



Annual Report 2020

Landscapes
for life
.org.uk

THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
Areas of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

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Learn more about the Colchester Declaration on page 28!

Welcome from our Chairman

“ 2019-20 has been a year like no other. At our AGM in November 2019 I spoke about uncertainty around a changing climate, the loss of nature, and the associated and predictable spread of pests and diseases. Much of what we have taken for granted over the last fifty years is now not so certain.

Earlier this year these observations were thrown into sharp relief as the global pandemic forced us to change the way we live and, as a nation, re-evaluate our priorities. The differences in the way we have all been affected provides an insight into the variability that exists across society with regards opportunity, health, economic resilience, and choice. Yet, landscape and nature have the inherent capacity to focus and inspire all to work towards a sustainable and just future. A future that respects the reality that we all utterly depend upon living in harmony with the natural world.

In truth, the value of the natural environment to us all has rarely been made so clear. The importance of local food production, highlighted by the global disruption of supply chains; the value of green space sharpened by restrictions placed on exercising and travel, and the importance of local community infrastructure have all contributed towards a heightened appreciation of the natural environment.


Through all this, AONB teams have continued to deliver:

- conservation work on the ground where safe to do so,
- support to visitors accessing the wellbeing benefits of being in green spaces safely, some exploring their local countryside for the first time,
- significant work on the delivery of the high ambitions of the Colchester Declaration,
- contact with volunteers missing their regular get togethers,
- Online events and workshops for partners and visitors.

Many have also contributed on the front line of the COVID-19 support efforts, having been redeployed by their host authorities to help vulnerable local residents.

I'm always proud to work with such a committed and inspiring group of people, but this year they have truly gone above and beyond. With only around 250 people working across all 46 AONBs, the amount AONB teams are able to deliver is remarkable. The figures and stories in this annual report demonstrate the incredible difference the nation's AONB teams are making for both people and nature. ”




Philip Hygate FRSA,
Chairman

The Landscapes for Life Annual Report

In common with the rest of the nation, **2019-20 has been an unprecedented year for our AONB teams.**

The early part of the year saw **a real renewal of ambition** by the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as they jointly made the **Colchester Declaration** (see page 28), closing the 2019 Landscapes for Life conference in July. Work to deliver the Declaration's stretch targets for nature and for people began immediately with AONB staff bringing **immense expertise and energy** to the table.

The Declaration was well starred, auguring the publication of **the Government's keenly awaited Independent Review of Designated Landscapes, the Glover Review**, in September.

The Review's central proposition that AONBs are strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources was a powerful and fundamentally important step in ensuring the benefits of the AONB designation are optimised. **We were heartened that the report recognised the immense value and potential of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, setting bold challenges for their higher profile within the urgent imperatives of **nature recovery and improving the health of the Nation**. We await the Government's response to the Report.



The **'Taking the Lead'** programme continued during the year. This gave almost 40 members of staff at all levels from AONBs throughout England and Wales access to **professional and personal development learning opportunities**. Through this programme, collaborative teams were formed, focusing on many varied aspects of the work of our AONBs – which saw the development of a new induction package for new members of staff, and the creation of a funding toolkit, amongst others.

One of the teams focused on communications, centred on creating a revitalised **Landscapes for Life week** with a 'National Moment' marking the **70th anniversary** of the passing of the legislation for the creation of AONBs – **National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act**.

Members of the public throughout the country visited their local AONBs to form heart shapes in their landscapes to mark the National Moment at 2pm on 21 September. The centrepiece event saw **Simon Armitage, Poet Laureate, reading a specially commissioned poem 'Fugitives'** for the first time on the slopes of Arnside Knott in Arnside & Silverdale AONB to over 200 people.



The National Moment also saw the **launch of our statement of intent to explore how we work with artists to engage new audiences and reflect on our human relationship with nature.** Since then, arts organisation Activate has created an **Art in the Landscape strategy** for AONBs and delivered training for AONB staff in how to work with artists and art organisations.

The 2019-20 year ended in lockdown, seeing all of us **adjusting to new ways of living and working,** and a great deal of uncertainty. We cannot underestimate the very real cost of the pandemic to people throughout society, but lockdown did give many people the opportunity to explore their local green spaces in greater numbers than ever before. AONB teams saw increases in visitor numbers as restrictions were lifted and **we hope that many of these new visitors will become regulars in their nearby countryside, deepening their relationship and affinity for our landscapes and nature.**

Who we are

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

Our **vision** is that the natural beauty of AONBs is valued and secure.

Our **mission** is to support and develop a network of ambitious AONB partnerships with a strong collective voice.



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



Amber Carter
Project and Systems
Manager



Richard Clarke
National Policy and
Development Manager



Clare Elbourne
Administrative
Assistant



Anna Trant



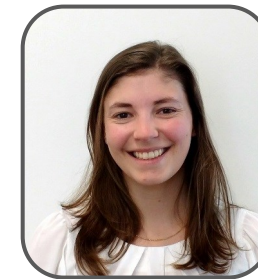
Ian Rappel
Wales Development
Manager



Ruth Colbridge
Communications and
Advocacy Manager



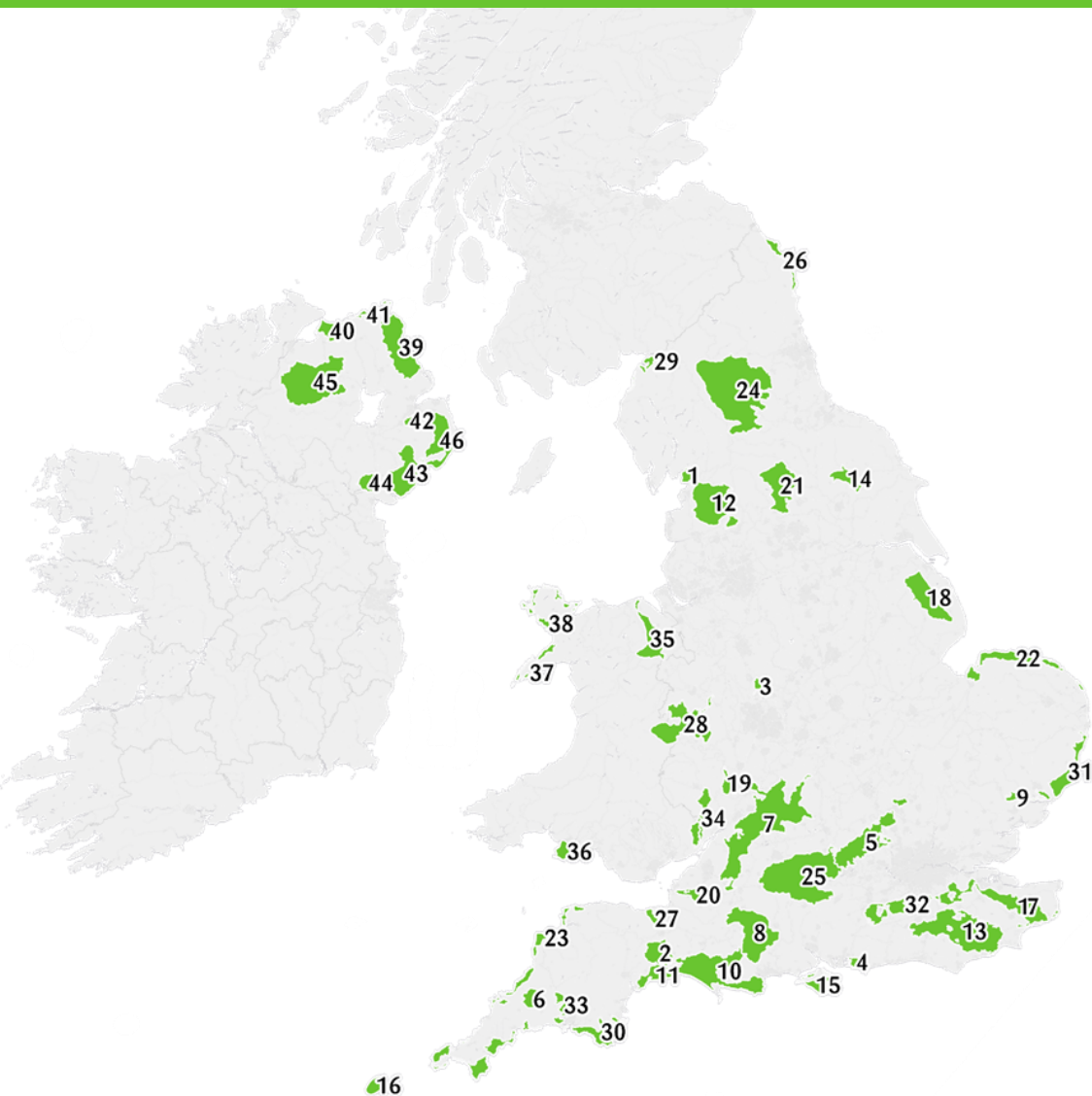
Frances Winder
Nature Recovery
Network Coordinator
(joined Nov 2020)



Marie Micol

Our contractors

The UK's 46 AONBs



England

- 1 Arnside & Silverdale
- 2 Blackdown Hills
- 3 Cannock Chase
- 4 Chichester Harbour
- 5 Chilterns
- 6 Cornwall
- 7 Cotswolds
- 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 Valle / 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

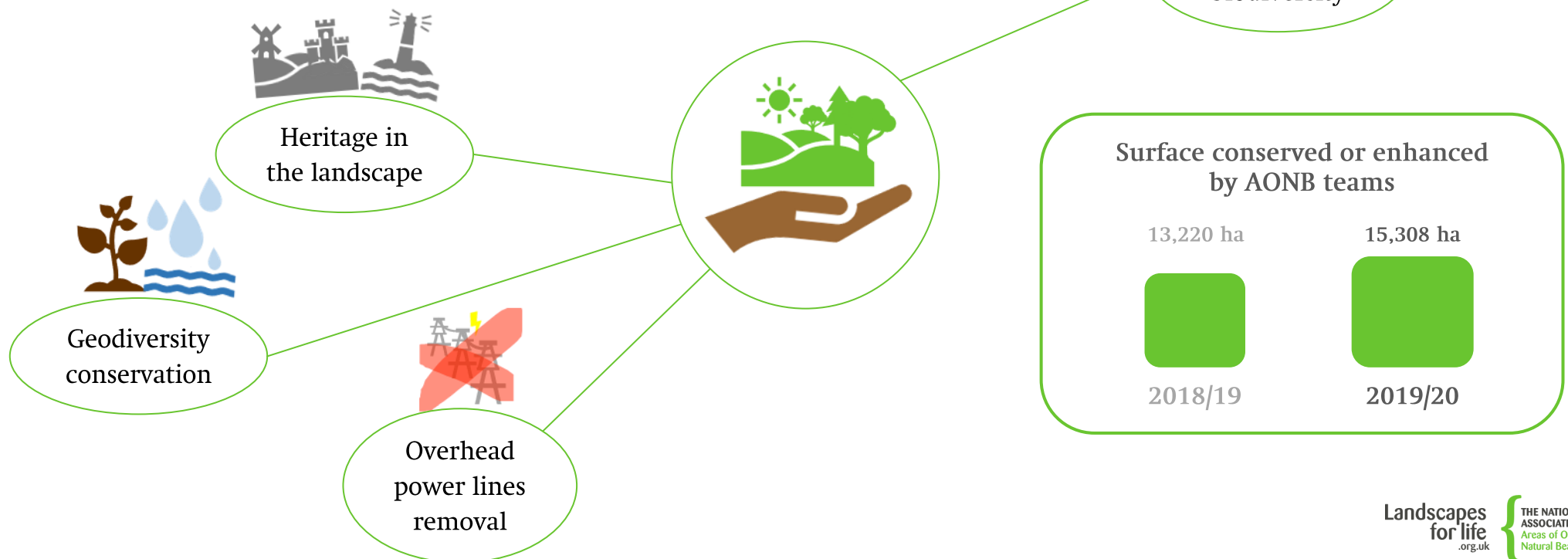
Note: In Scotland, National Scenic Areas hold a comparable designation to AONBs. They are administered by NatureScot.



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**; land area conserved or enhanced by **improvements to heritage assets**; and area where **scenic quality** has been improved by undergrounding overhead lines.



Nidderdale Wild Watch / State of Nature

Nidderdale AONB recently published its **State of Nature 2020 report**¹ – providing a comprehensive snapshot of how Nidderdale AONB’s nature is faring and an invaluable baseline against which to measure future progress.

While we know there have been declines in nature, very few areas or organisations can lay claim to having such exhaustive information about all the species and habitats in their localities – but what makes Nidderdale’s State of Nature 2020 report particularly special is that **it is the product of many, many thousands of hours of volunteer time.**

Over the past three years, Nidderdale AONB has run **The Wild Watch** – a National Lottery Heritage funded programme building on an already strong network of active naturalist groups collecting valuable biodiversity data in the area; running events to **help local people become wildlife surveyors.**

The figures speak for themselves: The Wild Watch generated **over 3,000 new surveys**, and the submission of **over 1,000 new citizen science records.** **Over 6,400 people attended over 140 events and volunteers gave 4,500 hours of their time to the project.**

¹ The report is available online: www.nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/stateofnature.

Nidderdale AONB now has valuable information on exactly where certain species live. The project had a list of **76 target species** including birds, mammals, invertebrates, plants and reptiles.



Habitat Suitability Models have **identified priority areas** where habitats could be improved to potentially create new habitat for some of our most important species in the future.



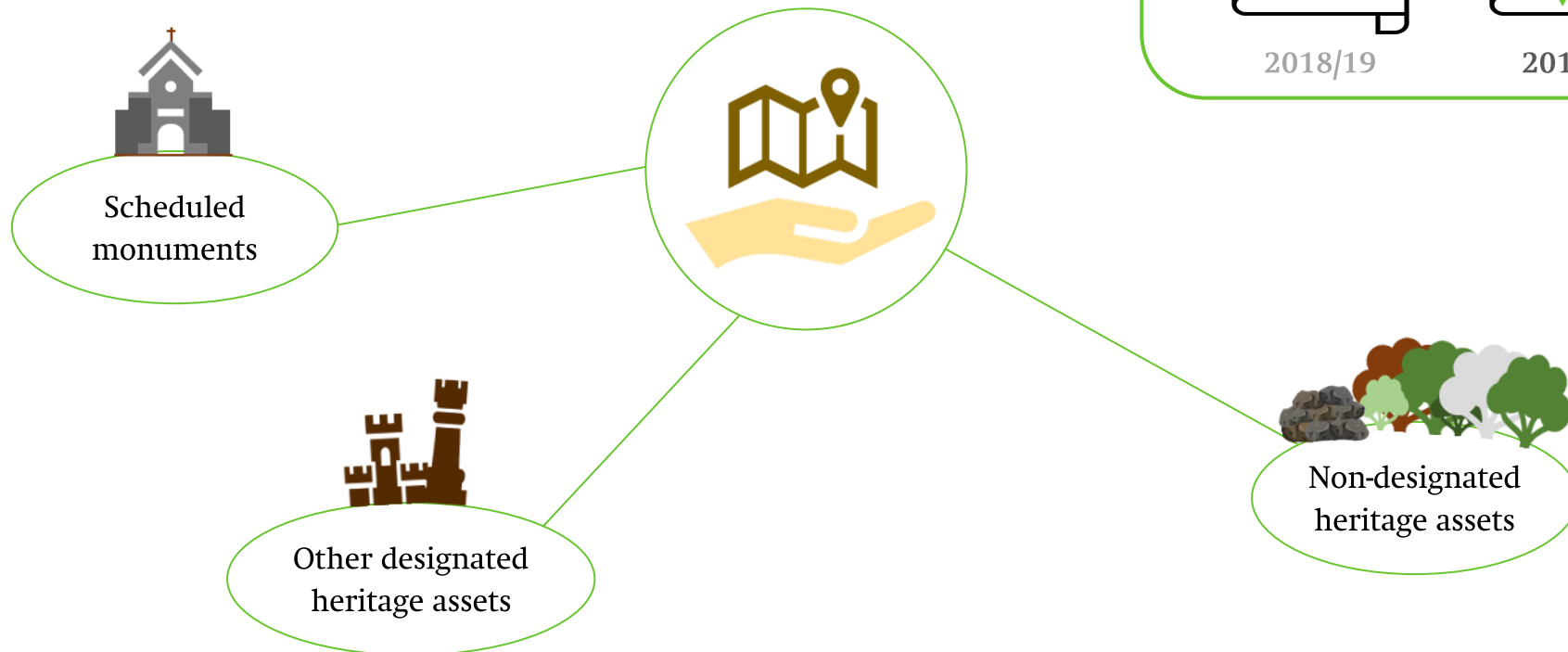
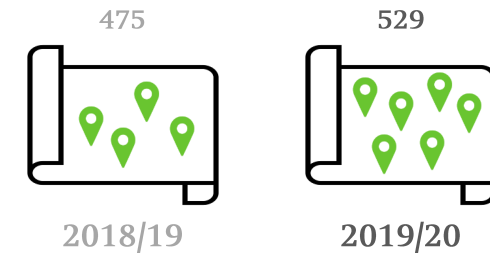
“The Wild Watch is an opportunity to **learn** more about wildlife, **play an active part** in helping gather data needed to protect it, and a really good excuse to be outdoors in fabulous **surroundings.**” ~ Volunteer

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**.

Heritage assets conserved or enhanced by AONB teams



Excavating our Roman legacy

Kent Downs AONB operates the **Darent Valley Landscape Partnership Scheme (DVPS)**, working with local partners to deliver numerous projects focusing on the nature, culture and heritage of the Valley.

One such project is seeing **local people** engaging with Darent Valley's **Roman legacy**. The River Darent was an important Roman supply route and the Valley was hugely significant, yet this history remains largely hidden.

The project centres on English Heritage's Lullingstone Roman Villa, built in c.75CE and rediscovered in 1949. The **excellent preservation** and features such as the spectacular mosaics suggest the importance of the building and status of the owner.

The project initially involved a **desk-based assessment** of the villa and land immediately surrounding it, followed by a **magnetometry and resistivity survey** undertaken by the **community archaeologist and trained volunteers**. This was supplemented by data from **volunteer-led metal detecting** and the DVLPs-commissioned LiDAR survey.

Test pit locations were then identified to inform and expand the findings from the original 1950s excavation as well as later

digs in 1986. The 2019 excavation – part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the original dig – was undertaken as a **community archaeology activity** that involved **over 150 people** in excavation and finds



processing, as well as youth **groups**. Several **local archaeology groups** (including two Young Archaeologists Clubs) were involved, and **two local schools** took advantage of a bursary scheme to visit the villa and take part in the dig.

The initial dig ended in July 2019, but **post-excavation activities by volunteers** are continuing (including processing of the environmental residue). A second socially-distanced dig was held in summer 2020.



A total of **over 4,500 volunteer hours** were contributed to the delivery of the two community digs up until this point, with **more post-excavation work expected to continue in 2021**².

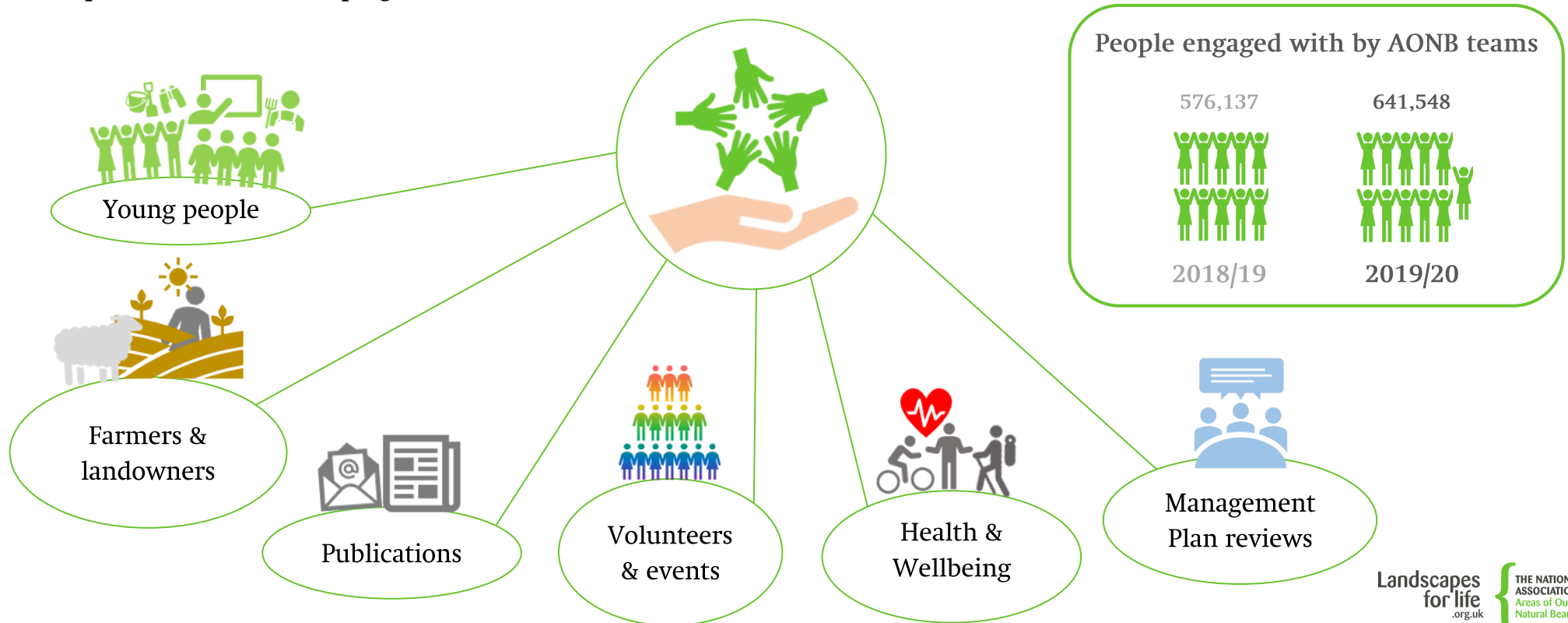
² Further information can be found at <https://darent-valley.org.uk/news/lullingstone-dig-what-a-success>.



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 – from consulting widely to develop robust five-year **management plans**; to working with local **landowners and farmers** to manage the landscape for nature; coordinating events for people to learn about the area and its heritage; to arranging **school trips** welcoming **conservationists** and **citizens** of the future to their local countryside. All AONBs have active **volunteering** programmes with opportunities to socialise, keep fit and develop new skills, while helping AONB teams to deliver more for the local area.



Reducing barriers to enjoying nature

Forest of Bowland AONB runs the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership – a four year project designed to conserve this landmark hill, re-connect people with the nature and rich history on their doorstep, and bring together the two contrasting sides of the hill. It is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Pendle Hill is an iconic sight, within easy travelling distance of former mill towns on the south side, home to working class and large South Asian communities, and less diverse rural towns and villages in the north. However, this diversity in the local population is not always reflected in the mix of people who visit and benefit from the countryside around Pendle Hill.



The Landscape Partnership programme includes a number of projects aiming to work with different audience groups from across the local populations, attempting to reduce barriers

to participation. Family focused outdoor learning sessions use local parks in order to engage local families with nature based activities and outdoor family time. A 'Get into Volunteering' project offers volunteering sessions across the landscape, introducing existing community groups to the local countryside and conservation activities in a supported way. The Partnership also works with organisations which already have trusted relationships with the South Asian community (through session delivery and their Community Grants Fund).



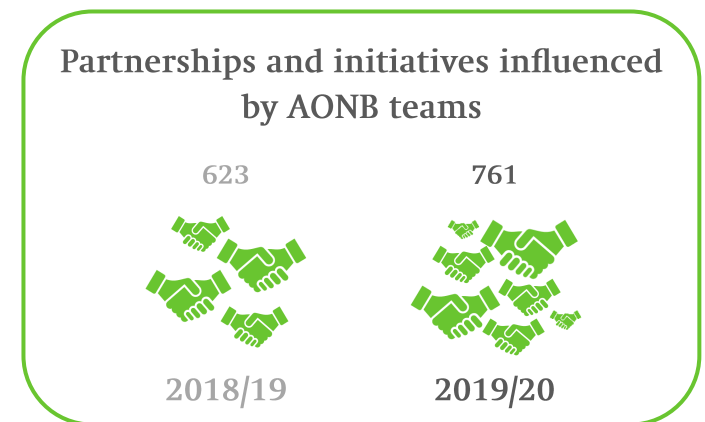
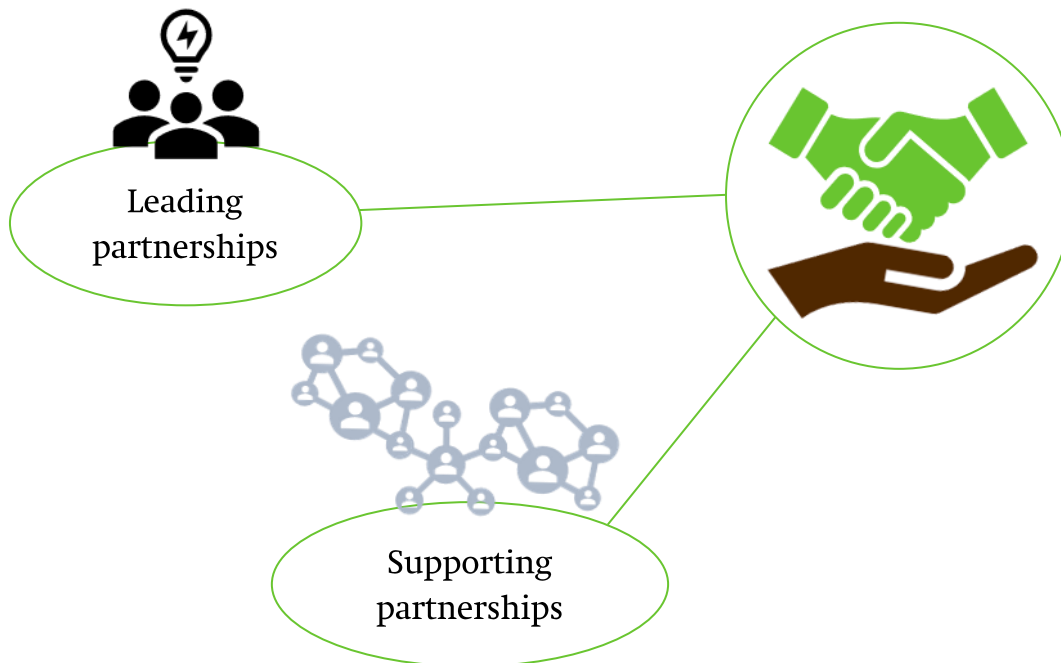
The creation of links with a local mental health and social inclusion service enabled people to be referred or to self-refer to the People Enjoying Nature programme. Getting outdoors in a no-pressure environment gave people the opportunity to engage as much or as little as they wanted, but attendees said they felt huge benefits of being outdoors, carrying out meaningful work and building friendships with other attendees.



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.



Working together to beat Giant Hogweed

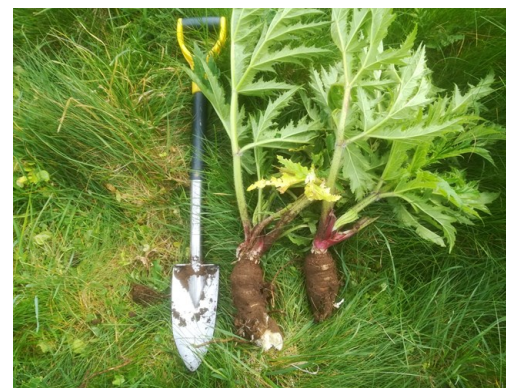
The Tamar Valley AONB along with the Environment Agency, Natural England and Cornwall Council, have been working together for the past 19 years. Coming together under the Tamar Valley Invasives Group³, they aim to control invasive species on over 40 km of riverbank habitat.

The main focus of the partnership is to address the spread of Giant Hogweed in the Tamar catchment. If left untreated, Giant Hogweed threatens valuable habitats, shades out other plants, causes riverbanks to erode and poses a serious health risk to both the public and livestock (if touched, the phytotoxic sap causes blistering on the skin and other serious problems).

Each mature Giant Hogweed plant can produce up to 50,000 seeds, which can survive in the soil for up to 15 years before germinating. Once established in an area, controlling its spread is a long term challenge, hence the need for the Giant Hogweed Eradication Project (supported in 2019 and 2020 by a Natural England Water Environment Grant).

Over the life of the project, Giant Hogweed numbers have reduced from the thousands to approximately 100 in 2020. This has been achieved by surveying and control: herbicide treatment or hand digging on organic land.

³ Further information can be found at <http://www.tamarvalley.org.uk/projects/tamar-invasive-project/>.



Ongoing vigilance and awareness of the situation is also key to ensuring Giant Hogweed doesn't start to spread again across the catchment, so the Tamar Valley Invasives Group is currently engaged with over 80 landowners, helping them with identification and advice on treatment. Landowners' ongoing support has been essential to the success of the project.

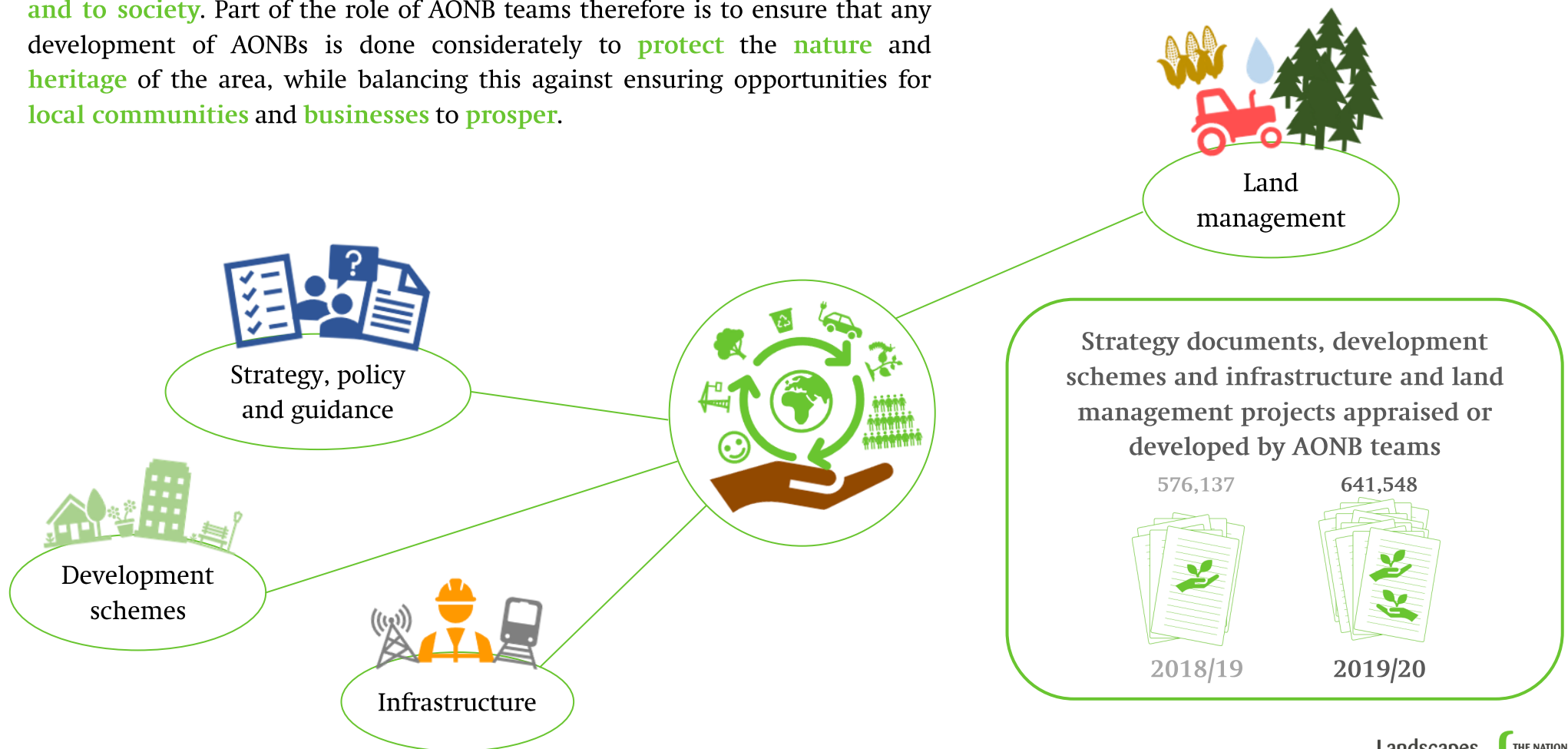


The partnership is currently undertaking a review of the project, due in 2021. It will focus on good practice and lessons learnt over 20 years of controlling Giant Hogweed in the Tamar Valley.

Looking ahead the team aims where possible to strengthen the Tamar Valley Invasives Group Partnership and is now developing links with South West Water and South West Lakes Trusts and their wider invasive species project work.

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**.



Creating beautiful places for everyone

With ever growing **planning pressures** on so many areas of the UK, particularly in the South East, **high quality housing design** is an important issue for residents and visitors alike.

To support local authorities and designers in developing housing that meets the requirements of the **National Planning Policy Framework** for well-designed places – while also fitting in with the AONB’s distinctive ‘sense of place’ – the **High Weald AONB team** worked with **15 local authorities and specialist consultants** to create a new Design Guide.

The High Weald Housing Design Guide gives clear, succinct, practical and consistent advice on design expectations for new housing development within the High Weald AONB, from **site layout and street design** to **building materials**, parking **provision** and **planting**. This enables **higher quality, landscape-led design** that reflects intrinsic High Weald character and is embedded with **a true sense of place**, without stifling innovation and creativity.

The Guide aims to help designers, developers, highway engineers, planning decision makers and others involved in developing housing, and is already being used to inform the design of developments in the High Weald ⁴.

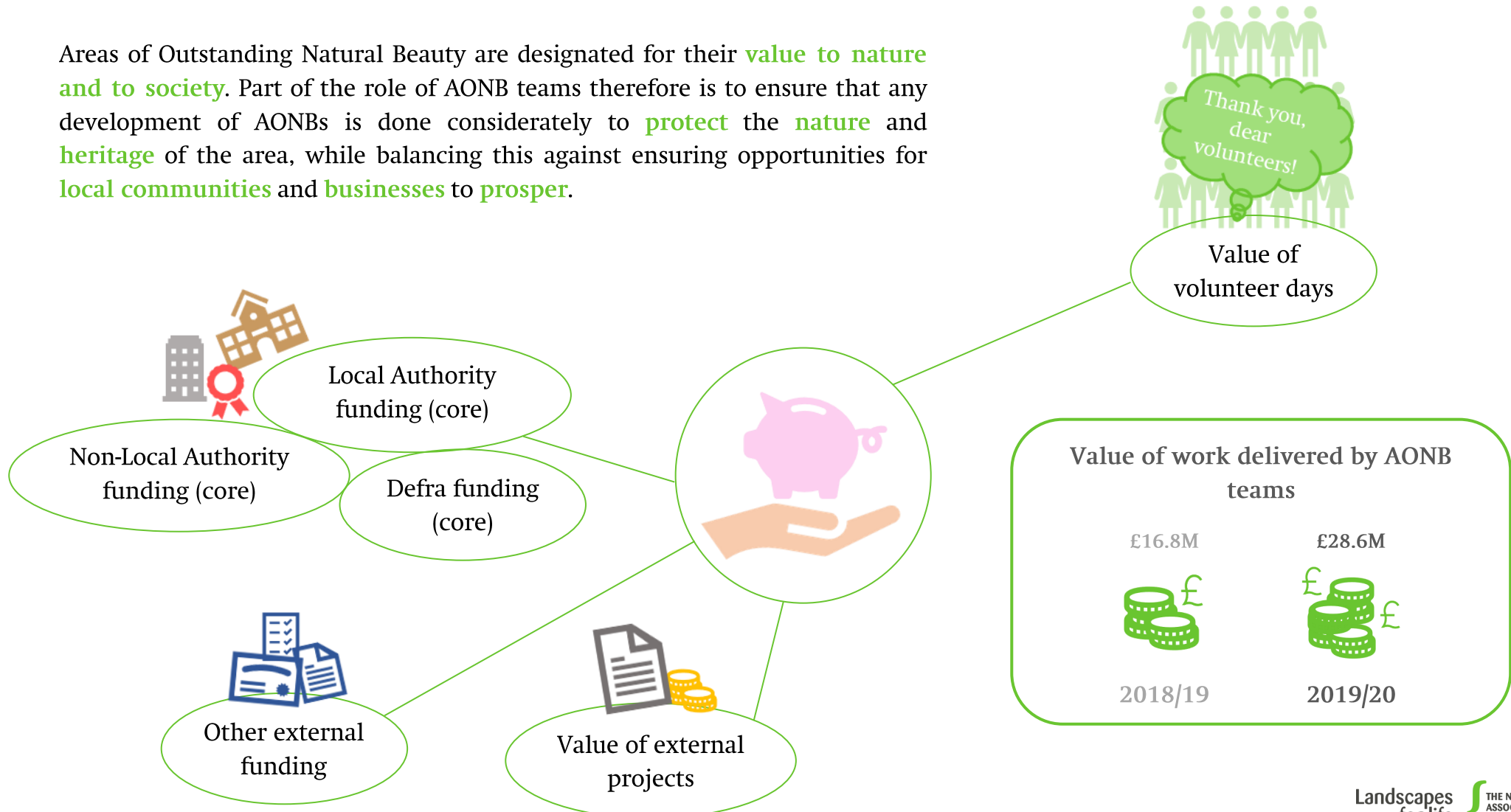
“The High Weald Housing Design Guide is a much-needed tool to help local authorities **balance the need for new housing with their statutory duty to conserve and enhance the precious landscape of the High Weald**. We hope to see fewer generic housing developments and more that **capture the essential character of the High Weald**, from its historic buildings to its breathtaking scenery. In short, **creating beautiful places for everyone**.” Sylvia Tidy, chair of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.



⁴ For more information, and to see the full Design Guide, please visit <http://www.highweald.org/look-after/planning/design-guide.html>.

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**.



Supporting growth for the rural economy

LEADER is a **national programme** (part of the Rural Development Programme for England and funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development). **In the Cotswolds**, the programme has created **new jobs** and grown the **rural economy** through capital grant investment, supporting a wide range of **businesses, farmers and not-for-profit organisations**.

The LEADER team at the **Cotswolds Conservation Board supported programme applicants** through an intense process of **rigorous project scrutiny**. The team spent time learning about the different sectors, so they could **help applicants develop high quality projects** and provide **extra support where needed**, whilst running **several training courses** for them. This local support team was hugely appreciated by applicants who felt the advice received was valuable.

The LEADER Programme has been a **great success** in the Cotswolds, with **56 rural businesses** supported with **grants totalling over £1.7 million**⁵. Funding has supported the construction of **new offices, farm shops and an education centre**; and **equipment** ranging from a robotic milking system to a log-drying kiln. These investments have enabled the

recipient businesses to **grow** and have **facilitated the creation of 80 jobs across the region**. In addition, **many environmental benefits have been gained**, notably from investments in high-tech equipment for precision farming, which helps farms reduce their carbon footprint.



⁵ Further information can be found at <https://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/cotswolds-leader/>.

Welsh AONBs update

In September 2019, the National Association welcomed a new member of staff: the **Wales Development Manager**, recruited to support the five Welsh AONBs in their work and in their relationships with partners. This role is funded by Welsh Government and pursues several objectives:

- optimising opportunities for delivery of the **Valued and Resilient Policy**,
- taking forward measures to **deliver greater parity** between National Parks and AONBs in Wales;
- supporting **the NAAONB's work in Wales**;
- supporting **collaboration** across Welsh designated landscapes and in particular across AONBs;
- supporting delivery and targeting of **the future of land management** post-Brexit;
- optimising **landscape scale resilience and connectivity** across Welsh AONBs;
- developing a **strong evidence-base** to support **effective advocacy in Wales**.

A little over a year later, this work has notably led to the successful launch of the **National Designated Landscape Partnership in Wales**, bringing together Welsh AONBs and National Parks, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales...

... but more on this in next year's report! In the meantime, **exciting success stories** from Welsh AONBs have been collated in the following pages.



‘Our Picturesque Landscape’ project

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB is working in partnership with other local organisations on **the National Lottery Heritage funded ‘Our Picturesque Landscape’ project.**

Our Picturesque Landscape will run for 5 years and centres on the landscape of the Dee Valley and the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site. Now in its second year, the project is **investing in the resilience of key visitor sites and engaging communities** in its **appreciation and management** while **reinterpreting this rich landscape for a new generation.**



A key part of this project involves the restoration of the Dell at Plas Newydd, the Ladies of Llangollen’s naturalistic planted garden.

The Ladies of Llangollen – Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby – inspired numerous poets and authors including Wordsworth and Anna Seward and were visited by such dignitaries as Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott and the Duke of Wellington.

Nowadays **people from around the world** visit the Plas Newydd Museum and the surrounding 10 acres of **gothic styled gardens** with their **ruined arches, rose gardens and wooded areas.**

The work on the Dell this year has included repairing dry stone walls, installing stepping stones in the river and restoring the railings leading to the summer house. Footpaths have been improved and handrails replaced to help **improve access for all visitors.** The garden enjoyed by the famous Ladies of Llangollen has **been restored to its former glory to delight and inspire future generations** of visitors.



Collaborating from source to sea

Ynys Môn/Isle of Anglesey Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty administers **Sustainable Development Fund grants** on behalf of Welsh Government. One such grant supported **the North Wales Rivers Trust's (NWRT) water quality and habitat improvement project**.

NWRT's surveys identified that the River Wygyr, which enters the sea at Cemaes, was affected in some areas by **trampling of the river banks by cattle** using the river for drinking – causing large quantities of silt and organic matter to enter the water, **affecting bankside and instream habitats for fish and other wildlife**.

Stock proof fencing was repaired and replaced in the lower river and an **alternative borehole water supply** to a series of drinking troughs installed to enable cattle to be completely kept out of the lower river.

The work was undertaken by a combination of **specialist local contractors and trained local volunteers**. The enhancement of wildlife habitats, particularly for **sea trout** and **brown trout** by removing obstructions to fish movement, improved river gravels and **diversification of stream habitats**.



NWRT worked closely with **Natural Resources Wales** and were directly aligned with the **Cemaes Bay Water Quality Group** comprising the local Community Council, local farmers, Aberystwyth University and different Isle of Anglesey County Council Departments to **enable a true collaborative project from source to sea**.

The quality of Cemaes's bathing water improved **from 'poor' in 2017 to 'sufficient' in 2018 and 2019** and has **now reached 'good' status** in the Welsh Government's annual Bathing Water Quality classifications for 2020.

Big Meadow CSA

The Gower AONB team works in close partnership with all those who **live, work and manage the land in Gower**, and those charged **with conserving and enhancing the landscape and wildlife** for the nation. The AONB operates the Welsh Government Sustainable Development Fund - a small grant scheme that **develops and tests ways of achieving a more sustainable way of living in Gower**.

A recent successful applicant was **Big Meadow Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)**, based near Llangennith at the western tip of Gower. Big Meadow CSA is a project which grows **fresh organic fruit and vegetables for local households**, becoming a **financially self-sustaining social enterprise** in the process, and **employing four part-time staff**.



From late 2019, they started renting a field on an established organic farm. With a **£2,000 SDF grant**, they established the basic infrastructure of seed beds, a large poly-tunnel, a water supply and purchased tools and equipment.



With a small number of **local volunteers**, they worked to plant and grow a variety of vegetable crops – starting with salads, tomatoes, kale, peas and beans, beetroot and potatoes. They are building **links with local schools and other groups**, developing a community of volunteers, and **anticipate reaching about 100 households with weekly fruit and vegetable boxes by summer 2021**.

They benefit from close links with Cae Tan CSA at the other end of Gower, who started up 6 years ago with similar SDF funding – they now have 120 regular households, with another 70 on the waiting list.

Supporting communities

The Llŷn AONB is a unique peninsula with a spectacular coastline of **sandy beaches, inlets, caves and small historic ports**. Inland there are **hills and mountains** such as the Eifl, Gyrn Ddu and Foel Gron. Interesting historical features in the area include **churches, chapels, holy wells and burial chambers**. Llŷn is **one of the strongholds of the Welsh language** – with almost 72% of the population speaking the language.

In addition to core AONB work the Llŷn AONB team operates the Sustainable Development Grant Fund (SDF) for their area on behalf of Welsh Government. SDF is designed to **support innovative environmental, economic and community projects that develop and test new ways of achieving a more sustainable way of life within the AONB**.

As a result of SDF funding, the Llŷn Peninsula AONB team have been able to support **numerous projects** including a coastal bus service, beach cleaning sessions and the Poetry and Literature Festival at Aberdaron.

One recent grant was issued to Peniel Chapel – a small traditional chapel located in Ceidio, within the heartland of the Llŷn Peninsula. There are still **regular services** held at the chapel, including a Sunday School. There is an **annual**

Eisteddfod, which has been going for over 100 years, held in May each year. The chapel is also used by the local Young Farmers branch for their weekly meetings.

A grant of £4,000 was awarded from the Sustainable Development Fund towards the costs of **re-surfacing the car park with local stone, improving access for people with disabilities and tree planting, enabling the chapel to serve the community of Ceidio for years to come.**



Lower Wye Valley Catchments Project

The **Lower Wye Valley Catchments Project** covered four Wye tributaries between Penallt and St Arvans, working with **landowners, land managers and the public** to investigate **practical, sustainable solutions addressing land management, water run-off, access and invasive weed issues**, gaining a better understanding of this part of the Wye Valley AONB. The AONB team worked in partnership with Monmouthshire County Council (MCC), National Farmers Union Wales, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Monmouthshire Meadows, Woodland Trust and the Wye & Usk Foundation.

During 2019/20 the project achievements included:

- **11 farm visits** with farm advice and Farm Plans completed for each;
- Project grant aid **supported farmers and landowners** to install over a kilometre of **riparian fencing**, 100 meters of new cross contour **hedgerow**, 125 meters of fencing to reduce field size and **encourage rotational grazing**, 15 acres of maize under sowing;
- **Six leaky dams** installed through which 9.9 kilometres of watercourses now flow — useful to demonstrate locally how **Natural Flood Management (NFM)** can help to slow the flow of water through a catchment;
- **Surveying and assessment of erosion and run-off** options on two unclassified county highways;

- **Seven volunteer activities**, including Himalayan Balsam control and surface water management on footpaths;
- **Collaboration with NRW** on issues in the Public Forest Estate;
- **Spraying of Japanese Knotweed and American Skunk Cabbage** at 35 sites;
- **Four public events** including a NFM seminar attended by 30 local and regional stakeholders, hearing about different **NFM approaches, experiences and best practice** through a series of presentations from national experts.



The NFM and Green Infrastructure Project concluded the 18 months funding from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) in January 2020. However, **resources have been secured from Welsh Government to continue** with some elements of the project and a **new Project Officer** has been recruited on a 12 month contract.

The work of the NAAONB in 2019/20

The past few years have been a **time of enormous change** for the environmental sector. With the combined pressures of climate change, nature depletion and Brexit, 2019/20 maintained that momentum. The National Association has continued work to align policy and delivery.

Advocacy

- The **independent Review of Designated Landscapes reported** in September 2019. The NAAONB immediately joined with the National Parks, Natural England and charities (RSPB and Wildlife Trusts), to **prioritise and begin delivery** of the recommendations. We keenly await government's response to the Review.
- Work is under way following the **Colchester Declaration** at the Landscapes for Life conference in July 2019. You can read more about this on page 28.
- **Tests and Trials** for Defra's new Environmental Land Management scheme are ongoing. The NAAONB coordinated a collaborative test offer covering the most varied set of landscape types across the country. More details on page 30.

Developing AONBs

- Opening Landscapes for Life week in September 2019, NAAONB Chief Executive Howard Davies made the **Art in**

the Landscape Statement of Intent to explore how AONBs can work with artists to help a wider audience connect with landscape. More on this on page 31.

- All AONBs contributed £500 for the NAAONB to **build on work from the Taking the Lead programme** (2018/19). Work is progressing through 2020, to understand expectations and perceptions around collaboration, and to provide AONB staff with the right tools to collaborate better.

Public engagement

- The **Landscapes for Life Conference 2019** took place at the University of Essex in Colchester and was **fully booked**. Speakers included Designated Landscapes Review panel members Julian Glover and Dame Fiona Reynolds, and a video address from the then Defra Secretary of State Michael Gove.
- In September 2019, we held **Landscapes for Life week** – commencing with the **'National Moment'**. Poet Laureate Simon Armitage was commissioned to write a new poem **'Fugitives'**, which he read for the first time at the national moment event in Arnside & Silverdale AONB.



Focus: The Colchester Declaration

In early 2018, the UK Government published its **25 Year Environment Plan**, with the ambitious target ‘to be the first generation in history to leave the environment in a better condition than we found it.’ **England’s AONBs** welcomed the challenge and jointly set out to develop measurable stretch targets to **contribute to the nation’s ability to deliver on the 25 Year Environment Plan**.

To close the 2019 Landscapes for Life conference in July, NAAONB Chief Executive Howard Davies formally made the **Colchester Declaration** on behalf of all of England’s AONBs. The declaration sets far reaching targets to **address the twin issues of climate change and nature depletion**.

Lead Officers from AONBs throughout England volunteered to form a **Colchester Declaration Steering Group**. Such was the **energy to deliver** that the steering group was oversubscribed, and members were co-opted according to landscape types to ensure the widest possible representation for onward learning.

Work has been sub-divided into three, interconnected work areas:

Nature Recovery Plans: each AONB is developing a Nature Recovery Plan to sit within their Management Plan by 2024,

articulating what action is needed to recover nature and build climate resilience. Additionally, **large scale national pilots** have been launched representing five broad landscape types to test approaches, **working across boundaries** and in **collaboration** with local National Parks, and in **partnership** with Natural England.

Species restoration: in the Nature Recovery Plan process, AONBs have each selected ‘**top five**’ **candidate species to work collaboratively towards removing them from the threatened list**. Working closely with colleagues in Natural England they are identifying specific actions required to improve conditions and habitats for these species to flourish.

Engagement: work has begun on **engagement with new audiences**, including through the Nature Recovery Planning process. AONB staff have been able to attend a kick off workshop learning about the **barriers to access** faced by people from a variety of different backgrounds. The parallel **Art in the Landscape programme** of work is developing new and innovative ways to engage new audiences.

The Colchester Declaration 2019

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the future of the natural world, and intergovernmental reports that the current global response to the effects of human impact on nature is insufficient – the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty believes that now is the time to significantly increase the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in AONBs. Using our unique network and partnership model, we are making a collective Declaration on Nature in AONBs, setting out our strategy for change.

With many AONB host authorities having taken the step of declaring a Climate Emergency we are demonstrating our readiness to act to redress declines in species and habitats within the context of a wider response to climate change.

We believe

1. Natural Beauty has intrinsic value and means so much to people
2. AONBs should be places of rich, diverse and abundant wildlife
3. Nature recovery is central to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
4. Climate change is the biggest threat to humanity and one of the greatest threats to biodiversity. Designated landscapes offer some of the most powerful solutions to the challenges of climate change
5. The network of AONBs and National Parks, their teams, partnerships, authorities and stakeholders offer a unique solution to tackling environmental challenges

We pledge

By July 2020

1. To enable an approach that creates opportunities within AONBs for people to make an emotional connection with nature.
2. To work towards the creation of nature recovery plans for each AONB.

By 2024

1. To embed an ecosystems services approach into all AONB Management Plans
2. To ensure all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero

By 2030

1. That at least 200,000 ha of SSSIs in AONBs will be in favourable condition
2. That at least 100,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites will have been created/ restored in AONBs to further support the natural movement of plants and animals
3. That at least 36,000 ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs following the principle of the right tree in the right place
4. That, by each AONB immediately adopting a species on the threatened list and by preparing and delivering a Species Action Plan, at least thirty species relevant to AONBs will be taken off the list by 2030

We call on Westminster and Welsh Governments to provide the power and resources to make these targets achievable.

Focus: Farming for the Nation

A group of **twelve AONBs** is playing a key part in the design of Defra's new **Environmental Land Management** scheme. One of 44 Defra Tests and Trials nationwide, the AONB programme '**Farming for the Nation**', coordinated by the NAAONB, is made possible by the **high level of collaboration** across the network.



It brings together **hundreds of farmers** across **thousands of acres of land** in a wide range of settings to **test proposed elements of the new system** set to replace the current Basic Payment Scheme. Together, these twelve AONBs provide significant input for the new scheme's development ahead of its implementation in 2024.

'Farming for the Nation' began in the autumn 2019 and is scheduled to conclude in June 2021. **Twelve local projects** in these AONBs are running concurrently and addressing topics ranging from **increasing farmers' and landowners' engagement** to planning for the **delivery of public goods**,

designing and collating **reliable data and mapping**, examining how to use **natural capital and ecosystem services** to enhance benefits from the scheme, exploring requirements for **guidance and advice**, enhancing **access** to agricultural landscapes, and **much, much more!**⁶



AONBs play an important role in developing this scheme because **they form a thread that connects farmers, landowners, wildlife charities and individuals**, through **decades of working in partnership and building strong, lasting relationships**.



⁶ Every quarter, they report on progress and impact. To see summaries and learn more about the national pilot, you can visit: <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/farming-for-the-nation>

Focus: Art in the Landscape

In 2019, the NAAONB successfully secured a **£15,000 grant from the Arts Council England**, as well as funding from individual AONBs, to help AONBs **build capacity to create a nationwide programme of inspiring, thought-provoking artworks** set in some of the UK's most iconic landscapes.



The first piece of work within this project was the coordination of a **'National Moment'** on Saturday 21 September 2019, to mark the **70th anniversary** of the passing of the legislation

for the creation of AONBs. This was notably celebrated by the commission of a poem, *Fugitives*, by Poet Laureate Simon Armitage.

Then, project consultants **Activate Performing Arts** were appointed by the NAAONB to draw up a **National Art in the Landscape Strategy**, underpinned by extensive research.⁷

AONBs are **cultural landscapes** and are an important element of our **collective and individual identity**. They are **experienced** by people who live in them or visit them, and

creating more opportunities for others to nurture their creativity and access this cultural value has become a key priority for AONBs and the NAAONB.

Following this initial stage, Active Performing Arts have been delivering **training for AONB staff**, to give them the skills, confidence and connections to **work with artists** to celebrate and bring to light the beauty of the area where they work, using **arts as a central mechanism to help more people experience and understand landscapes**.

With better understanding comes better stewardship; the basis of a more sustainable future.



⁷ You can see the full strategy and more on the project here: <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/about-aonbs/art-landscape/project>

Bowland Award Winner 2019

Each year, AONBs select the **best project, best practice or outstanding contribution** to the wellbeing of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The **Chichester Harbour Education Service** celebrated its **20th anniversary** in 2019. It aims to **encourage a sense of guardianship for the Harbour, amongst local young people.**



In 1999, recognising that **for people to care about a landscape they first had to experience it**, the Service was set up and a classroom was built on the quay to welcome visiting schools.

This education centre now offers **curriculum linked sessions for all stages**: from nursery age to higher education and all sectors of provision — **all are welcome**. It also offers an **Outreach programme**, offering talks and workshops free of charge at schools.

The Education Service has also developed **innovative projects on environmental issues** such as sustainability, plastic in our

oceans and coastal access, and has featured **local history and art experiences**, as well as a **programme of free boat trips** on a solar powered catamaran.

Many of these projects have been funded by the **charity the Friends of Chichester Harbour.**

In recent years, they have focused on **creating stronger partnerships with local schools**. Rather than one-off visits to the Harbour, they now provide the opportunity for repeated visits over several weeks.

Over the past 20 years, an estimated **150,000 people** have benefited from the Education Centre.



Closing remarks

Once again, the stories in this report represent the **combined efforts** of farmers, landowners, volunteers and conservation charities, convened by a scant 250 AONB staff members spread throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. And once again, we have been spoilt for choice in the stories we tell. Every AONB has numerous examples of what they have done locally to **contribute to nature conservation, heritage management and sustainable development, all while connecting a wide range of people with our iconic areas.**

AONB teams have maintained their reputation as **the most effective collaborators.** While AONB Partnerships do not own any land, their expertise, local knowledge and ability to coordinate nature recovery by working with landowners is unsurpassed.

AONB management plans are an immensely powerful tool: they are documents incorporating the relationship between social, economic, and environmental drivers in the comprehensive management of an area for nature and for people; and developed through a process of public consultation, make them a **democratically devised, legitimate expression of public policy for a place.**

This **holistic but detailed** approach will be needed by the nation even more in the coming years as the UK departs the EU

and the Environmental Land Management scheme, is introduced.

The 2019/20 year ended in the first Covid-19 lockdown, and despite the challenges of home working, home-schooling, and caring responsibilities, **AONB teams have continued to deliver,** sometimes with fewer staff than ever due to redeployment by host authorities to boost support teams on the front line.

The Covid-19 crisis led to people accessing the countryside in unprecedented numbers during 2020. When we commissioned Simon Armitage to write *Fugitives* back in 2019, we had no idea how many new *Fugitives* we would be welcoming just a year later. **Beauty, and its importance to us as humans, is always hard to quantify, but 2020 has demonstrated its value.** When faced with challenges and stresses, we need to seek out the solace we can only find in beautiful, natural surroundings.

The forthcoming years will bring **more opportunities** for AONB teams to continue to deliver their **transformative work.** The importance of this work can only increase in the post-Brexit world as we continue to combat climate change and nature depletion in a world where more of us are remembering the value of natural beauty.

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Who we are

Picture provided by the Forest of Bowland AONB Team

The UK's 46 AONBs

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

Nidderdale AONB State of Nature 2020 report:
www.nidderdaleaonb.org.uk/stateofnature

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Collaborating from source to sea

Picture provided by the Isle of Anglesey AONB Team

Big Meadow CSA

Picture provided by the Gower AONB Team

Supporting communities

Picture provided by the Llŷn AONB Team

Lower Wye Valley Catchments Project

Picture provided by the Wye Valley AONB Team

The work of the NAAONB in 2019/20

Arne, Dorset AONB (c) Tony Gill

Marshwood Vale, Dorset AONB (c) Nathalie Roberts

Rotational grazing sheep with Elowen Oates, picture provided by Cornwall AONB

Yellowhammer in snow, picture provided by Surrey Hills AONB

Focus: Farming for the Nation

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