest Road Verges
- Continuing involvement with the North Yorkshire Local Geological Sites Partnership, encouraging progress to map the AONB's most important geodiversity sites
- Entering work carried out in the AONB in 2013/14 and 2014/15 into the Government's Biodiversity Action Recording System
- Assessing the management options and payments becoming available under the new Countryside Stewardship scheme
- Starting a targeted programme of survey and management work on Scheduled Monuments, particularly those on the At Risk Register, using volunteers where possible. Four-year funding approval received from Historic England. Monument Management Scheme Year 1: surveyed 74 of the 79 Scheduled Monuments in the AONB; carried out bracken and scrub control works on 8 round barrows at Hovingham, Yearsley and Oulston (6 separate SMS)
- Restoring 2 traditional village name signs and casting 2 replicas to replace modern signs
- Restoration of 4 traditional direction signs
- Continuing liaison with Northern Powergrid on overhead electricity cable undergrounding, with the surveying and submission of 11 potential schemes for funding in the 8-year RIIO-ED1 period
- Monitoring the incidence and spread of tree diseases in the AONB, particularly *Phytophthora ramorum* following an outbreak at Gilling

In addition to initiating and grant aiding work itself, the AONB Unit also gives advice to applicants and/or comments on applications submitted for agri-environment scheme funding and woodland management licensing:

- 4 Felling Licence Applications and 1 Woodland Management Plan appraised for impact on the AONB



Hedge restoration, Brandsby



Wall restoration, East Newton



Restored traditional direction sign, West Ness

Planning Issues

The Joint Advisory Committee is consulted by the Local Planning Authorities on certain developments in the AONB, in line with an agreed protocol. The AONB Manager also monitors the Weekly Lists of planning applications and calls-up details of any smaller schemes which might potentially have an impact on the AONB. Consultation responses are dealt with by the AONB Manager, in consultation with the JAC and Chairman in certain circumstances.

Larger/more significant applications examined in 2015/16 included major extensions to Firby Hall, construction of 500 dwellings on the western edge of Malton, development of an 88ha solar farm near Easingwold, erection of an agricultural workers dwelling at Husthwaite (2 attempts), new agricultural buildings at Yearsley and Bulmer, a solar farm at Oulston, a new house on the outskirts of Crayke and the conversion of a bungalow into a house in Crayke.

During 2015/16:

- 102 applications were determined by the Local Planning Authorities in the calendar year 2015. 90% of these were approved
- 121 applications were scrutinised in detail by the AONB Manager
- Comments were submitted on 55 schemes, where a conflict with AONB Objectives was identified, improvements could be made or support was given
- Objections or Strong Reservations were lodged in 23 of those responses; the District or County Council followed the JAC's recommendation of refusal, or the applicants amended or Withdrew the proposals, in 13 of the cases where a decision was required
- 5 schemes were approved following re-submission/ amendment in line with AONB comments
- 13 consultations on other development (primarily within roads or verges) were also scrutinised – comments submitted on 5 schemes

In other planning-related issues we:

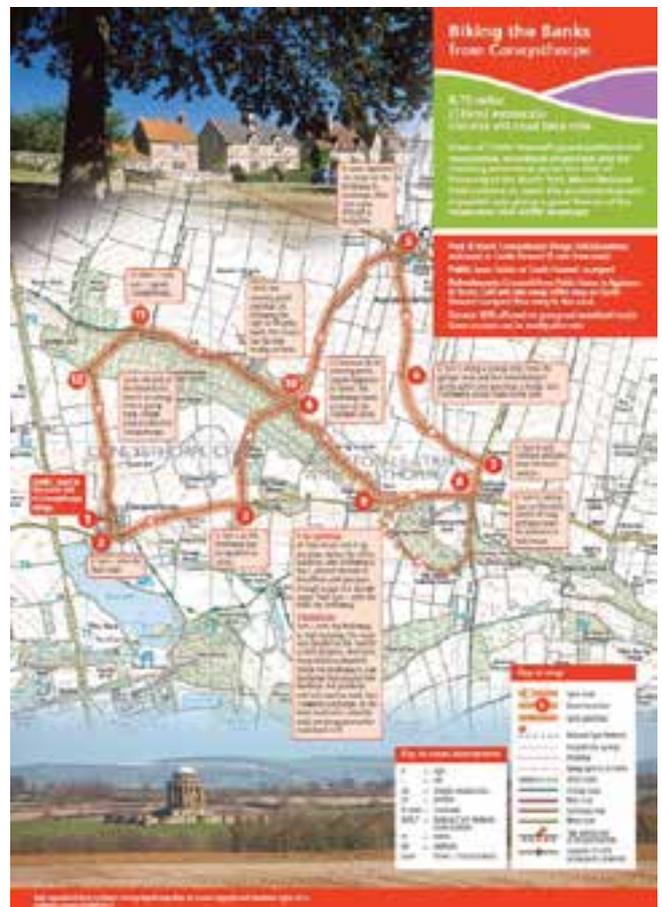
- Commented on national policy consultation documents by submitting local evidence/perspective to the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) as necessary
- Submitted comments on the preparation of North Yorkshire County Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4, the Ryedale Local Plan Strategy Sites Allocation document; the North Yorkshire Draft Minerals & Waste Joint Plan and the Hambleton Local Plan Issues & Options paper

ENJOYING THE AONB

The Public Rights of Way network continues to be managed to a generally good standard, although the age of some of the infrastructure means that continual maintenance/ improvement works are required over the whole network. More complex path routing issues are being resolved gradually, depending on their complexity, whilst volunteers are still making a significant contribution to path management.

In 2015/16 work included:

- Preparing an off-road cycling route leaflet for the Coneysthorpe area
- Digitising the remaining 3 walks routes around Terrington, to make a uniform package of 12 electronic leaflets for the whole AONB, now hosted on the AONB website
- Beginning preparation of some Easy Access walks, for less able users
- Developing a new mechanism to assist North Yorkshire County Council with resolving Public Rights of Way issues in the AONB
- Developing phase two of an initiative with Visit York, via Ryedale DC and Welcome to Yorkshire
- Finalising negotiations on a package of improvements in PRow routing on the Castle Howard Estate, to be implemented in summer 2016
- Removing litter from at least 10 sites in the AONB, on a regular basis throughout the summer



Coneysthorpe mountain bike route leaflet

COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

Our Junior Ranger Club continued, with 4 activity sessions held during the school half-terms and holidays.

In 2015/16 the programme consisted of:

Junior Ranger Club (April)

- Springtime Fun – 13 children

Junior Ranger Club (October)

- Amazing Autumn – 18 children

Junior Ranger Club (February)

- Wonderful Winter – 17 children

Junior Ranger Club (March)

- Spring has sprung! – 20 children

Communities:

- Continued liaison with the principal organisations involved in community work in the AONB, via the regular Community Development Officers' meetings



Planting seeds at a Junior Ranger Club day at the Yorkshire Arboretum

PUBLICITY

Promotion of the AONB has continued via our Newsletter, Annual Report and attendance at the local agricultural show. Increasingly our profile is being raised via the leaflets and publicity being produced in partnership with other organisations, as detailed in the 'Enjoying the AONB' section.

In 2015/16 we:

- Maintained the 14 AONB Gateway Signs
- Mounted a display about the AONB at 1 event
- Published and distributed our annual Newsletter (AONB News) in October 2015
- Published our 2014/15 Annual Report in September 2015
- Delivered a low-cost refresh of the AONB website, focussed on providing information to visitors, residents, etc, as well as a platform for guided route leaflets, grant application forms, Information Notes, etc
- Managed the new AONB website – 25,694 Page Views by 7,947 Users
- Amended our Wikipedia entry to bring the text into line with the Management Plan, website, etc
- Prepared a Nature Notes article for inclusion in The Ramblers September magazine
- Maintained a presence on Twitter, issuing information and re-Tweeting as appropriate
- Attended the Ryedale Show

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

We distributed £5,600 to Sustainable Development projects, assisting a variety of schemes addressing environmental, social and economic objectives.

Sustainable Development projects assisted in 2015/16 included:

- Continuation of a Sustainable Rural Communities project run by Rural Action Yorkshire, assisting with community planning
- An inter-generational project at Terrington
- Installation of composting toilets at the Yorkshire Arboretum, to assist on school visit days



New composting toilets, Yorkshire Arboretum

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

The AONB Management Plan is delivered via the policies and actions of many partner organisations, but we also make use of a number of sources of specialist help and assistance.

In 2015/16 we:

- Continued to participate in the Biodiversity Action Partnership for Ryedale, Scarborough and the AONB
- Participated in the North York Moors, Coast and Hills LEADER Transition phase, awaiting approval of the launch of the new Local Development Strategy
- Attended two meetings of the re-invigorated North York Moors Native Woodland Partnership
- Continued to explore options to support jobs, skills and sustainable economic growth locally, as part of the joint Protected Landscapes Growth Plan submitted to the Local Enterprise Partnership
- Continued to participate in the partnership focussing on the River Rye, to develop a project to tackle Himalayan balsam, river quality and sedimentation on a catchment scale. This has now turned into an application for Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership funding
- Arranged for Volunteers to help us with 25 projects or tasks, equating to over 136 person/ days of assistance worth £8,425

NATIONAL ACTIVITY

The Howardian Hills AONB is part of the national 'family' of 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is an important umbrella body that co-ordinates lobbying on behalf of all AONBs, responds to national consultations and organises training events. Support and participation in NAAONB activities brings many benefits for the Howardian Hills and is important for staff development.

In 2015/16:

- We attended the national AONB Forum in July
- We attended the national Chairmen's meeting/ NAAONB AGM in November
- AONB Unit staff attended 1 Northern AONB Group meeting, as well as participating in many national internet forum discussions on AONB projects/management



Volunteers cutting species-rich grassland, Appleton-le-Street Churchyard SINC

HOWARDIAN HILLS AONB FACT FILE

AONB CONTACTS

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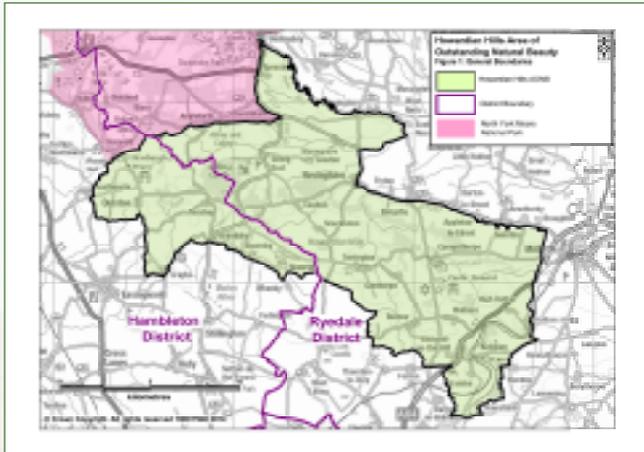
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• **The Howardian Hills covers 204 sq. km (79 sq. miles)**



• **The area was confirmed as an AONB in 1987**



• **About 9,300 people live in or immediately adjacent to the area**



• **Around 18% of the area is wooded**

Photos: ©AONB Unit, unless stated otherwise