



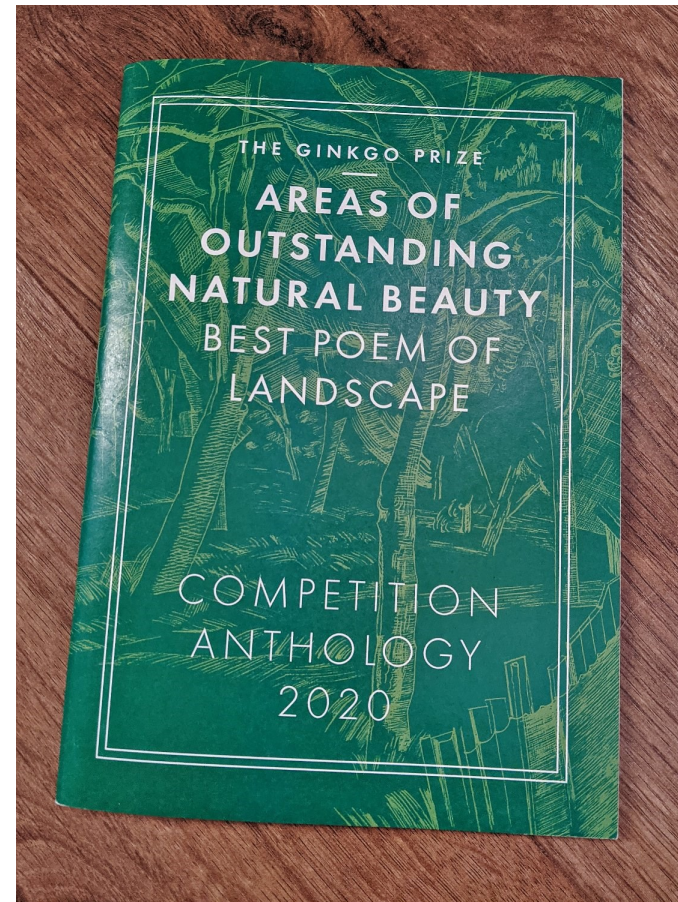
Annual Report 2021

Landscapes
for life
.org.uk

THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
Areas of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

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The Ginkgo Prize is an internationally recognised award for eco-poetry. Engaging with artists has been a major highlight for AONBs this year!

Welcome from our Chairman

“ In last year’s Annual Report, I wrote of the changes wrought by the global pandemic, the effects of which are still in evidence. As a National Association and family of outstanding landscapes **we continue to manage these challenges with a sensitivity of approach and certainty of purpose.** This places us at the forefront of national debate about the responses to climate change, nature recovery and post Covid wellbeing and economic recovery.

The figures and stories in this year’s Annual Report demonstrate **how AONB teams have once more stepped up to deliver.**

More people than ever have engaged with their local AONB. Some of this engagement was **via screen and social media,** and while this is not the same as breathing the fresh air in beautiful surroundings, it is heartening to know that people have still been able to access the spaces that mean so much to them.

Twelve AONB Partnerships collaborated to deliver Tests and Trials on behalf of Defra, exploring payment methods post-Brexit: known as the **Environmental Land Management Scheme.** The AONB Tests and Trials were unusual in being the only ones delivered by an England-wide collective, **covering the widest possible variety of landscape types,** from coast to upland. They were co-designed by AONB teams and local farmers and landowners working together. The opportunities to maximise environmental gains by collaborating in this way to deliver nature-based solutions for the good of the nation are enormous.

Work such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme, Farming in Protected Landscapes and nature based climate recovery at scale, as with bog restoration, are truly **at the cutting edge of positive ways to a sustainable future.**

While the year we are reviewing here runs from April 2020-April 2021, it would be remiss not to mention the **changes within the NAAONB** since. Between June and October 2021, we bade a fond farewell to some of our most loyal and influential colleagues. **Howard Davies, Richard Clarke and trustee Nick Holliday** each made a significant contribution to the cause of protected landscapes. **We are indebted to them, will miss them and wish them well for the future.** Particular recognition is owed to Howard for the remarkable body of his work as Chief Executive.

We have welcomed **new trustees Jim Dixon, Anjana Khatwa, Gill Perry and Karin Taylor** to the Board, and **new Chief Executive, John Watkins,** joins us at a critical point for protected landscapes and nature-based climate response. He comes with a superb suite of skills and experience most recently in senior policy roles with Welsh Government.

As ever, **my sincere thanks to the AONBs teams** for their efforts which deliver benefits locally and nationally, and provide the Association with a wealth of evidence to demonstrate and amplify the value and great potential of AONBs. ”



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Hygate'.

Philip Hygate FRSA,
Chairman

The Landscapes for Life Annual Report

The year 2020-21 began in lockdown for all of us in the UK. Many AONB team members were redeployed by their host authorities to help with the local COVID-19 response. As lockdown eased, **AONB teams worked hard to ensure that the welcome in our areas was as warm as ever.**

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty saw an **increase in visitors** as restrictions were lifted and it was great to see these areas being accessed by people in the way intended when the legislation that paved the way for their designation was passed just over 70 years ago. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was sister legislation to that which created the NHS. **AONBs are here to take care of the nation's wellbeing, as our NHS is here to take care of its health.**

So much has changed for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty since 1949. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act of 2000 protects the land to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. But more recently, **AONB teams have recognised the need to expand the scale of their social contract with the nation.** The Colchester Declaration detailed what AONBs can deliver for nature, climate and people. Their track record is strong – they have restored peatland twice the area of Birmingham, colossal carbon sinks which also defend downstream urban areas from flooding and provide habitat for threatened iconic bird species. AONBs cover some 15% of the land area of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and this, coupled with their **skilled and flexible teams** means they have the potential make a huge contribution to the UK's efforts.

As well as being **places for nature and physical and spiritual wellbeing**, AONBs are **also living communities**. Post Brexit, the government is phasing out farm payments based on land area and focusing on giving public money

for public goods. The incoming **'Environmental Land Management Scheme'** will reward farmers and landowners for managing their land in ways that create bigger, better and more connected spaces for nature, reduce flood/drought risk or improve access for people. To research how new payment methods can best be delivered, Defra commissioned various **tests and trials** during 2020-21 and 12 AONBs took part. The main finding was that **advice from AONB teams helped farmers to be more ambitious with their projects**, resulting in higher payments for the farmer and **more impactful interventions for nature, climate and people** (more on this on p.23).

Our annual **Landscapes for Life week celebration** of all things AONB in September moved **online**, with creative opportunities to engage with AONBs including: a rebooted **Wye Valley River Festival** rescheduled from May including loads of fantastic online content; an **eco-poetry workshop** with award winning poet Meryl Pugh; the **Forest of Bowland's Foodie Foray**; and a talk on Start Bay's (in South Devon AONB) role in the preparations for D Day.

As we put the finishing touches to the Annual Report for 2020-21, Government has responded to Julian **Glover's Review of Designated Landscapes** (2019) and we hope that the decisions made as a result of this will **harness the immense ambition of the AONB Family** – skilled teams with a detailed understanding of their local areas and the relationships to leverage real change on a landscape scale – to **significantly upscale their work** in the coming 70 years to **really make the difference they are capable of.**

Who we are

The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is a **charity** that provides a strong collective voice for the UK's 46 AONBs.

Vision

The natural beauty of AONBs is valued and secure

Mission

To support and develop a network of ambitious AONB partnerships with a strong collective voice and a positive impact on the places for which they care.

Strategic Objectives

Support policies for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs.
Maintain an understanding of AONBs and the issues they face.
Advocate for AONB partnerships and their teams.
Sustain a collaborative culture across the AONB Family.

Key Actions

Work with partners to support thinking on protected landscape management.
Take action to achieve nature recovery and minimise climate change.
Create opportunities for people to connect with landscape.
Support AONB teams to promote sustainable agriculture.
Build tools and opportunities to support collaboration.
Develop the organisation.

Our **charitable objects** are simple and have the care of the UK's countryside at their heart. They are:

- to promote the conservation **and enhancement of natural beauty**, including the physical, natural, cultural and built environment in and around AONBs, other protected areas, and those areas for which such designation might be pursued;
- to advance the **education, understanding and appreciation of the public** in relation to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty in and around AONBs, other protected areas and those areas for which such designation might be pursued;
- to promote the **efficiency and effectiveness** of those organisations promoting or representing AONBs, other protected areas and those areas for which designation might be pursued.

We do this by taking a **collaborative and partnership based approach** to working with our members and other organisations at a national level to achieve shared goals.

Our staff



Howard Davies
Chief Executive
(until Sep '21)



John Watkins
Chief Executive
(joined Jul '21)



Amber Carter
Project and Systems
Manager



Clare Elbourne
Administrative Assistant



Anna Trant



Richard Clarke
National Policy and
Development Manager
(until Jun '21)



Ruth Colbridge
Communications and
Advocacy Manager



Frances Winder
Nature Recovery
Coordinator



Ian Rappel
Wales Development
Manager
(until Sep '21)



Marie Micol

Our contractors

Our Board of Trustees



Philip Hygate FRSA
Chairman



Chris Woodley-Stewart
Vice Chairman



Nick Holliday
(until Nov '21)



Denise Hewlett



Paul Walton
(until Nov '21)



Lucy Barron



Karin Taylor



Anjana Khatwa

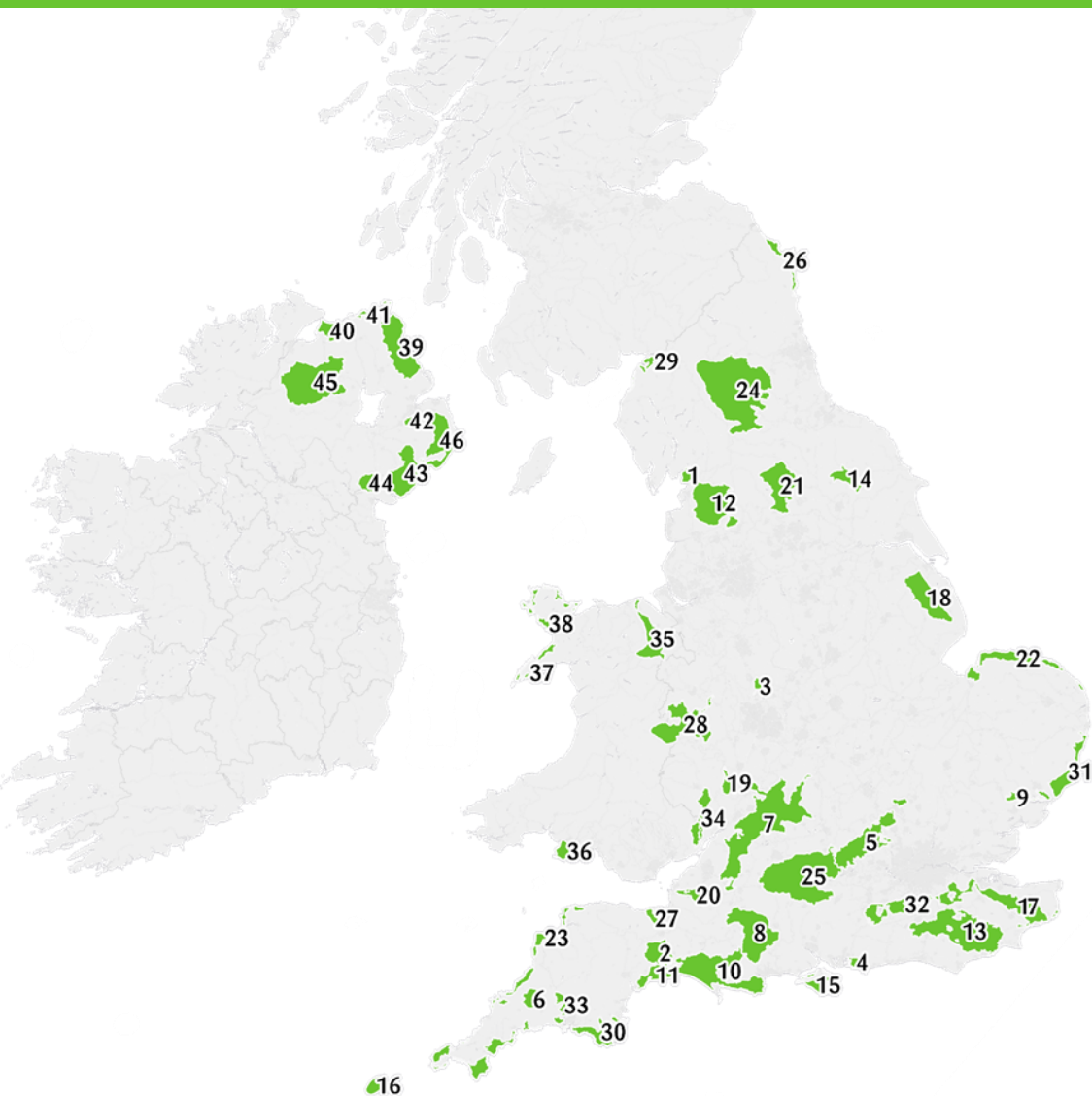


Jim Dixon



Gill Perry
Honorary Treasurer

The UK's 46 AONBs



England

- 1 Arnside & Silverdale
- 2 Blackdown Hills
- 3 Cannock Chase
- 4 Chichester Harbour
- 5 Chilterns
- 6 Cornwall
- 7 Cotswolds National Landscape
- 8 Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire Downs
- 9 Dedham Vale
- 10 Dorset
- 11 East Devon
- 12 Forest of Bowland
- 13 High Weald
- 14 Howardian Hills
- 15 Isle of Wight
- 16 Isles of Scilly
- 17 Kent Downs
- 18 Lincolnshire Wolds
- 19 Malvern Hills
- 20 Mendip Hills
- 21 Nidderdale
- 22 Norfolk Coast
- 23 North Devon
- 24 North Pennines
- 25 North Wessex Downs
- 26 Northumberland Coast
- 27 Quantock Hills
- 28 Shropshire Hills
- 29 Solway Coast
- 30 South Devon

- 31 Suffolk Coast & Heaths
- 32 Surrey Hills
- 33 Tamar Valley
- 34 Wye Valley (cross-border)

Wales

- 34 Dyffryn Gwy (cross-border)
- 35 Clwydian Range and Dee Valley / Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy
- 36 Gower / Gŵyr
- 37 Llŷn / Llŷn
- 38 Anglesey / Ynys Môn

Northern Ireland

- 39 Antrim Coast and Glens
- 40 Binevanagh
- 41 Causeway Coast
- 42 Lagan Valley
- 43 Mourne
- 44 Ring of Gullion
- 45 Sperrin
- 46 Strangord and Lecale

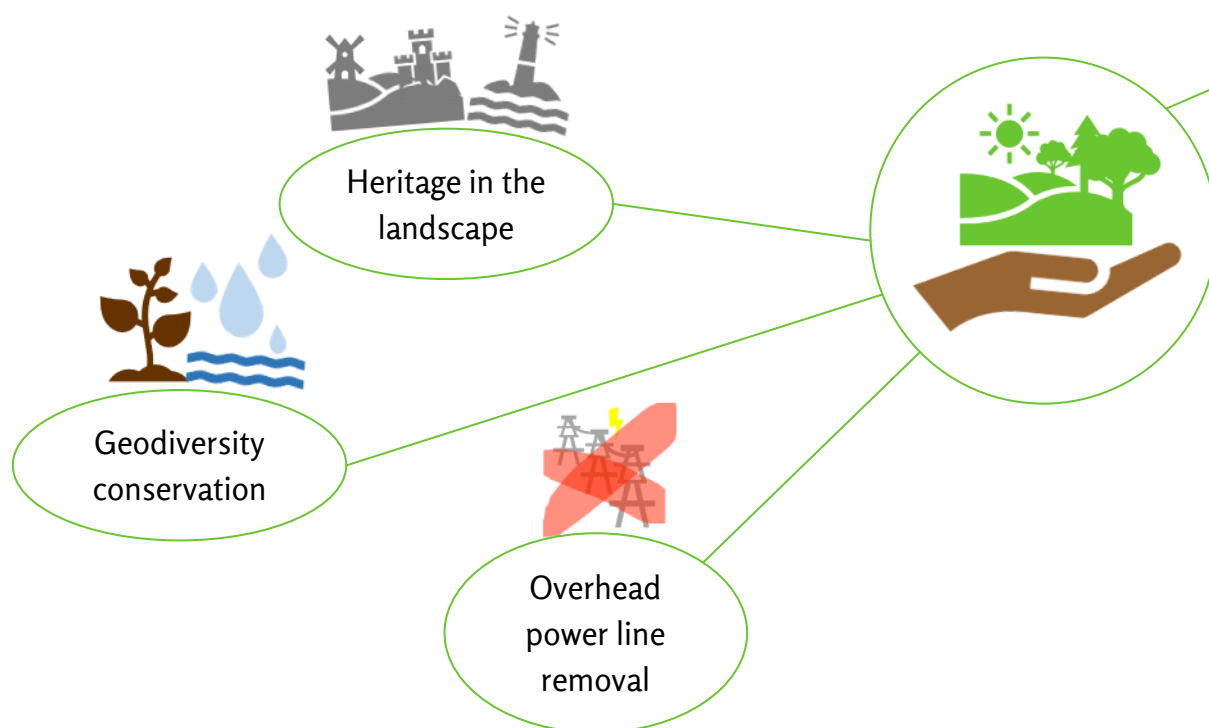
Note: In Scotland, National Scenic Areas hold a comparable designation to AONBs. They are administered by NatureScot.



Caring for natural beauty

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated and protected for the beauty of their landscapes. Each AONB has its own distinct, sometimes unique, characteristics; incorporating **culture, heritage, wildlife, geology, habitats, tranquillity and scenic quality**.

To measure the contribution AONB Partnerships make to natural beauty, we assess area conserved or enhanced for **biodiversity** and **geodiversity** (the variety of landforms, soils and minerals); land area conserved or enhanced by **improvements to heritage assets**; and area where **scenic quality** has been improved by undergrounding overhead lines.



Habitats for biodiversity

Surface conserved or enhanced by AONB teams



Brook Vessons Headwater Restoration Project

Situated in the **Shropshire Hills AONB**, the Brook Vessons area supports important **wetlands and upland wood pasture***, but over many years has been changed and manipulated. This created a noticeable boundary between the Brook Vessons Nature Reserve, managed by Shropshire Wildlife Trust, and Brook Vessons farm, which until recently was managed for upland sheep. Watercourses on the farm had been hollowed out to create ditches, and land drains laid to improve grazing.

The farm sits between the Nature Reserve and Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, and **the changes made for agricultural purposes had created a habitat gap**. The farmer was happy to work with the Shropshire Hills AONB team to **help restore the natural water function on the farm's upper slopes** to fill this gap and deliver “more, bigger, better and connected” habitats, deemed essential to deliver nature recovery in Professor Sir John Lawton’s Making Space for Nature report.



The site also lies on the edge of a now deserted village so the **AONB team worked with the Historic Environment Team at Shropshire Council** to ensure that the **significant archaeology** was also protected.

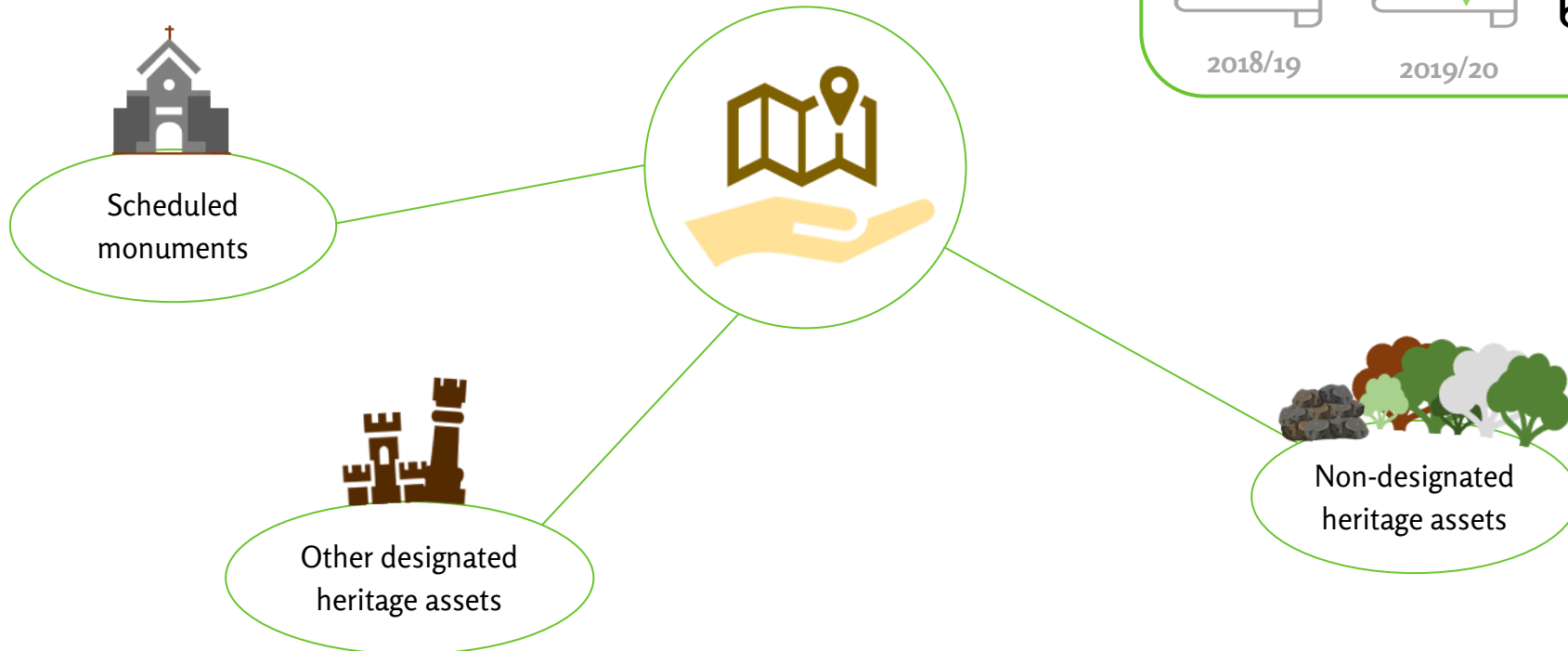
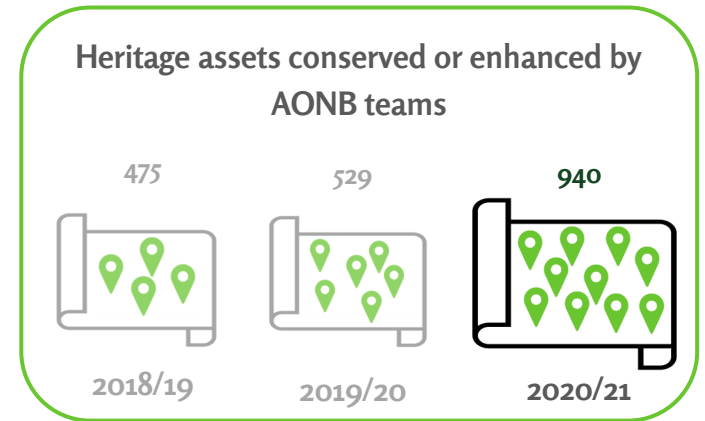
A local contractor with previous experience of working protected sites delivered the work alongside the AONB team, using locally sourced materials and the natural seed bank allowed the area to rapidly revegetate.

The £15,000 cost of the project was funded by the Environment Agency, and **the project area totals 15.6ha of grassland/rush pasture**, however the **impacts will be wider**, the overall zone of influence is **estimated at 28ha**. The site is now likely to secure a Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier agreement.

Caring for heritage

Conserving heritage assets for the future is important in **preserving what is special** about our designated areas. From abbeys to peel towers, milk churn stands to dry stone walls, hedgerows to burial mounds; these features are the physical **legacy** of the human activities that shaped each area.

Keeping these features alive is as important for the **story and culture** of an area as it is for its **scenic value**.



Accessing Aidan

Bamburgh, a village within the **Northumberland Coast AONB**, is a popular tourist destination, famous for its iconic castle as well as cosy pubs and cafes and a beautiful beach. Less well known is that **1400 years ago, Bamburgh was the capital of the kingdom of Northumbria.**

A cosmopolitan and cultural centre, Bamburgh **attracted people from across Europe** to work and visit during its **'Golden Age' in the 7th century.**

A storm in the late 19th century first revealed the Bowl Hole graveyard a few hundred metres south of Bamburgh Castle. Excavations between 1998 and 2007 **unearthed the bones of 110 people** dating from Anglo Saxon times. After the bones were exhumed, they were researched and analysed before being reinterred in their permanent home, the **crypt of St Aidan's Church** in Bamburgh.



The **Northumberland Coast AONB team was the lead partner** in securing a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant to create 'Bamburgh Bones', **telling the story** of these people and of Bamburgh at the time they lived.



Working with partners St Aidan's Church, a local community history group – the Bamburgh Research Project and Durham University, Northumberland Coast AONB team created a project that saw the **reopening of the crypt to the public** via new safe stairs and viewing platform, a **digital projection in the crypt**, installed lighting, **new movable interpretation** in the church complete with touchscreen access to the **digital ossuary now available online**, and created education resources and digital content.

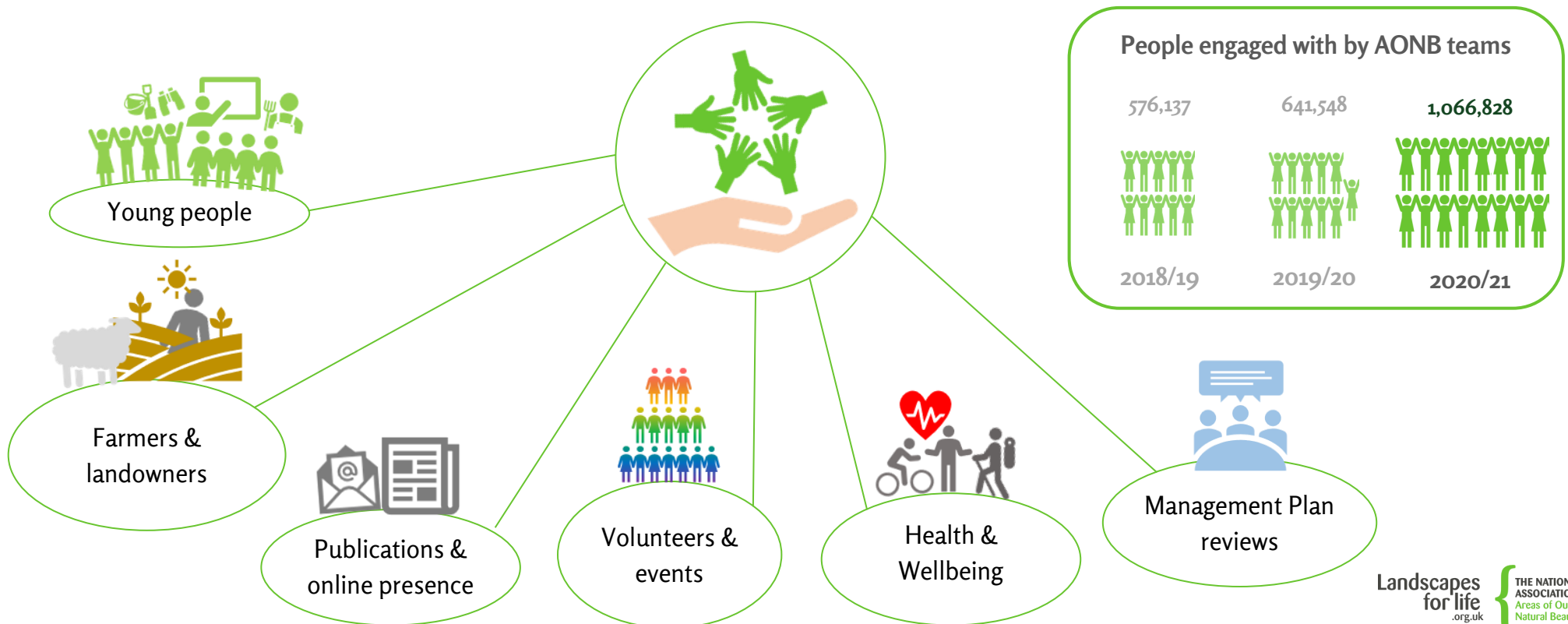
The digital ossuary is a fantastic resource, giving a fascinating **insight into the lives of each of the people whose bones are preserved**, how they lived, and where they hailed from*.

* if you're unable to visit Bamburgh, you can access the information and digital ossuary [on their website](#)

Engaging with people

People form strong personal bonds with AONBs, and these places have become special to residents, generations of visiting families and individuals seeking feelings of **rootedness, tranquillity, inspiration, consolation and freedom**. AONBs also play a crucial role in the nation's **physical and mental wellbeing**.

AONB Partnerships recognise the **mutual benefits of engaging with local communities**. The spike in number of people engaged with this year illustrates the nation's need for natural spaces close to urban areas in times of anxiety as well as the increasing online presence of AONBs and the development of digital content to allow people to connect with these special places at all times.



HARVEST - Surrey Hills Arts

Harvest is a community event organised by **Surrey Hills Arts, part of the AONB team, celebrating the Surrey Hills landscape at harvest time.** Hundreds of people gather on Box Hill at dusk to view and take part in **art inspired by the surrounding landscape.**

Harvest grew out of a project in September 2018 where artist Mary Branson **explored the relationship of the local farming community to the land** and the impact of the changing climate on their work. *Harvest 2018* featured sixty-six 'invisible' hay bales; illuminated outlines of what should have been in the lower field had it not suffered from drought, highlighting the unseen work that goes into shaping the landscape that is often taken for granted.



In 2019, the event was called *Harvest – One Moon* and was designed with **inclusivity at its heart.** The *I Speak Music Orchestra* of refugee young people provided drumming rhythm to the singers and together they sang out a beautiful Syrian song across the landscape. They were also joined by UP! Orchestra of Unlimited Potential, young people with special educational needs who joined in the singing and percussion.



One hundred women bearing huge lanterns marched to the beat of Medau drum in the distant field, illuminating a perfect circle before dissecting it to represent Equinox.

In 2022 Harvest will return to Box Hill to **creatively celebrate and welcome people to the Surrey Hills.**

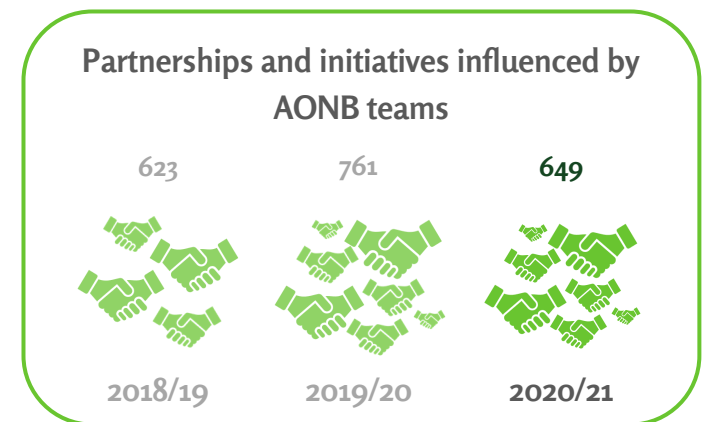
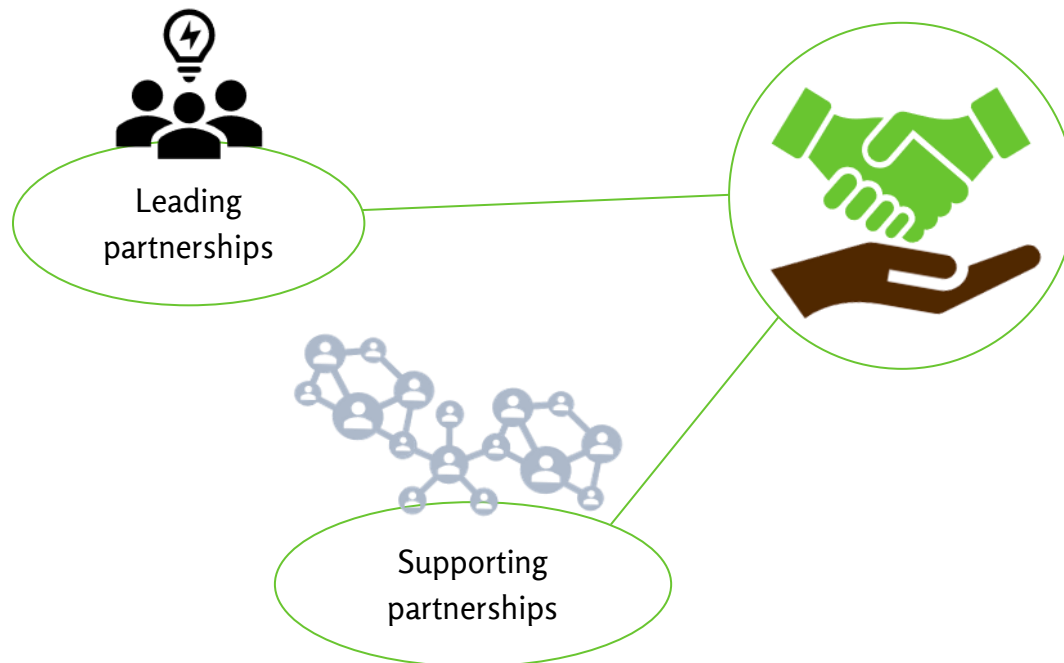
~ 'The event gave a real sense of community and coming together' – Attendee

Harvest is **an opportunity to bring people together in this outstanding landscape that is there for everyone.** It gathers **around 400 people** of all ages each year and engages with dozens of creative practitioners. A series of workshops and events leading up to the event engage **around 200 more people.**

Power to convene

AONBs cover some 15% of the land area of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, yet have small workforces. Their unique strength lies in their **power to convene**.

AONB Partnership teams include representatives from across their locality: from other **conservation organisations**, such as the RSPB, Natural England, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts; **farmers and landowners**; local **history and natural history societies**; representatives from **local business** organisations; **residents**; **local authorities**; and **ramblers**. This active **representation and team-working** to conserve AONBs helps prioritise and share work, amplifies what can be achieved and ensures that effort is invested where it is most needed.



Connecting the Culm

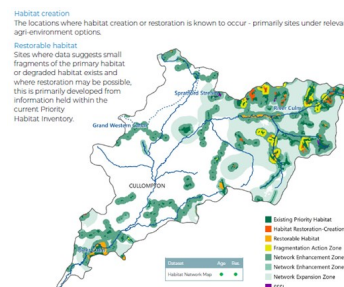
The **Blackdown Hills AONB's [Connecting the Culm](#) climate change adaptation project** works across a river catchment that covers an area of **100 square miles** reaching well **beyond the boundaries of the AONB**. The project began in 2019 and the current EU funded phase will run until the end of 2022.

During the project the aim is to **slow the flow of the river** and **reduce the risk of flooding and drought**, **improve water quality**, **re-establish habitat and restore nature** and **improve access** to the beautiful surroundings for local residents and visitors. Connecting the Culm also has a longer-term aim – the **creation of the Blueprint for the Culm** – a 25 year shared vision developed by local organisations and residents working together.

The AONB team is the lynchpin of the project, and they work closely with the Westcountry Rivers Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust, supported by a steering group consisting of representatives from Devon County Council, Mid Devon District Council, the Environment Agency and the National Trust, which owns a significant estate at Killerton, towards the bottom of the catchment.

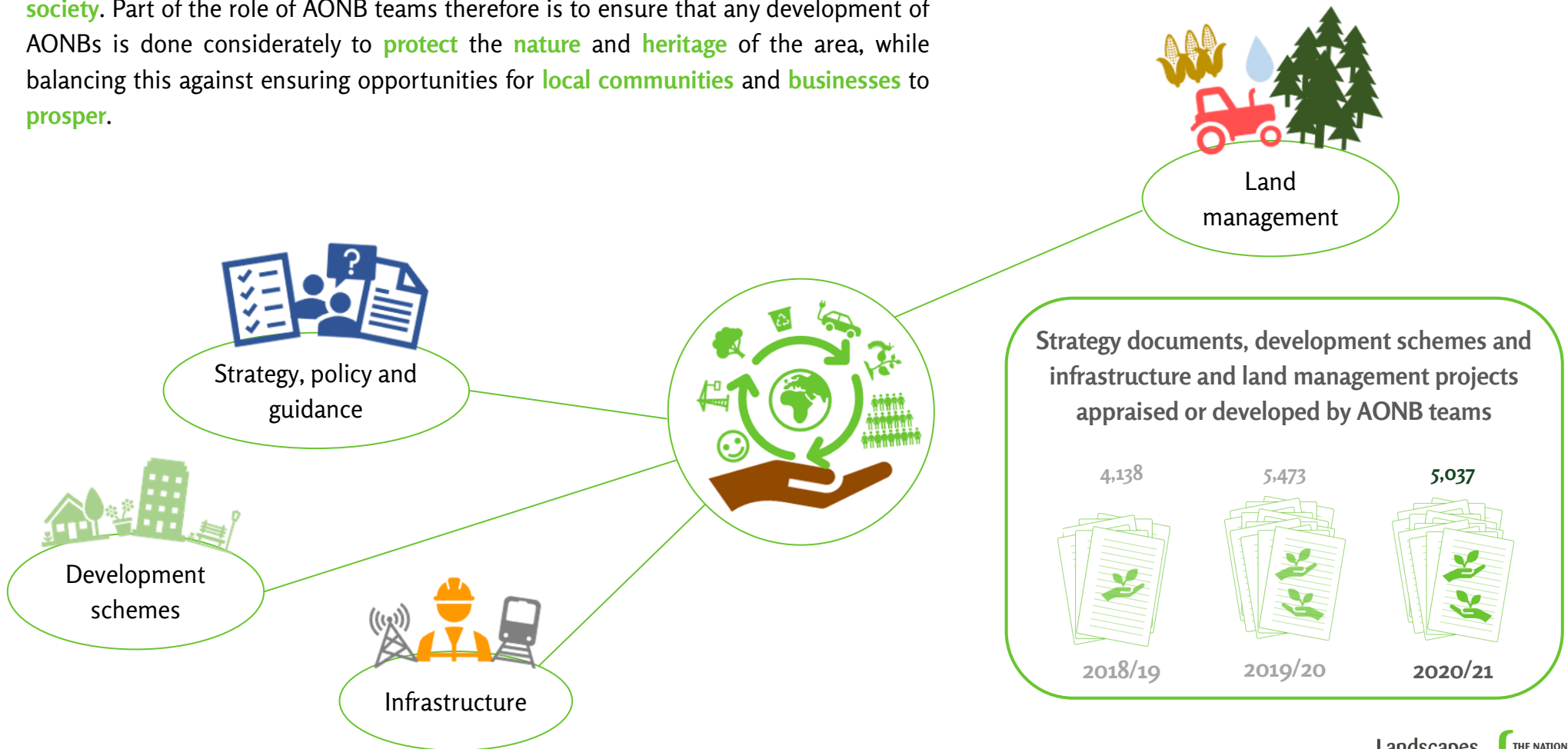
The team have taken a **creative approach to ensuring that local residents are involved and empowered**. In developing the Blueprint for the Culm, the team commissioned a local artist to illustrate what the catchment looks like now and capture outputs of a series of

immersive workshops to visualise how it could look in the future; including tree planting to help prevent erosion, reconnecting flood plains to store water, leaky dams and beavers to slow the flow. The project has also included a series of **community festivals**, a **YouTube channel**, **storytelling**, and **Citizen Science training** to help people explore and understand the river and nature in their local area.



Sustainable development

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated for their **value to nature and to society**. Part of the role of AONB teams therefore is to ensure that any development of AONBs is done considerately to **protect** the **nature** and **heritage** of the area, while balancing this against ensuring opportunities for **local communities** and **businesses** to **prosper**.



Roads for wildlife and humans

There are 2579 km² of road verges across Great Britain, equivalent to 1.2% of land. Roads are what get us around and help provide vital links for all, but they are also **home to vast communities of plants and animals**.

The four-year partnership between **Cornwall AONB** team and the Environment & Sustainability Institute (University of Exeter) allowed PhD student Ben Phillips to lead **crucial research on road verges**, how they support wildlife and what benefits they provide to humans, as well as how we can improve their management.



Through spatial modelling, remote sampling, roadside surveys and field experiments, the project has produced no less than seven **academic papers** between 2017 and 2021, contributing to **improve knowledge and understanding on road verges**. This research has notably shown the importance of road verges for pollinators, but also

to mitigate traffic pollution, support agricultural production, and enhance access to nature for people.

The project also produced **practical management guidelines** and **responded to requests for guidance on verge management**. Last but not least, the project team worked on generating engagement locally and nationally, notably to ensure project outputs could actually be delivered on the ground to benefit nature and people.

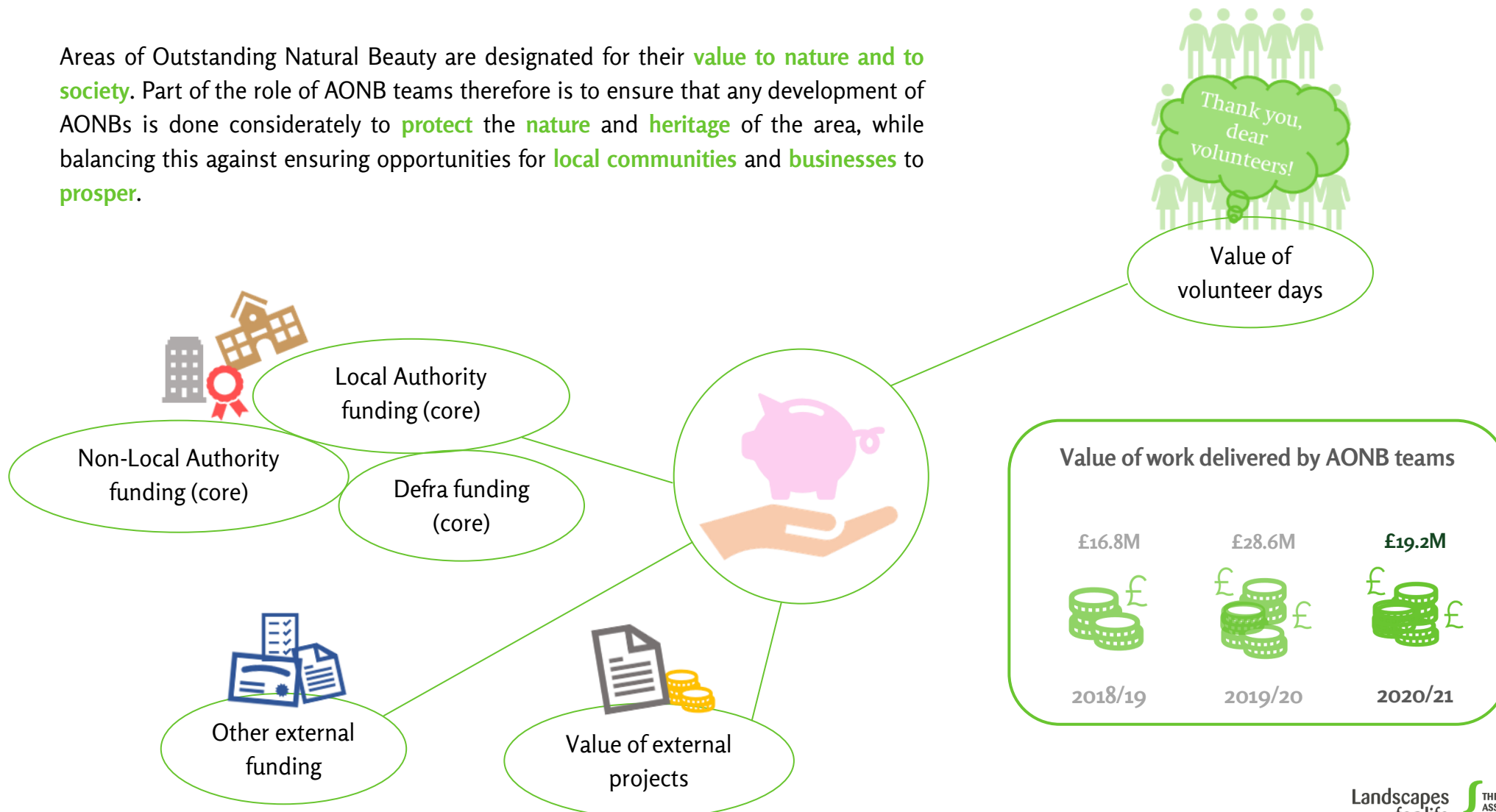
And on the topic of roads, the **Cotswolds National Landscape team** has played a central role in **ensuring the A417 'Missing Link' road scheme delivers more for the landscape through a partnership approach**. Regularly meeting with Highways England, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, National Trust and Natural England, they identified and agreed on significant changes to the scheme design, to **benefit biodiversity and people's enjoyment of the area**. They are notably working with these partners on how the scheme could deliver Biodiversity Net Gain.

The image on the right is a visualisation from Highways England to show how one of the new road crossings may look.



Value for money

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are designated for their **value to nature and to society**. Part of the role of AONB teams therefore is to ensure that any development of AONBs is done considerately to **protect** the **nature** and **heritage** of the area, while balancing this against ensuring opportunities for **local communities** and **businesses** to **prosper**.



River Stour Enhancement

Dedham Vale AONB team has worked with the Environment Agency and landowners to deliver the **River Stour Enhancement Project**.

Through **various successful funding bids developed by the AONB team**, worth on average £40,000 per year over the last 10 years, and **strong collaborative working** with numerous partners – including landowners, land managers, local authorities, conservation organisations, statutory bodies and volunteers – the project is **delivering countless nature based solutions**. It is **reducing the risk of flooding** in the local area, **creating improved habitat** for fish and invertebrates, and **improved access for people**.



Since the project began in 2012, around **15,000 trees** have been planted on **11 waterbodies**, totalling **7,627m of riverbank** in the River Stour Catchment, on the **'right tree, right place'** principle. These trees are suited for riverside habitats with

root systems that prevent **riverbank erosion** and **provide shade** to keep water temperatures down for the benefit of wildlife.

Working with volunteers, the team have carried out **monitoring and control of Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam** on 17,533m of

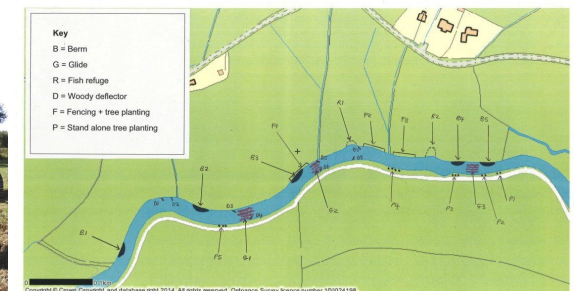
riverbank on nine waterbodies. These plants cause personal injury, and shade out native plants as well as contributing to riverbank erosion and damage fish spawning beds.

2,333m of river habitats have been enhanced through the creation of hundreds of features: such as backwaters, dyke restoration (to re-wet flood plains), flow deflectors and the removal of artificially raised soil banks to re-connect the river to the flood plain.

These works will help **improve their biodiversity and landscape value**, for example, by increasing their attractiveness to wintering wildfowl, and the increased capacity of the floodplain to store floodwaters will also deliver benefits in terms



River Stour at Wiston/Wormingford. Proposed restoration features – Plan 1



Welsh AONBs update

Work in the Welsh AONBs in the 2020/21 financial year was dominated by activities responding to the Covid-19 outbreak and associated impacts. Here are some examples of activities undertaken by Welsh AONBs during this period.

Active Wood Wales, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB supported Coed Lleol to help individuals **improve their health** through regular woodland-based group activities. Lockdown led to rethink delivering and create the #Naturefix programme, including **daily National Nature and Wellbeing Sessions online** along with **YouTube videos** (currently over 7,000 views). A telephone **befriending service** was also set up with a focus on nature and wellbeing.

Healthy Reds, Anglesey AONB

Anglesey AONB supported the Healthy Reds project which has conserved Red Squirrels from the threat of non-native invasive Grey squirrels. The project has **raised awareness** of the impacts of invasive species and **promoted the natural resource value and economic benefits of Red Squirrels**. It was successfully undertaken and achieved its aims despite Covid-19 and **contributed towards conserving 70% of the Welsh Red Squirrel**.

The Wye Valley River Festival, Wye Valley AONB

The Wye Valley River Festival is a biennial initiative focusing on arts & environment with landscape at its heart. By staging magnificent outdoor arts events that **captivate and engage**, the Festival has celebrated and interpreted the River Wye, the countryside and its communities since 2014. **In 2020 the festival went online**, employing 222 artists, creatives, and

specialists. It commissioned and created 141 new pieces of work and 19 short films. Artists created and uploaded **92 hours of content/entertainment on the festival website**, a combination of films, podcasts, music, talks, workshops and live streams.

Machroes Site Improvements, Llyn AONB

Machroes Beach, in the Llyn AONB, saw a **large increase in visitor numbers**, raising the need for **improvement to infrastructure to serve both residents and visitors**. The AONB team worked with the Local Authority's Marine Unit to identify a **programme of works**: improvements included the beach cabin, road, path and slipway which has also **improved the management of people and vehicles** in the area.

Clyne Valley Country Park Regeneration, Gower AONB

Covid restrictions resulted in a **dramatic increase in activity** in the Clyne Valley. Located on the doorstep of western Swansea, Clyne provided the **ideal local green space for many local communities** and this level of use is expected to continue. The project set out to improve the infrastructure and management of the park, helping **develop partnerships between various interested groups** including Swansea Council, NRW, Clyne Valley Community Project and user groups.

The project coincided with significant change in the way local communities viewed and used Clyne Valley, with far **more regular informal users exploring the area**, raising significant issues between users. The funding has enabled Swansea Council to start to address these issues, **setting the foundations for better management in future**.

Y wybodaeth ddiweddaraf am AHNE Cymru

Roedd gwaith yn AHNE Cymru ym mlwyddyn ariannol 2020/21 yn cael ei llywio gan weithgareddau a ymatebodd i'r brigiad o achosion Covid-19 a'r effeithiau cysylltiedig. Dyma rai enghreifftiau o weithgareddau a gyflawnwyd gan AHNE Cymru yn ystod y cyfnod hwn.

Coed Actif Cymru, AHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy

Cefnogodd AHNE Bryniau Clwyd a Dyffryn Dyfrdwy Coed Lleol i helpu unigolion i **wella eu hiechyd** drwy weithgareddau grŵp rheolaidd wedi'u lleoli mewn coetiroedd. Arweiniodd y cyfnod clo at ailfeddwl y dull darparu a chreu'r rhaglen #Naturefix, gan gynnwys **Sesiynau Natur a Lles Cenedlaethol dyddiol ar-lein** ynghyd â **fideos YouTube** (mae dros 7,000 o bobl wedi'u gwyllo ar hyn o bryd). Sefydlwyd gwasanaeth cyfeillio dros y ffôn hefyd gyda ffocws ar natur a lles.

Cochion Iach, AHNE Ynys Môn

Cefnogodd AHNE Ynys Môn y prosiect Cochion Iach sydd wedi gwarchod Gwiwerod Coch rhag bygythiad gwiwerod Llwyd estron goresgynnol. Mae'r prosiect wedi **codi ymwybyddiaeth** o effeithiau rhywogaethau goresgynnol ac wedi **hyrwyddo gwerth adnoddau naturiol a manteision economaidd Gwiwerod Coch**. Fe'i cyflawnwyd yn llwyddiannus a chyflawnodd ei nodau er gwaethaf Covid-19, **ac fe gyfrannodd at warchod 70% o Wiwerod Coch Cymru**.

Gŵyl Afon Dyffryn Gwy, AHNE Dyffryn Gwy

Mae Gŵyl Afon Dyffryn Gwy yn fenter bob dwy flynedd sy'n canolbwyntio ar y celfyddydau a'r amgylchedd gyda thirwedd yn ganolog iddi. Drwy gynnal digwyddiadau celfyddydol awyr agored godidog sy'n **cyfareddu ac yn ymgysylltu**, mae'r Wyl wedi dathlu a dehongli Afon Gwy, cefn gwlad a'i

chymunedau ers 2014. **Yn 2020 aeth yr ŵyl ar-lein**, gan gyflogi 222 o artistiaid, pobl greadigol ac arbenigwyr. Comisiynodd a chreodd 141 o ddarnau newydd o waith a 19 o ffilmiau byrion. Crëwyd a lanlwythwyd **92 awr o gynnwys/adloniant ar wefan yr ŵyl** gan artistiaid, cyfuniad o ffilmiau, podlediadau, cerddoriaeth, sgysiau, gweithdai a ffrydiau byw.

Gwelliannau i Safle Machroes, AHNE Llŷn

Gwelwyd **cynnydd mawr yn nifer yr ymwelwyr** yn nhraeth Machroes yn AHNE Llŷn, gan godi'r angen i wella'r **seilwaith i wasanaethu trigolion ac ymwelwyr**. Gweithiodd tîm yr AHNE gydag Uned Forol yr Awdurdod Lleol i nodi **rhaglen waith**: roedd y gwelliannau'n cynnwys caban y traeth, y ffordd, y llwybr a'r llithrfa sydd hefyd wedi gwella'r **ffordd y rheolir pobl a cherbydau** yn yr ardal.

Adfywio Parc Gwledig Dyffryn Clun, AHNE Gŵyr

Arweiniodd cyfyngiadau Covid at **gynnydd dramatig mewn gweithgarwch** yn Nyffryn Clun. Wedi'i leoli ar stepen drws gorllewin Abertawe, darparodd Clun y **man gwyrdd lleol delfrydol ar gyfer llawer o gymunedau lleol** a disgwylir i'r lefel hon o ddefnydd barhau. Nod y prosiect oedd gwella seilwaith a rheolaeth y parc, gan helpu i **ddatblygu partneriaethau rhwng gwahanol grwpiau â diddordeb** gan gynnwys Cyngor Abertawe, CNC, Prosiect Cymunedol Dyffryn Clun a grwpiau defnyddwyr. Roedd y prosiect yn cyd-daro â newid sylweddol ym marn cymunedau lleol ynghylch Dyffryn Clun a'r ffordd yr oeddent yn ei ddefnyddio, gyda llawer mwy o bobl yn crwydro'r ardal mewn modd anffurfiol yn rheolaidd, gan godi materion arwyddocaol rhwng defnyddwyr. Mae'r cyllid wedi galluogi Cyngor Abertawe i ddechrau mynd i'r afael â'r materion hyn, **gan osod y sylfeini ar gyfer gwell rheolaeth yn y dyfodol**.



The work of the NAAONB in 2020/21

During the year 2020-21, the NAAONB stepped up and supported AONB teams throughout the global pandemic by providing a **digital space for connection and collective responses to the challenges brought by Covid-19**. It has also continued to advocate **on behalf of AONB Teams, Partnerships and the areas themselves**, and offering opportunities for AONB team development, whilst stepping up to

Advocacy

- Taking forward the recommendations of the **Glover Review** continued to be a focus of our work over the last year. Greater need for engagement has led to a step change in the way we operate, with **individual AONB lead officers taking a national lead** on a number of key strategic fronts.
- Significant effort and resources went into **co-developing the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme** which gives AONB teams a significant role in helping align agricultural support to the delivery of the AONB purpose.

Developing AONBs

- The NAAONB has launched the **National Landscapes Platform** to enable **greater collaboration and information sharing** amongst protected landscape professionals in England and Wales. This platform continues to be developed and improved to meet the needs of this large network.
- We are **currently supporting a brand focused, national conversation** to explore how we become **more inclusive** in the ways we operate, at a national level and across all AONBs.

- A **Collaboration Advisory Group** has been brought together to continue supporting the development of a culture of collaboration across the AONB Family. It is prioritising collaborative **climate change action** to support the ambition set out in the Colchester Declaration (see more on p.26).

Public engagement

- Our annual **Landscapes for Life week celebration** was delivered primarily **online**. We shared pictures of our favourite places via Twitter and invited others to do the same. Many people shared images of the outside spaces, urban and rural, that had provided their **escape during lockdown**. The biennial Wye Valley River Festival moved from May to Landscapes for Life week and included **self-guided real-life experiences** as well as **loads of fantastic online content**.
- Our **ongoing partnership with Poetry School and UK Laureate Simon Armitage** continued with **our very first collection of Landscape eco-poetry** submitted as part of the Ginkgo Prize, and we were able to commission three new poems from the winners of the Laurel Prize. Award winning poet Meryl Pugh gave a **free online eco-poetry workshop** for us during Landscapes for Life week attended by 100 people from all over the world, which resulted in poems being submitted in the landscapes category of the Ginkgo Prize.
- Sadly our **Landscapes for Life conference** due to take place in Devon in July 2020 was **postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic** and took place online in 2021 instead.



Focus: Farming update

AONBs are living, working landscapes covering 15% of England's land area, and AONB Partnerships are **taking a leading role in supporting the delivery of post-Brexit farming payment schemes.**

Environmental Land Management Scheme

Between 2019 and 2021, **twelve AONB teams** worked **with local farmers and landowners** on Tests and Trials (T&Ts), designed to help **develop Defra's Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS)** which will pay public money for public goods and replace Basic Payments. ELMS payments will reward farmers and landowners for managing their land in ways that create more bigger, better and more connected spaces for nature, reduce flood/drought risk or improve access for people^x.

The AONB T&Ts covered the **widest possible variety of landscape types** and were **co-designed by AONB teams and their local farmers and landowners**. At a national level, **the NAAONB coordinated the project administration, reporting and evaluation.**

The common theme across the AONB T&Ts was the use of **Land Management Plans** to map where **nature based solutions** could be employed – the additional benefit of working with the AONB team was that these plans zoomed in at field and farm level, and set this work in context of the **landscape scale plans** laid out in the AONB Management Plan. The Management Plan is a democratically derived plan for the entirety of the area, incorporating the work of the AONB team as well as partner organisations, and subject to public



consultation. Projects also incorporated **innovative explorations** into how the ELMS could support the protection of heritage features, improved access for more diverse groups, natural flood and drought management, and much more. The main finding was that advice from AONB teams helped farmers to be more ambitious with their projects, resulting in higher payments for the farmer and more impactful interventions for nature, climate and people.

Practical learnings from the T&Ts will benefit AONB teams and farmers and landowners throughout the entire AONB network.

Additionally, to help the rural community to prepare for the roll out of ELMS over the course of the next few years, Defra commissioned the NAAONB to deliver **a series of workshops for farmers and landowners and for protected landscape (AONB and National Parks) staff.**

Focus: Art & engagement update

In September 2019, the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty came together for a 'moment'. Hearts were formed in AONBs across the nation, and UK Laureate Simon Armitage read 'Fugitives', the poem commissioned by the NAAONB, on the slopes of Arnside Knott in Arnside & Silverdale AONB.

As designated landscapes teams, we so often see the areas we are caring for through the lens of policy and science. The 'National Moment' brought people together in some of our most beloved landscapes in a way we have not seen before.

This commitment to exploring how we might work with artists to support more people to make a connection with landscape on their own terms led to a competitive tendering process and Dorset's Activate were commissioned to develop the Art in the Landscape Strategy for us.

This was endorsed by the NAAONB Board of Trustees at their October 2020 meeting. AONB teams have since taken the strategy to their own Partnership Boards and Advisory Committees for local endorsement. Activate delivered a series of online workshops for



AONB staff to develop their knowledge of how to work with art and artists. This generated six large scale arts ideas which we hope to develop and produce in the coming years. In 2022 we are thrilled that AONBs throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland are taking part in Green Space Dark Skies, which will create large scale light art in the landscape using thousands of volunteer 'lumenators'.

Our work with Poetry School continues and during 2020 the NAAONB published its first collection – the shortlisted poems from the Ginkgo Prize 'Best Poem of Landscape' category, sponsored by the AONB Family. We were also able to commission new poems by the winners of the Laurel Prize including the stunning 'Beast of Bodmin' by multi award winning poet Pascale Petit. You can hear a breath-taking reading of the poem in English and Cornish here: www.cornwall-aonb.gov.uk/beast



Focus: Driving collaborative climate action

Following the end of the Taking the Lead programme (funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund), the National Association **surveyed the network of AONB staff** to inform how to best conduct the next stage of collaborative activity.

This led to the creation of a **Collaboration Advisory Group (CAG)**, brought together to **find effective ways to continue enhancing collaboration across the AONB Family**. The CAG is made of AONB staff and lead officers as well as external volunteers who bring a fresh perspective. It is facilitated by the National Association.

The CAG quickly identified a **gap in collaborative action: climate change**. Whilst AONBs have made substantial progress on the nature recovery aspect of the Colchester Declaration (see next page), the climate targets remained largely overlooked and many issues had yet to be addressed!



Through a prioritisation exercise on the possible areas of influence from AONBs on climate issues, the CAG defined five **priority workstreams for collective action**:

- Agriculture;
- Nature-based solutions;
- Building Design and Planning;
- Renewable Energy;
- Sustainable Tourism and Transport.

At the annual Lead Officer meeting convened by the National Association in March 2021, the CAG led a sense-checking and scoping exercise to further refine the remit and purpose of each workstream.

Shortly after, they launched the **Collaborative Climate Change Action Programme** establishing five sub-groups made of AONB staff and lead officers, taking on important work on the five priority workstreams.

Through 2021, these five sub-groups are working with the support from the National Association to **start establishing an AONB common position on specific climate change issues**, defining a **national narrative on the role of AONBs in tackling climate change** and gathering **key data and evidence** to influence policy and drive local action.

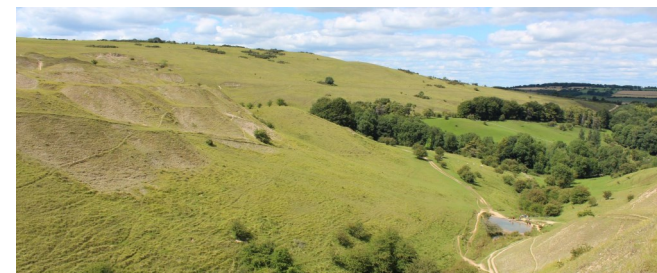
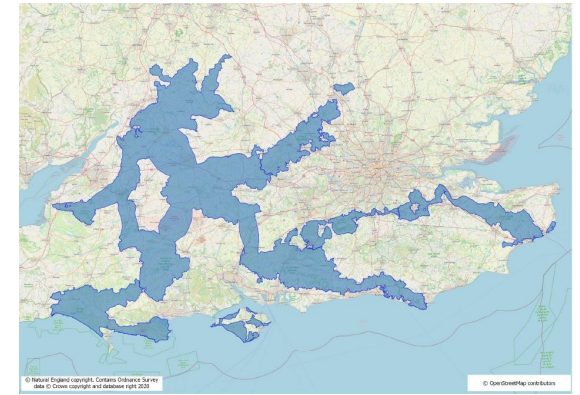
Focus: Update on Colchester Declaration

In July 2019, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty family made a commitment to **increasing the scale and pace of their efforts to tackle climate change and restore nature**. Despite staff redeployments and the countless other challenges thrown out by the pandemic, AONB partnerships have developed plans detailing exactly how they will do this.

Nationally, the NAAONB has recruited a **Nature Recovery Coordinator**, Frances Winder, who has worked with AONB teams to develop **five nature recovery pilots** covering vast swathes of the countryside in AONBs and National Parks and bridging the spaces between. These have the potential to be game changing, making serious headway in our aspiration to deliver on the challenge from Julian Glover and the Landscapes Review Panel that AONBs and National Parks should form **the backbone of a National Nature Recovery Network**. Following the guidance of the Making Space for Nature report (2010) by Professor Sir John Lawton, these projects will **create more, larger and improved nature rich areas, and join them up** to enable species to spread.

Big Chalk is the first of the pilots to begin. It is a hugely ambitious project linking **over one million hectares of calcareous soil areas across the south of England**; including **farming clusters, Local Nature Partnerships, water companies, wildlife charities and local authorities** as well as **a National Park and nine Areas of Outstanding Natural**

Beauty. These organisations and landowners will work together across boundaries to **restore wildflower grasslands, wildlife corridors and iconic bird species**. Water quality will be improved, flood risk to downstream towns and cities reduced, and soils better managed to improve carbon capture and contribute to the journey to net zero.



Other pilots focusing on: ending **the boom and bust flood/drought cycle**, restoring valuable **carbon sink peatlands**, targeted work with missing groups to **improve access and share employment opportunities**, and **improving coast and marine environments** – all while making significant gains for nature – will be announced later in the year.

Closing remarks

After a gruelling two years for all of us, the UK's AONB teams and the National Association for AONBs are proud to have played a role in **providing space for the nation to find comfort and reconnect** with nature and with each other. We are under no illusions though. We know that some of the citizens of the UK are **unaware of these places, feel they are not for them, or do not feel safe or welcome**. We know also that the **challenges of the future** will be even greater than those brought by COVID-19, the effects of climate change and nature depletion are already evident.

The whole AONB Family is **united** in its hope that the consultation opened as part of the Government's response to the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes will result in the **doubling of funding** Julian Glover called for, as well as the **expanded power and purposes**, and the **improvement of governance** that he prescribed. This is a real opportunity for Government to invest in reaching its own targets of net zero by 2050, the 25 Year Environment Plan, and 30% of land and sea protected for nature by 2030, rather than making commitments but leaving delivery to chance. **AONB teams work for the public good**, not for profit and offer easily the most cost effective way to meet these pressing challenges.

The UK's AONB teams want to be conserving, enhancing and signposting landscapes that more of the nation is even more proud of and **our vision for 2042 is exciting, inclusive and nature-rich**:

Local communities with a future, broadband enabling home working. Partnerships with **respected career paths for local youngsters and new residents**. A **five-year Management Plan developed in partnership with local authorities, eNGOs and the local community** including actions to restore nature, reduce climate change, create community owned energy generation schemes and a five year land supply that prioritises affordable, green homes. **Farmers supported by AONB staff** to translate actions from the Management Plan to field and farm level, helping them access higher farm payment tiers while **making real, positive change for nature, climate and people**. The immense cost of flooding reduced due to well managed uplands. **Close working with NHS and Social Care providers** to provide social prescribing, improving wellbeing and skills by being in nature. **Globally-recognised landscapes** shaped by their geology, landform, climate and waves and generations of people, with unique culture, language, industry and heritage in which the whole nation feels welcome, has a stake and feels proud of. **National treasures with a local accent**.

The Annual Report of 2020-21 has shown you what your AONBs can do for you without adequate funding and powers – all 34 AONBs currently share the funding of one single medium-sized comprehensive school and employ on average four full-time equivalent staff. **Imagine what we could do with fair funding**.

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- * Panoramic picture provided by Tamar Valley AONB
- * Long horned mining bee. Image credit: John Walters
- * Pyramidal orchids at a site working with the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team. Image credit: Anna Field
- * Steppers UK, a walking group from Coventry during a walk they organised in and around Chipping Campden. Image: Tea Smart / Squashed Robots Films for Cotswolds National Landscape.
- * Cotswolds landscape near Stanton. Image: Tea Smart / Squashed Robots Films for Cotswolds National Landscape.

Who we are

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The UK's 46 AONBs

Basemap: © ESRI

English AONB Data: <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/8e3ae3b9-a827-47f1-b025-f08527a4e84e/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-england>

Welsh AONB Data: <https://lle.gov.wales/catalogue/item/ProtectedSitesAreasOfOutstandingNaturalBeauty/?lang=en>

Northern Irish AONB Data: <https://www.opendatani.gov.uk/dataset/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty/resource/162a2927-9d64-419b-ae65-4baab27dbbbo>

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Welsh AONBs update

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The work of the NAAONB in 2019/20

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Focus: Art and Engagement Update

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Focus: Driving Collaborative Climate Action

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Focus: Update on Colchester Declaration

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