



Agenda

Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

**Friday, 5 November 2021, 10.00 am
Council House, Malvern Hills District
Council**

**Avenue Road
Malvern
WR14 3AF**

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Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee
Friday, 5 November 2021, 10.00 am,

Members

Elected Members:

Gwyneth Rees (Chairman)	Malvern Hills Trust
Bronwen Behan	Malvern Hills District Council
Sven Bosley	Herefordshire Association of Local Councils
Jerry Fryman	Worcestershire Association of Local Councils
Anthony Johnson	Herefordshire Council
Helen I'Anson	Herefordshire Council
John Raine	Malvern Hills District Council
Cllr Scott Richardson Brown	Worcestershire County Council
Cllr Jack Satterthwaite	Worcestershire County Council
Roger Yeates	Forest of Dean District Council

Non-Elected members:

Wayne Barnes	Forestry Commission
Prof Richard Bryant	Hereford & Worcester Earth Heritage Trust
Sarah Faulkner	NFU West Midlands
Ian George	Historic England
James Hervey-Bathurst	Country Land & Business Association
Frank Hill	Campaign to Protect Rural England
Hazel McDowall	Natural England

Co-Opted Members:

Mr A Lee	Herefordshire Local Access Forum
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Agenda

Item No	Subject	Page No
1	Apologies and Substitutes	
2	Declaration of Interests	
3	To elect a Chairman	
4	To appoint a Vice-Chairman	

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All the above reports and supporting information can be accessed via the Council's website.

Date of Issue: Thursday, 21 October 2021

Item No	Subject	Page No
5	Confirmation of the minutes of the previous meeting To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2021.	
6	A (draft) nature recovery plan for the Malvern Hills AONB To receive a presentation from Robert Deane of Rural Focus (see also report/PDF supplied). To note the draft plan and raise and discuss any issues arising.	1 - 24
7	A meadow restoration project at Old Colwall To receive a presentation from Paul Esrich (AONB Partnership Manager).	
8	Farming in Protected Landscapes To receive a report from Sah Warden, Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer. To note the report and raise and discuss any issues arising.	25 - 28
9	Planning matters and the Malvern Hills AONB To receive a report from Karen Humphries (AONB Partnership Assistant manager) and to raise and discuss any matters arising.	29 - 38
10	Information Items To note the items for information.	39 - 42
11	Verbal Reports from Partners	
	If you have any other contributions that you would like to bring to the meeting, please contact Paul Esrich tel: 01905 845057.	
12	Dates of Future Meetings <u>2022</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 April 2022, and • 4 November 2022 	

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 5 NOVEMBER 2021

A NATURE RECOVERY PLAN FOR THE MALVERN HILLS AONB

Recommendation

- 1. The Committee is recommended to:**
 - a) Note the draft plan; and**
 - b) Raise and discuss any issues arising.**

Background

2. At its meeting on 6th November 2020 members of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC considered a paper concerning future work to produce a Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB. The policy context for this work was established and the two phases of work required to produce a plan were set out, these being:
 - Phase 1 - data gathering to establish a spatial baseline and a series of theoretical opportunities which will promote nature recovery, followed by
 - Phase 2 - stakeholder engagement to discuss and agree a way forward, culminating in the production of the Plan itself.

Summary

3. In the spring/summer of 2021 two pieces of mapping work (Phase 1 above) were completed. The first deals with ecological opportunities (identifying the best places in which to expand or create key habitats such as woodlands or meadows) and the second highlights the ecosystem services which the area currently and potentially provides for people/society, for example, the storage of carbon and provision of clean air.
4. In May 2021 a company called Rural Focus was commissioned by the AONB Unit to produce a Nature Recovery plan for the MHAONB and a 3km buffer around it, making use of the mapping work generated in Phase 1.
5. Stakeholder engagement was a key element of the commission and so far this has taken two forms:
 - I. An online scoping survey in June 2021 to canvass initial views and to test the water on preferred approaches towards the Nature Recovery Plan – 17 responses received with lots of good comments.

II. A stakeholder engagement event that took place in Colwall Park Hotel on 9th September 2021 with c.25 attendees, some in person and some via zoom. There was a good attendance from local landowners and this doubled up as a Facilitation Fund event.

6. A draft Nature Recovery Plan has now been produced (see attached PDF). NB This is incomplete, it does not contain an Action Plan or a Monitoring and Evaluation section. However, it is shared here to help gain feedback from the JAC as part of broader stakeholder engagement.

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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Introduction

Nature in crisis

The UK has only half of its natural biodiversity left, making it one of the most nature depleted countries in the world.ⁱ The 2019 UK wide State of Nature reportⁱⁱ gives a sobering picture of the UK's wildlife including habitats that are of significance to the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The climate crisis is disrupting natural systems shifting climatic zones and exacerbating land degradationⁱⁱⁱ increasing pressure on nature.

Despite its outstanding natural beauty, the Malvern Hills AONB has not escaped these changes. Although it retains large areas of nature-rich habitats and is an important regional reservoir of biodiversity, it has seen the same declines as many other areas and faces the same challenges.

A plan to inspire action for nature

This Nature Recovery Plan aims to halt and reverse this decline, providing an inspiring vision of what is possible and practical solutions for achieving it.

It is a Plan for everyone who has influence over, and benefits from, nature in the Malvern Hills AONB. It recognises that it is the decisions of the many private landowners, including farmers and estates, that will have the greatest effect on nature. Those who look after nature need the right balance of incentives, guidance and regulation, provided by public bodies and environmental organisations, to guide and support their decisions. Local residents and visitors also have a role to play: as consumers of the food, drink and leisure opportunities produced in the countryside; and as stewards of nature in their own gardens and neighbourhoods.

AONBs leading nature recovery

Although AONBs are not primarily a wildlife designation, the important role they play in nature recovery has been confirmed and enshrined in policy.

In the light of the climate and biodiversity crises the planet is facing, AONBs across the country made a collective declaration on nature in 2019, known as the Colchester Declaration.^{iv} It states that AONBs should be places of rich, diverse and abundant wildlife and reaffirms the importance of Natural Beauty and that it has intrinsic value which means so much to people. It places nature recovery at the centre of the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. To follow through on these statements, a pledge was made to draw up Nature Recovery Plans for each AONB, of which this Plan is the Malvern Hills'.

In 2010 in his seminal report 'Making Space for Nature', Professor Sir John Lawton recommended that *"recovering wildlife will require more habitat; in better condition; in bigger patches that are more closely connected."*^v The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan aims to deliver this recommendation *"Developing a Nature Recovery Network to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside."*^{vi} This will be achieved by, amongst other things, linking existing protected landscapes, of which the Malvern Hills AONB is one.

What do we mean by nature?

Wildlife and the habitats that sustain them, including the soils and underlying geology, are the focus of this Plan. By protecting and enhancing these, the Plan also recognises the many benefits that local communities and wider society can gain

from thriving nature, including healthy food, clean water and air, resilience to the changing climate and access for recreation and enjoyment. The Plan therefore covers nature itself as well as the many benefits and services that nature provides us with.

Figure 1: The services we receive from nature



The interacting mosaic of habitats that provides a home for so many key species forms the landscape of the Malvern Hills AONB. The special wildlife of the AONB is closely related to thousands of years of farming and forestry traditions.^{vii} These actions and interaction between nature and people within the AONB has resulted in the distinct character of the landscape such as ancient unenclosed common land, orchards, parklands which are home to this wildlife.

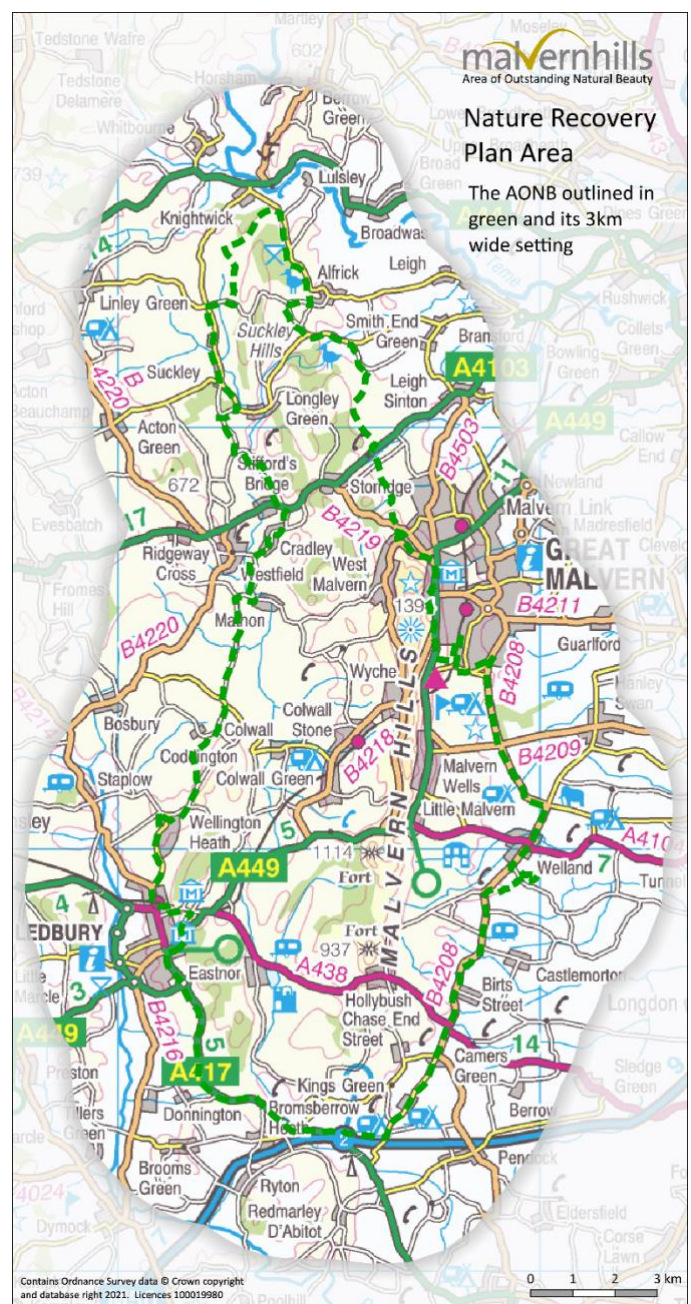
For nature to flourish, it will be important that land management practices that conserve the nature-rich landscapes of the AONB, such as grazing, coppicing, orchard management and hedge laying^{vii} are able to continue. This close relationship between nature and landscape character means that throughout the NRP references and information on landscape character and nature are used interchangeably.

However, landscape character is not, and never has been static. Such are the pressures facing the AONB, from climate change, development and changing agricultural priorities, that the characteristics of land use and management that provide its outstanding natural beauty will need to be revalued and, in some cases, reinterpreted.

What is the geographical scope of this Plan?

This Plan is centred on the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area of some 105 km². It also takes account of its wider setting and connectivity, defined by a 3km-wide setting around the AONB boundary. More broadly, the Plan also recognises the broader regional context and the links for nature that need to be strengthened and extended through the surrounding countryside and urban areas. The ‘Strategies’ section of this Plan uses these three scales to describe key approaches and priorities for nature.

Figure 2: The Nature Recovery Plan area



Relationship with other plans and policies

There are a range of new national initiatives under development that will influence this Plan. These include the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the design of the Environmental Land Management Schemes and the requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain provision as part of new development. As these are developed, there will be a need to review and revise the strategy and actions in this Plan.

The State of Nature in the AONB

A special place for nature

Nature is at the heart of what makes the Malvern Hills AONB special. From the area's distinct and varied geology, celebrated by the internationally recognised Abberley & Malvern Hills Geopark, arise an array of natural habitats and species many of which are nationally rare (see Box 1 below).

The interaction of nature and people within the AONB has produced different areas of distinctive landscape character. These show a combination of features that have evolved over time such as ancient unenclosed common land, orchards, parklands, ridgelines, ponds and hedgerows which form the mosaic of habitats that are so important to wildlife in the area.

Box 1: Special habitats and species:

- Extensive areas of acid grassland and heath on the tops of the Malvern Hills and on the commons on their eastern flanks. These are home to ... [AONB team to add more?]
- Flower-rich calcareous grassland on the limestone rocks to the north and west of the Hills, containing species of rare orchids.
- Ancient deciduous woodland particularly on the lower hills and valleys in the north and west of the AONB
- Lowland meadows, some (to the east of the Hills) containing rare plants such as green-winged orchid.
- Traditional orchards in parishes such as Colwall, Alfrick and Suckley
- Woodpasture, parkland and veteran trees (in arable and pastoral fields)
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees ...
- Ponds, rivers and streams ...

There are 16 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) lying partly or wholly within the AONB, the majority of which are designated to protect biodiversity. These represent 10.9% of its total area (11.45 square kms).^{vii} There is one Local Nature Reserve within the AONB at St Wulstan's (Malvern Wells).^{vii}

The current state of nature

In recent decades, the AONB and the area surrounding it has been subject to the same losses of nature as those across the nation. For instance, the UK has seen 97% of wildflower meadows lost between the 1930s and 1984 and 90% of lowland ponds in the UK were lost in the 20th Century. ⁱⁱ Within the AONB, there has been a significant reduction in the area of traditional orchards, especially in parishes such as Colwall, Alfrick and Suckley. [See insert maps – to be added].

Box 2: The condition of key natural assets:

- Agricultural soils. Most arable soils have significantly depleted levels of organic matter and microbial activity and a poor structure, reducing their productivity and ability to hold water and carbon. Soils under permanent pasture are in better condition but may be locally compacted.
- Water and wetlands. Diffuse pollution and sediment run-off means that the ecological condition of many rivers and water courses is not good. Climate change is causing more frequent and intense flooding and also low summer flows, exacerbating problem for aquatic life.
- Woodland. Many of our native trees are coming under acute stress from new pests and diseases and periods of intense weather (e.g. storms and drought). Loss of key species such as ash will accelerate change, particularly in unmanaged woodland.
- Unimproved grassland and heathland. Many nature-rich sites have become isolated and their small populations of plants and animals disconnected from others.

[Note in this draft Plan: The data on SSSI condition, summarised in the State of the AONB Report, 2015, paints a relatively rosy picture (98% favourable or unfavourable recovering condition), which is at odds with national state of nature reports. How to address this?].

Current and future pressures

Nature in the AONB will face significant pressures for change over the foreseeable future.

The agricultural transition

Farming in the AONB is starting to go through a period of major change as the support schemes that were funded by the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are replaced by a new domestic policy based on supporting public goods from land. Defra is developing three new Environmental Land Management Schemes but their content and suitability to the AONB is currently not known. Other factors that will influence how farmland is managed include the costs of agricultural inputs; the available of labour; promotion of low carbon / net zero farming techniques; pests and diseases (including bovine TB); and changes to farming export markets

Climate change

Average UK temperatures have already increased by nearly 1°C since the 1980s and the trends predicted by climate science are proving accurate. As well as rising average temperatures, periods of low rainfall, interspersed by intense rainfall are creating difficult conditions for our native wildlife, and are testing some types of farming and forestry. Examples of the impacts on nature include: new pest and diseases (ash dieback being a highly visible example); changing timings of seasons; low summer river flows; and damage to vegetation from high winds. Many of these impacts are likely to accelerate in the short term. The longer term effects will depend on measures by governments and individuals over the next few years.

Built development

The Government has a goal of significantly increasing the rate of house building in England and of ensuring that negative environmental impacts of these developments are mitigated. The AONB itself is unlikely to see new developments at the same scale as surrounding areas. However, there are likely to be growing numbers of visitors and a reduction in the tranquillity that can be experienced in the AONB (for instance dark night skies). There are also likely to be opportunities to create new habitats using funding from development in nearby areas through the proposed requirements for 'Biodiversity Net Gain' (described further below).

New opportunities

Whilst these pressures continue, the policy context within which nature recovery sits is rapidly changing. This presents significant opportunities to create positive change for nature, but also requires a new understanding to develop of the stakeholders and policy and funding mechanisms and the connections (chains of influence) between them that will be able to facilitate nature recovery.

Some key emerging opportunities for nature recovery are:

Environmental Land Management schemes

The delivery of public goods under the three proposed Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes and the need for priorities to be spatially targeted means that there is an opportunity for the Nature Recovery Plan to direct and influence landowners and their advisors in their delivery of nature and other public goods. The NRP should be a key influence on ELM delivery and a source of guidance to farmers and their advisors.

Biodiversity Net Gain requirements

The imminent introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) provides a significant opportunity for land that is going through land use change as a result of development. For mandatory BNG to achieve its full potential requires a NRP that helps to coordinate and direct the type of net gain planned for and achieved. The AONB should also be looking to implement a more stringent requirement than 10% net gain (many Local Authorities have already raised the requirement to 20%).

Carbon Markets

New markets are emerging for landowners to get funding for woodland etc through carbon markets. These markets are growing. The NRP could have a significant role in influencing uptake and location – ensuring synergies with landscape and nature recovery.

Local Food Markets

As noted in the AONB Management Plan, the area has a relatively affluence of the population with an above average income (and high carbon footprint) – and it can be assumed a high interest in local products. Food production in the AONB is significant and some of the production systems that

are of particular value to nature are under threat e.g. Orchards. Closing the gap between food production and the local population is a way to help lower the AONB population’s carbon footprint, support nature as well as protecting some of the most important agricultural systems in the AONB that underpin the landscape and livelihoods. This avenue of business and nature-based solutions in the AONB could be explored further through the NRP.

Community interests

The AONB and the communities that live and work in and around it are inextricably linked. Some of these connections are well understood and relationships established - For example, recreational use of the AONB and the work of the Malvern Hills Trust. However, other connections need strengthening - For example the link between personal consumption patterns and land use or between choices relating to private property and nature and other public goods (such as areas of hard surfacing, fencing and outdoor lighting). The NRP can start a process of engaging with the

community on these issues and identifying spatial opportunities for suitable interventions.

A changing place for Nature

Change to the landscapes and habitats that make up the AONB are inevitable given the climate crisis and other pressures that are exerting themselves on the area. The challenge going forward is to ensure that change positively benefits nature and allows it to recover from past harm that has occurred. We may need to change our perceptions of the functions that landscapes can provide and the way they look – for instance welcoming increases in tree cover or accepting flooding in areas that can cope with it. Thinking about the needs of wildlife (as well as our own), both now and going forward, as the climate crisis takes hold, will help us evaluate what is special about our cherished landscapes and reimagine them for the future.

The special qualities of the AONB that are most vulnerable to change are set out below [Note in draft: Is this table a useful part of the NRP?]:

Special qualities of the AONB	Sensitivity to change
A high, dramatic ridge of ancient rock that is visible from a distance	
A distinctive and varied geology giving rise to a unique array of natural habitats	
Dramatic scenery and spectacular views	
A strong ‘spirit of place’: landscapes that inspire with a deep cultural narrative	
An historic landscape including ancient unenclosed commons and designed parkland	
A rich and distinctive historic environment including prehistoric sites	
A distinctive combination of landscape elements (e.g. orchards, parklands, quarries, etc.)	
A wide variety of landscape types in a relatively small area	
A wide variety of wildlife habitats and species, many of which are nationally rare	
Distinctive ‘villagescapes’ that define a ‘spirit of place’ in the settlements	
A sense of remoteness and tranquillity. People feel calm and spiritually refreshed	

Our Strategy

This section of the Nature Recovery Plan consists of two parts.

- The first part is a set of guiding principles, describing the approaches that should be taken to safeguard and restore nature in the AONB.
- The second part contains three sets of priorities to shape the way land is used and managed for nature. Each set of priorities operates at a different scale.

Guiding principles

Do no harm

Given the crisis in nature the first principle should be to do no further damage. Nature recovery will not be successful if it is under-mined by further loss of habitats or deterioration of soils or water resources. This includes small scale harms which have an incremental and cumulative impact.

The NRP has the potential to influence changes to both land use and to land management. It should address activities that negatively impact upon nature (e.g. light pollution, development and pesticide use) as well as proactively increasing and enhancing nature. This may require thinking in a more holistic way about impacts on nature, rather than sticking to traditional nature conservation approaches.

Build a movement

The NRP is for everyone who lives and works in and around the MHAONB. Many different groups of people have a role to play, including owners and managers of land, consumers of food and drink, recreational users, regulators or advisers. The diagram to the right shows how the Plan provides the means to co-ordinate appropriate actions by those who own and manage land using the resources and guidance from national and local policies and schemes.

Figure 3. How the Plan joins top-down policies to bottom-up land management activities



Those involved in both bottom-up activities and top-down policies have to want change to happen, and this 'will' needs to be fostered in order for solutions to be delivered. Public will is an important influence on both the policy making process and encouraging the uptake of new ideas in land management, industry and commerce.

Stepping-stones to improvement

Given the scale of the biodiversity crisis, nature recovery can seem like a daunting, formidable task. The first step to change can be the hardest. However, the impact of everyone making small changes is cumulative. Individuals and organisations start at different stages of understanding, engagement, will and ability (either financial, operational or technical) to make changes. This stepping-stones approach helps to remove barriers to participation whilst inspiring a longer-term commitment to action.

[To add diagram showing scale of measures]

The past isn't a guide to the future

The climate crisis means that change to the wildlife, habitats and landscapes of the AONB is inevitable. A new direction must be found; one that allows nature to recover and flourish into the future at the same time as the qualities that make the AONB special are revalued or reimagined. Our landscapes will need to be dynamic and revaluating them for the future is essential for them to survive as special places.

Priorities for nature

This Nature Recovery Plan advocates three key sets of priorities for nature in the AONB, each of which operate at a different scale. These are:

A. Strengthening the Regional Nature Network.

This recognises the importance of the AONB as a core area for nature of regional significance and the need to enhance and enlarge the habitat corridors and connections to other core areas;

B. Connecting people to nature in the AONB and its setting. This emphasises the benefits that local people and visitors, and society more widely, gain from nature, and the actions that are needed to enhance these services.

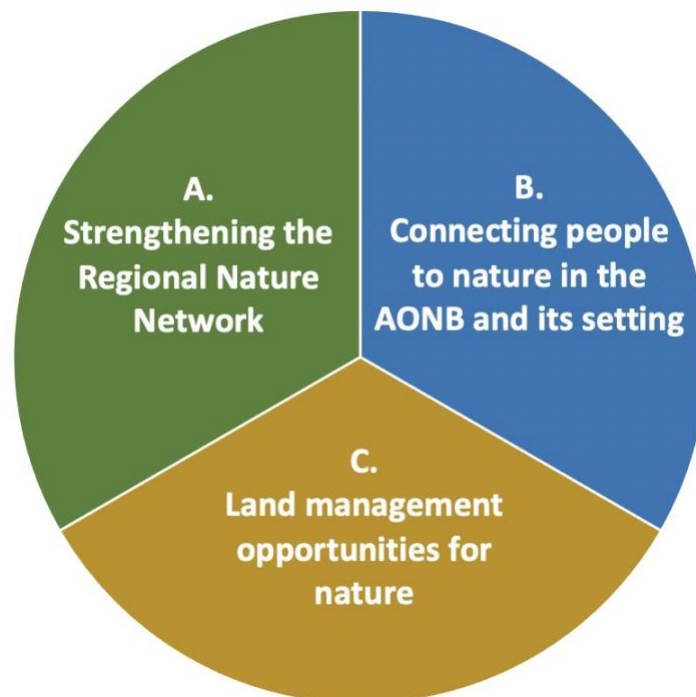
C. Land management opportunities for nature.

This provides guidance to landowners and managers on the actions they can take to conserve and enhance nature on their land. It does so under headings of six key landscape types:

- High nature value open habitats
- Highly wooded landscapes
- Predominantly grazed areas with frequent HNV habitats
- Predominantly grazed areas with fewer HNV habitats
- Predominantly arable landscapes
- Urban areas

A map showing the connectivity of different types of habitat across the whole area is also used to suggest how the nature network can best be reinforced.

Our approach for prioritising nature



A. Strengthening the regional nature network

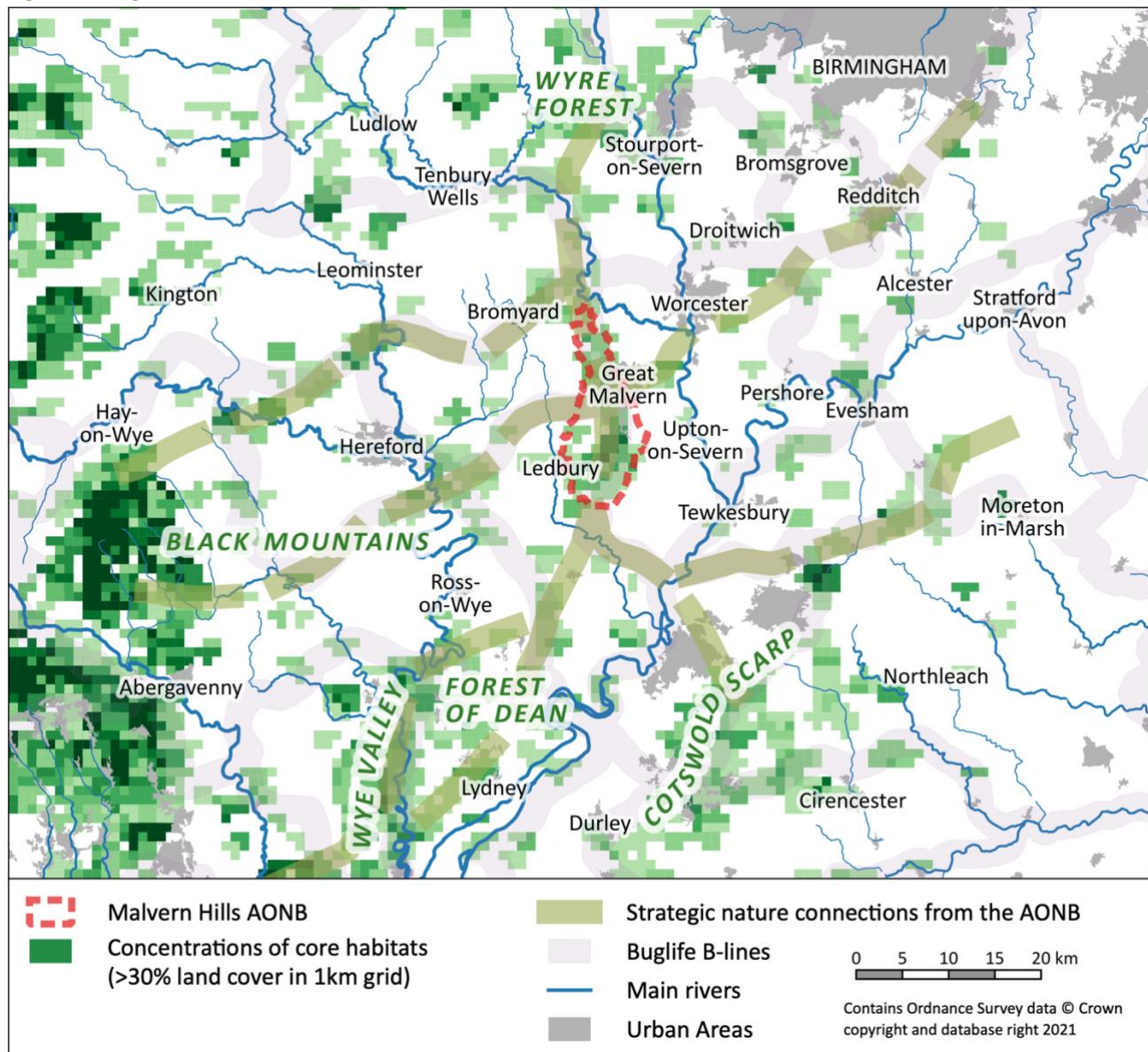
The map below shows how the AONB (ringed in red) contains a high concentration of core habitats (the grid squares coloured darker greens).

The thick dashed lines show how the AONB is connected to other core biodiversity areas. These closely following the 'B-lines' developed by Buglife (shown as pale purple lines).

These key connections are:

- To the north: the Wyre Forest (ancient woodland and heathland),
- To the south: the Cotswold scarp (beech woodland and calcareous grassland), Forest of Dean (broadleaved woodland and heathland) and Wye Valley (ancient woodland), and
- To the west, the Black Mountains (moorland and acid grassland).

Figure 4. Regional Nature Connections



The Priorities for safeguarding nature at this regional scale are:

- To recognise the importance of the AONB as a core area for nature of regional significance.
- To promote, with partners including other projected landscapes, the strengthening of connections to other regionally important areas.

B. Connecting people to nature in the AONB and its setting

Reinforcing people's relationships with nature and the benefits that it provides them with is central to achieving nature's recovery. The AONB's Colchester declaration^{iv} recognises this and pledges to "create opportunities within AONBs for people to make an emotional connection to nature". Functional connections to nature in the MHAONB and its setting are clear from the wide range of services and benefits that local people, visitors and wider society receive from it. **Appendix 1** sets out a series of maps of how well the AONB and setting is doing at providing these services.

Whilst the public are at different stages in their understanding and willingness to adopt change, public awareness internationally is now at an all-time high of how our actions have harmed nature and how this is changing the world to our detriment. Even amongst the people in this AONB who are already aware of the biodiversity crisis and the need to act, there may still be uncertainty about what they can do individually or as a community to make things better.

Understanding the benefits we all gain from nature, whether pollinating the crops we eat, providing a place of tranquillity to visit or filtering the air we breathe, is an important step to making decisions that support these connections.

Everyone has a role to play, whether as purchasers of food that can be produced locally and sustainably, recreational users of the countryside, policy makers and regulators, or owners and managers of land.

The priorities for connecting people to nature in the AONB and its setting are:

- **Connect and join up activities on the ground for nature:** Bringing individuals together, encouraging community organisation and activism for nature, (including public support for mitigation / enhancement policies, contacting government officials and pro-biodiversity consumer behaviour) and showcasing diverse voices who can advocate for nature but who would not normally be associated with this message can be powerful and effective ways of early adopters connecting with the silent majority and encouraging change.
- **Partnership working for a unified approach for nature recovery:** Top-down organisations can also play a role by organisations coming together and speaking with one united voice, delivering a consistent message and advice, this will increase trust, reduce ambiguity and in still confidence in those seeking to take action.

C. Land management opportunities for nature

This set of priorities provides guidance to landowners and managers on the actions they can take to conserve and enhance nature on their land. It does so under headings of six key landscape types:

- High nature value open habitats
- Highly wooded landscapes
- Predominantly grazed areas with frequent HNV habitats
- Predominantly grazed areas with fewer HNV habitats
- Predominantly arable landscapes
- Urban areas

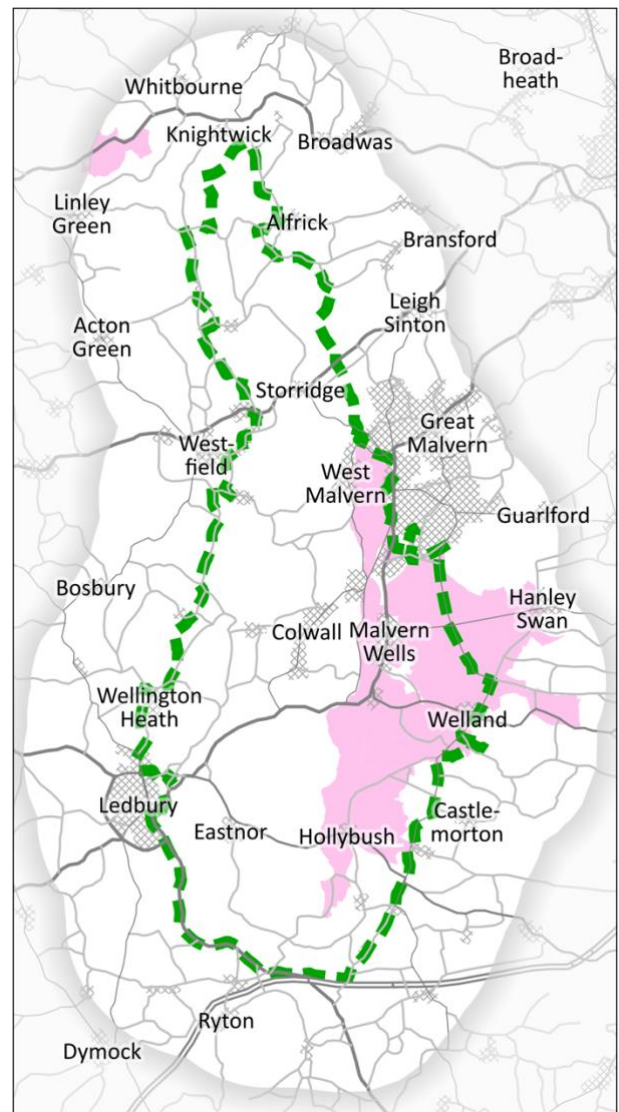
High nature value open habitats

High concentrations of agriculturally unimproved grassland, heathland and wetlands (or 'high nature value open habitats') occur along the spine of the Malvern Hills and on the commons that lie on the southern easterly flanks of the hills. There is also a smaller area at Bringsty Common in the north west of the NRP area. In these areas, high nature value open habitats account for at least a third of the total land area.

Land management priorities for nature in these areas are to:

- Promote opportunities for grazing on commons
- Maintain a balance between open land, scrub and woodland on the ridge slopes
- Manage/restore all remaining patches of semi-natural vegetation
- Manage bracken cover to maintain an open structure
- Protect the heritage value of rock outcrops
- Manage the balance of habitats to retain views of outcrops and protect archaeology
- Develop an access strategy to reduce erosion along the ridge footpaths

These landscape types are based on the landscape character typology prepared for the AONB in 2011 (described in the Landscape Strategy Guidelines for the AONB) and extended by Worcestershire County Council to cover the 3km side setting area in 2021 (CHECK). Appendix 2 provides a statistical summary of these simplified landscape types and their relationship to the full landscape character typology.

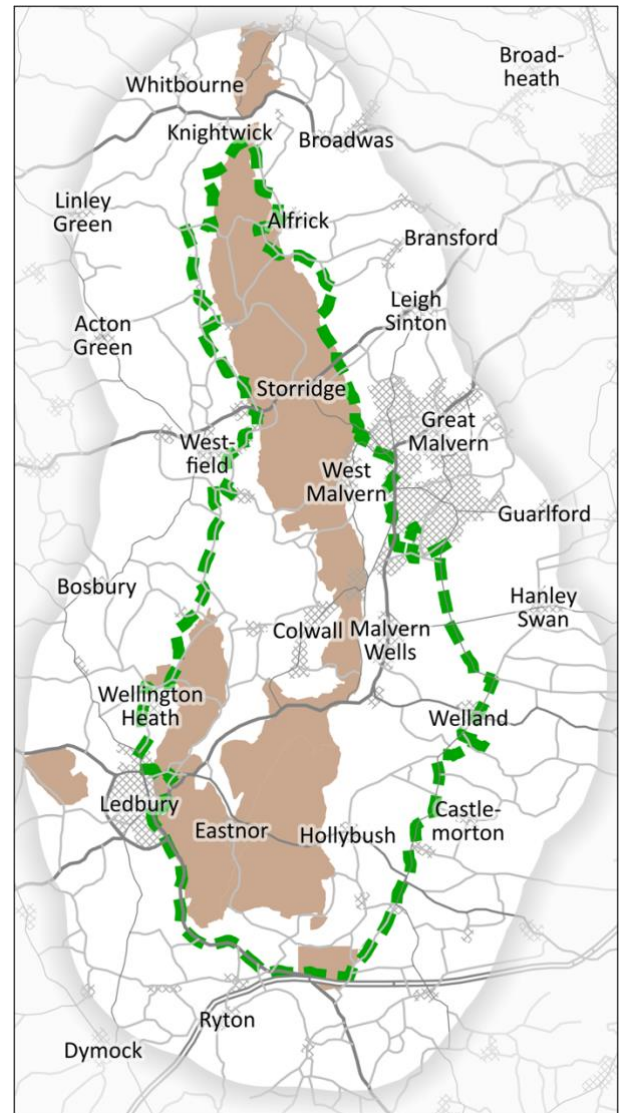


Highly wooded areas

Areas which are highly wooded (with nearly 40% of the land area covered by woodland, most of which is broadleaved) occur in the northern and south western parts of the AONB. Smaller areas occur outside the AONB in the 3km setting area north of Knightwick and west of Ledbury. Along with woodland, these areas have high concentrations of permanent pasture, a dense network of large hedgerows and significant remaining areas of traditional orchards (including cider apple and cherry trees). Significant areas of parkland and wood pasture also occur in places.

Land management priorities for nature in these areas are to:

- Conserve and maintain all remaining blocks of ancient woodland
- Conserve all older permanent pastures
- Conserve remaining traditional orchards
- Conserve the historic enclosure pattern
- Protect the heritage value of small quarries
- Maintain/enhance tree cover and wetland vegetation along watercourses
- Maintain/manage all woodlands using sustainable forestry management practices
- Maintain/manage hedgerow trees, ensuring a diverse age structure
- Manage/restore hedgerow boundaries including hedgerow trees
- Manage gamebirds to support sustainable woodland and hedgerow management
- Replace conifer plantations in ancient woods
- Seek opportunities to restore/create orchards



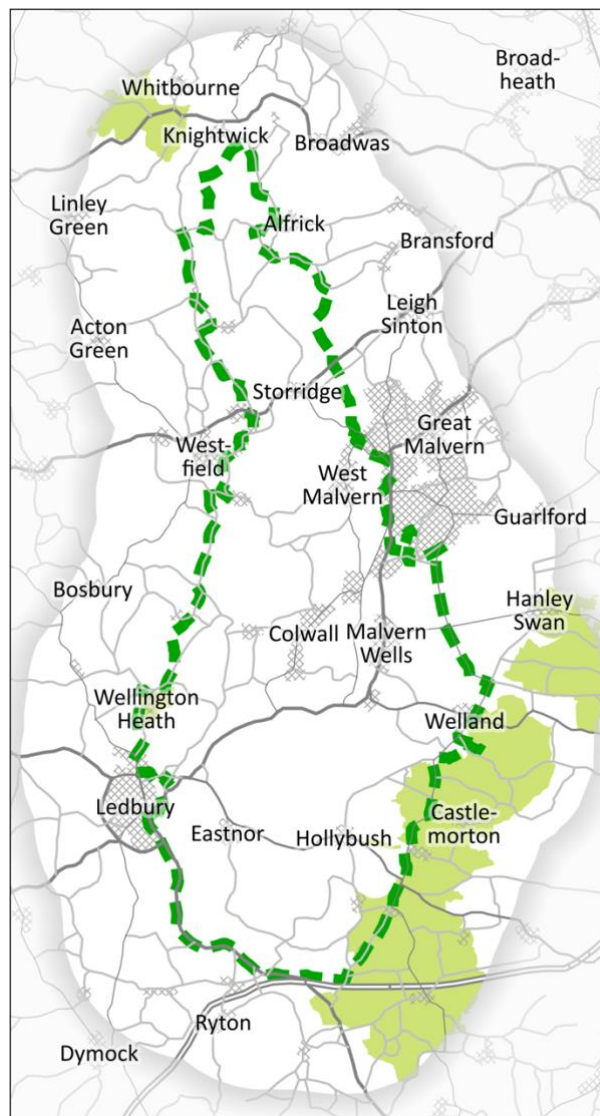
Predominantly grazed areas with frequent HNV habitats

This landscape type is dominated by grassland farming (60% of land cover as permanent pasture) and has significant areas of high nature value open habitats (principally unimproved neutral grassland and some traditional orchards). It has low levels of woodland cover (as low as 4%) and a quarter of farmland is under arable cultivation. There are many watercourses and streams and farm ponds are also frequent.

These areas occur in the south western part of the NRP area, in the 3km setting to the AONB and a smaller area in the north west of the NRP area.

Land management priorities for nature in these areas are to:

- Conserve all older permanent pastures
- Conserve the historic enclosure pattern
- Retain and manage field ponds
- Maintain/enhance tree cover and wetland vegetation along watercourses
- Maintain/manage hedgerow trees, ensuring a diverse age structure
- Manage/restore hedgerow boundaries including hedgerow trees
- Seek opportunities to create new woodlands
- Seek opportunities to restore/create orchards
- Seek opportunities to restore wetlands to enhance ecological diversity
- Seek opportunities to restore/enhance the biodiversity of agricultural land

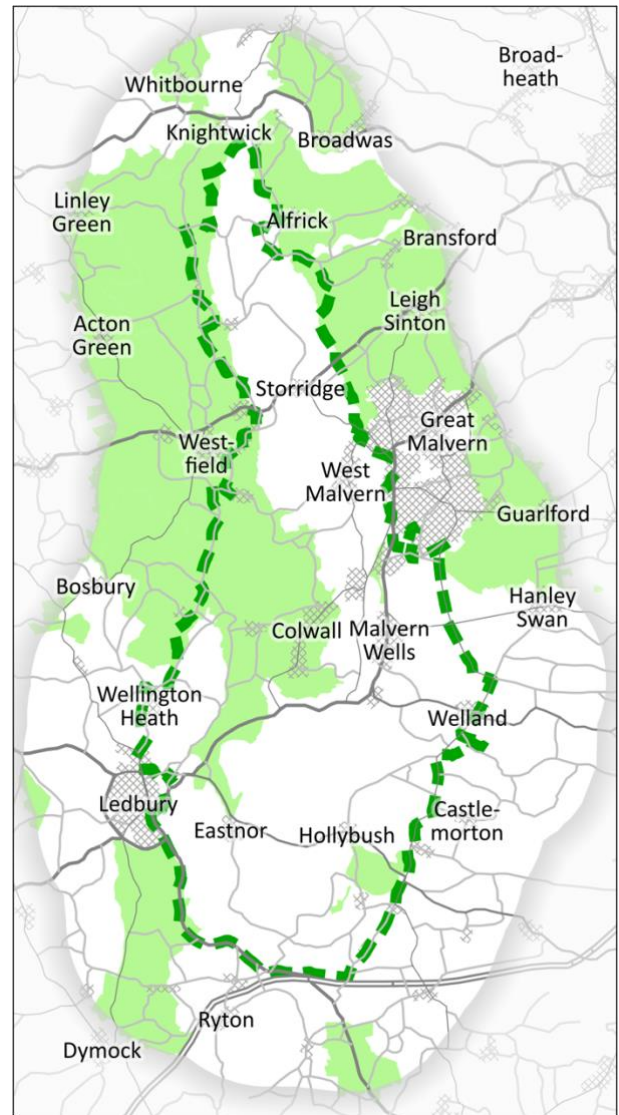


Predominantly grazed areas with fewer HNV habitats

This landscape type has high levels of grassland farming (permanent pasture accounts for nearly half of land use) and, unlike the previous types, relatively few areas of high nature value. Woodland cover is around 8% but much of this woodland is ancient semi-natural in character. Arable cropping takes place on a third of the land. Field boundaries are frequently low annually trimmed hedges. There are many watercourses and streams and farm ponds are also frequent. There are also areas of parkland and wood pasture.

Land management priorities for nature in these areas are to:

- Conserve all older permanent pastures
- Conserve and maintain all remaining blocks of ancient woodland
- Conserve remaining traditional orchards
- Maintain/manage hedgerow trees, ensuring a diverse age structure
- Manage/restore hedgerow boundaries including hedgerow trees
- Manage standing water bodies to enhance biodiversity
- Seek opportunities to create new woodlands
- Seek opportunities to restore/create orchards
- Seek opportunities to restore former parkland

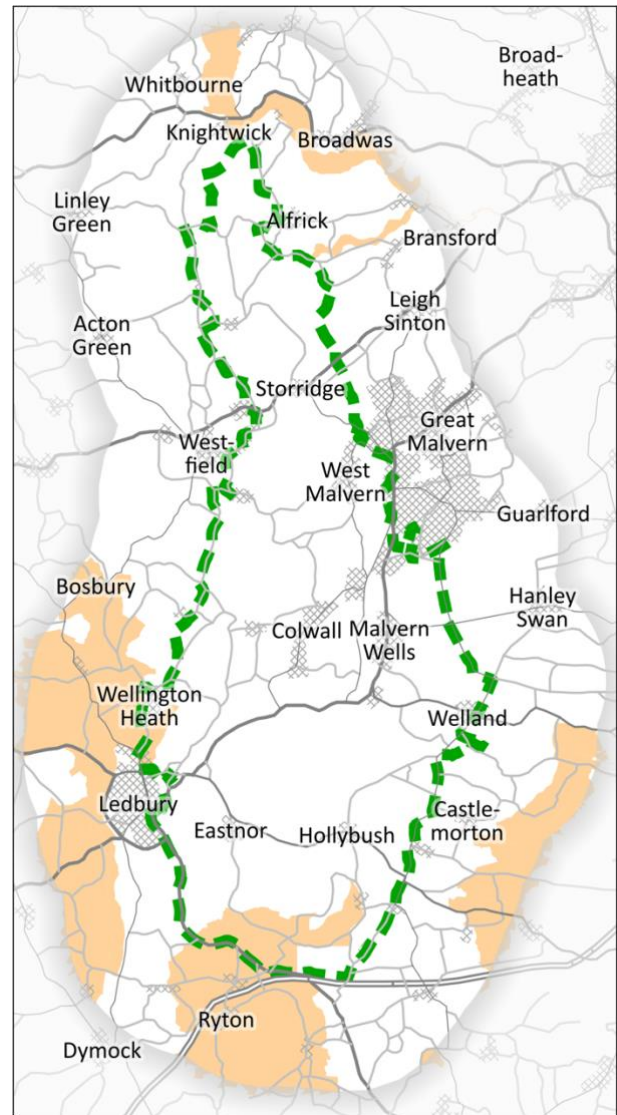


Predominantly arable areas

Areas where arable farming is the dominant land use (accounting for half of land cover), occur around the southern edge of the AONB and also in the valley floor of the River Teme to the north of the AONB. Agriculturally improved permanent pasture accounts for about a quarter of land cover and woodland is found on about 8% of the area. In many areas, field boundaries consist of low annually trimmed hedges, often beside watercourses and streams.

Land management priorities for nature in these areas are to:

- Create/maintain a minimum 4m buffer strip around field margins
- Maintain/enhance tree cover and wetland vegetation along watercourses
- Manage/restore hedgerow boundaries including hedgerow trees, ensuring a diverse age structure
- Manage field pattern & hedgerows for good habitats & visual screening
- Seek opportunities to restore/create orchards
- Manage standing water bodies to enhance biodiversity
- Seek opportunities to create new woodlands

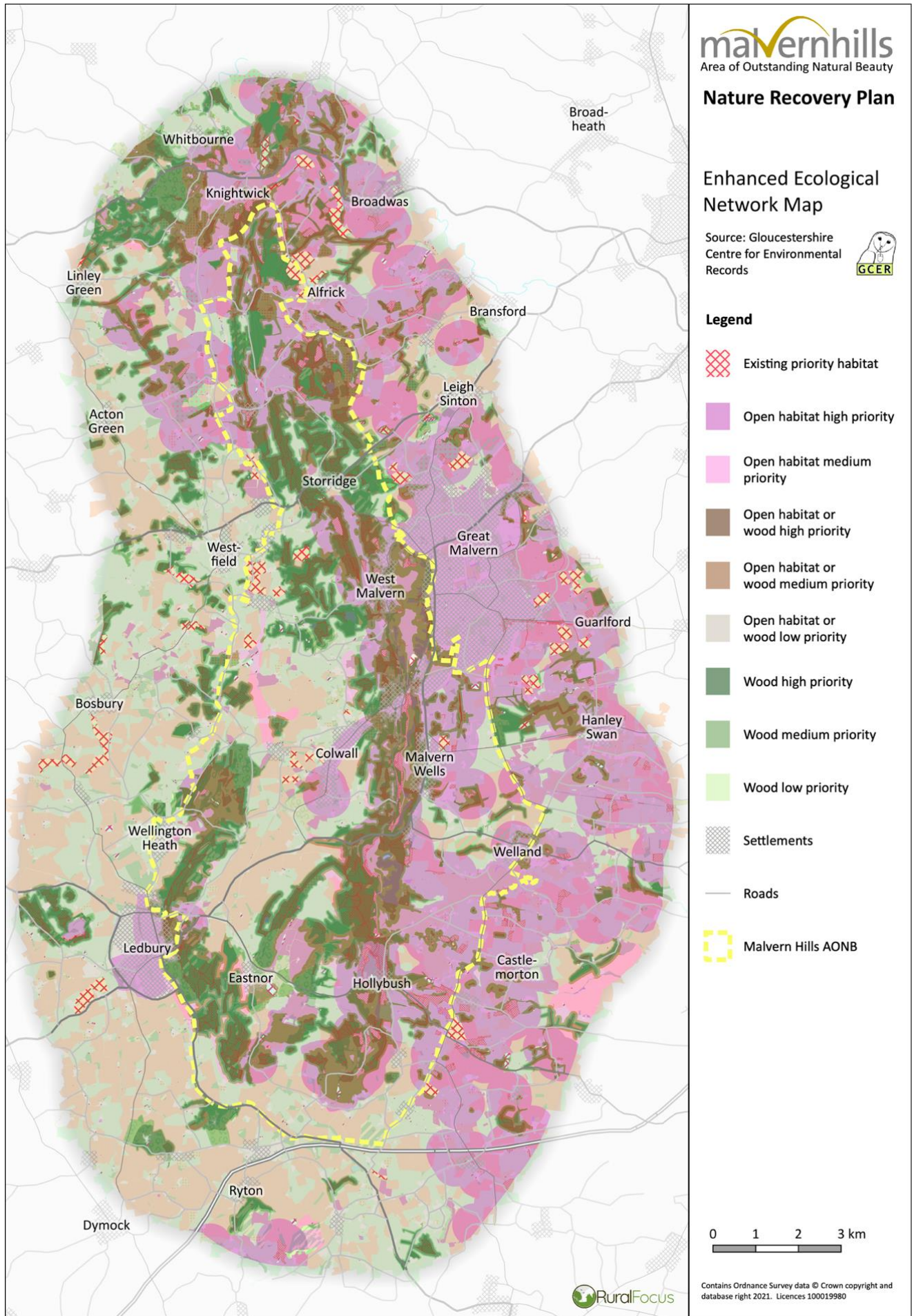


Enhancing the nature network across the whole Plan area

The map on the following page (Figure 5) has been prepared to show how populations of key species can be protected and better connected allowing them to spread and grow. Based on the extent of existing habitats and the way key species move between them, it shows the areas where there is highest priority for conserving, expanding or creating open habitats (such as agriculturally unimproved grassland and heathland), woodland or a combination of the two.

The map suggests that in most of the AONB there are large areas which have a high priority as native woodland and open habitats (mainly flower-rich low input grassland). The land to the east of the AONB has a high priority for conserving, expanding or creating open habitats. The land to the west of the AONB has a medium priority for woodland or open habitats, with some areas having a high priority for woodland.

Figure 5. Enhanced ecological network map



Delivery – Action Plan

To be developed. Short table of actions over a 2 year timescale.

Monitoring progress of this Plan

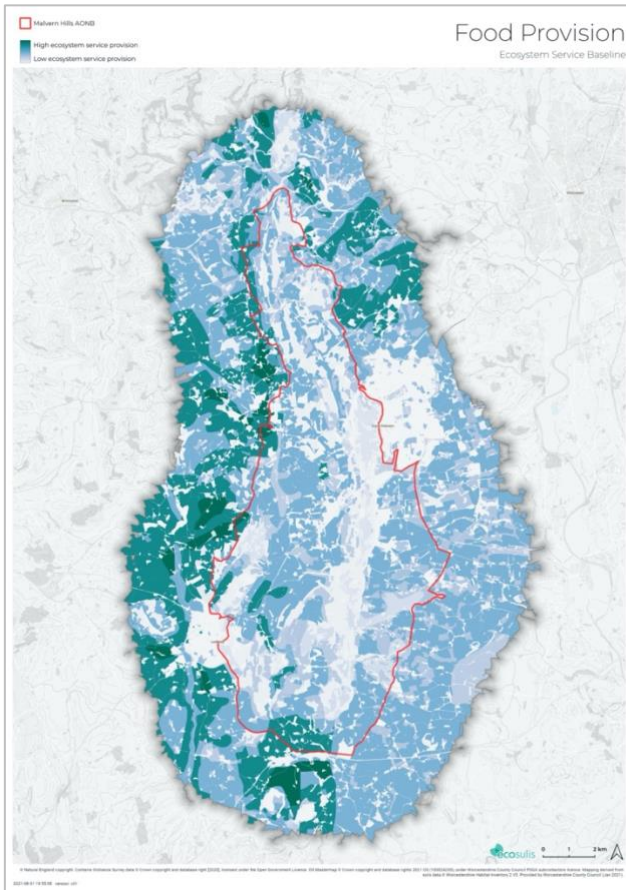
To be added. Commitment to monitoring and review as national and regional policies (ELM, BNG etc) are rolled out.

Appendix 1. State of Nature – Provision of Ecosystem Services

This appendix uses a series of six maps of ecosystem service provision, prepared for the AONB and its setting in 2021, to assess where and how well these

services are being provided to local people, visitors and wider society.

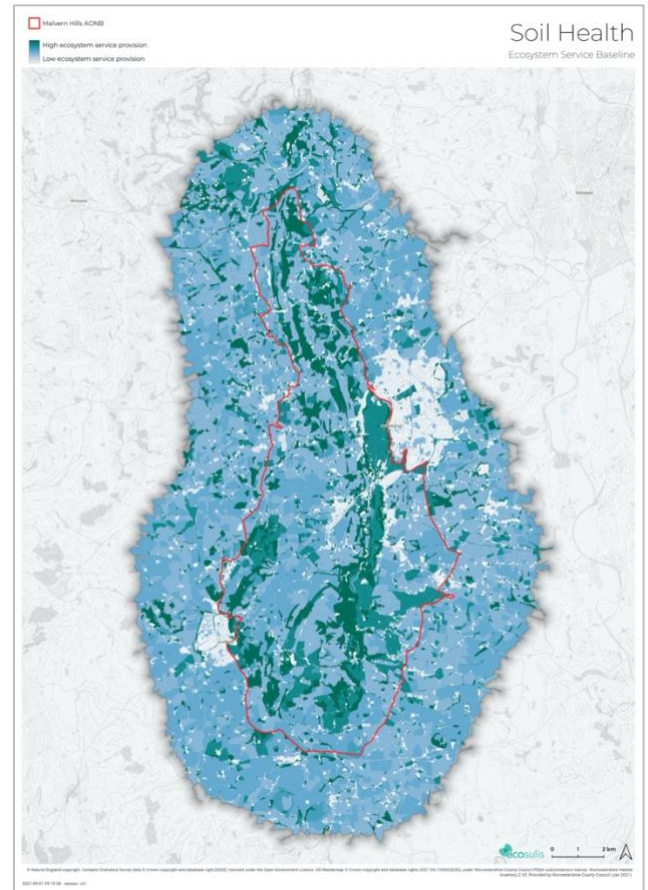
Food provision



This map is based on the Agricultural Land Classification which grades land based on its capability for agricultural and forestry production.

It shows that the greatest opportunity for food production, based on the Agricultural Land Classification, occurs outside the AONB in the western, southern and north eastern parts of the 3km setting around the AONB

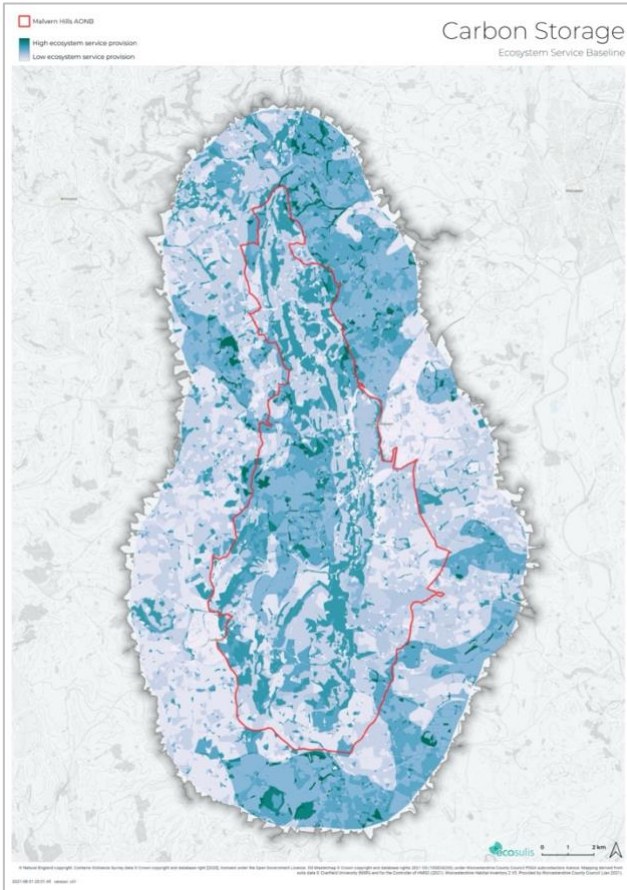
Soil health



This map is based on current land use, relating this to the likely health of the underlying soil. For instance woodland and unimproved grassland is assumed to have high soil health.

It shows that soil is likely to be in best condition in the centre of the AONB, following the line of the Hills and the concentrations of woodland on its flanks.

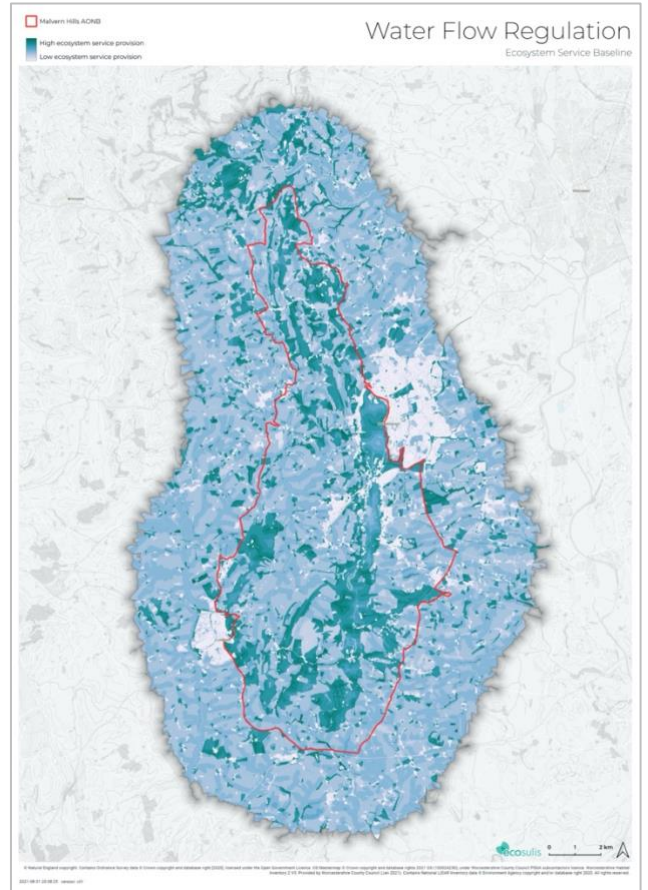
Carbon storage



This map is based on **TO BE COMPLETED**

It shows

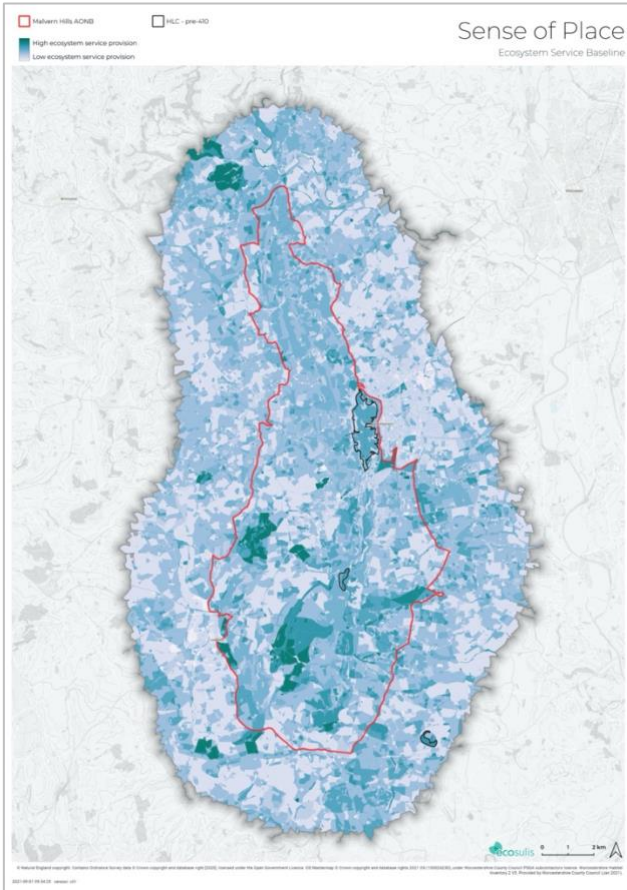
Water flow regulation



This map is based on

It shows

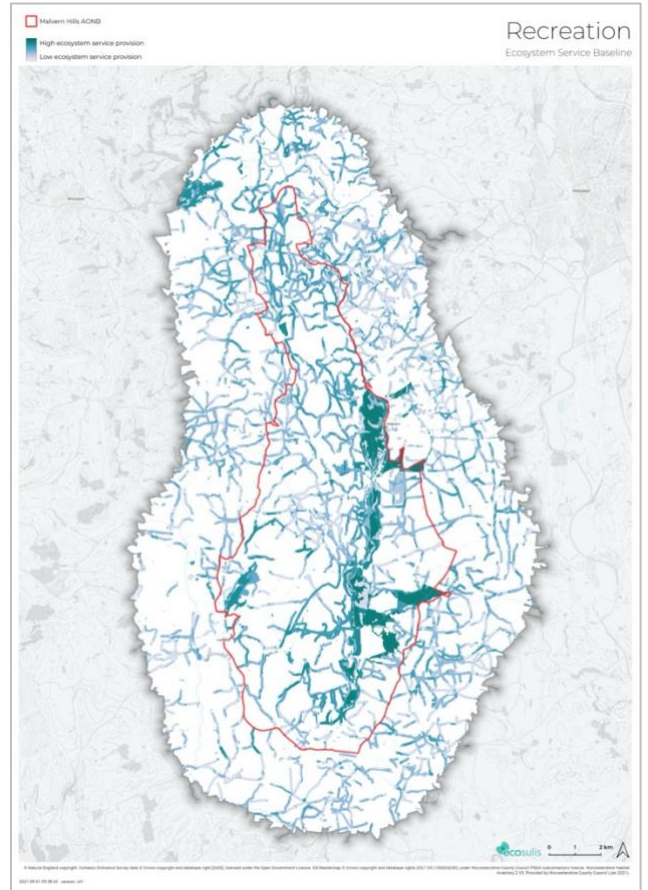
Sense of place



This map is based on

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Recreation

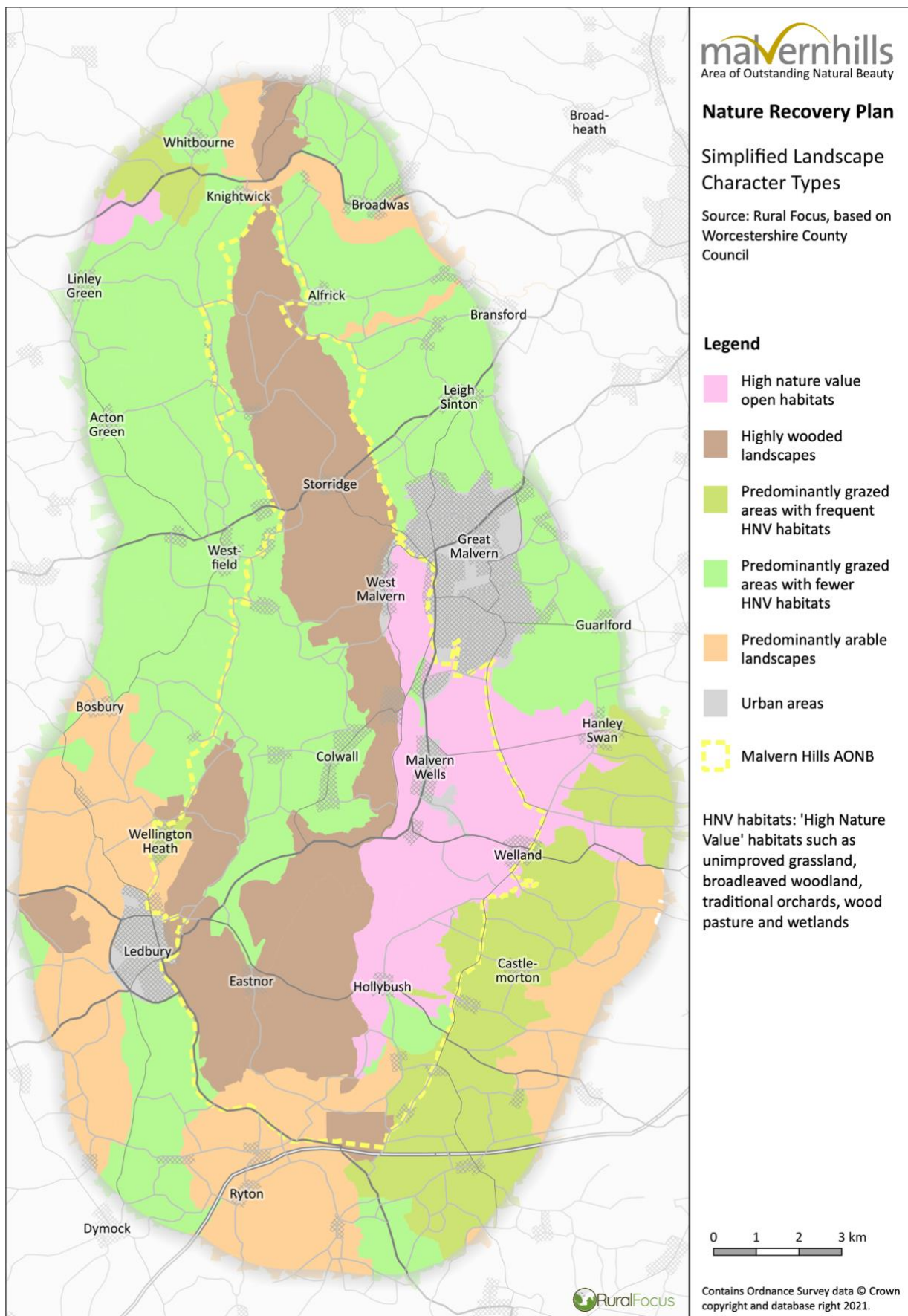


This map is based on

It shows

Appendix 2. Simplified Landscape Types

This plan six simplified landscape types to identify the areas where discrete sets of land management actions are likely to provide most benefits to nature. The map below shows these areas and the table on the following page provides a statistically summary of their areas and land cover.



Summary land cover statistics for simplified landscape types

Simplified landscape types	High nature value open habitats	Highly wooded landscapes	Predominantly grazed areas with frequent HNV habitats	Predominantly grazed areas with fewer HNV habitats	Predominantly arable landscapes	Urban areas	The AONB	Whole NRP area
Constituent landscape character types	High hills and slopes, Unenclosed commons, Enclosed commons	Principal wooded hills, Wooded hills, Wooded hills and farmlands	Wooded estatelands, Settled farmlands with pastoral land use, Forest smallholdings & dwellings	Principal timbered farmlands, Timbered plateau farmlands, Unwooded vale	Estate farmlands, Low hills and orchards, Principal settled farmlands, Riverside meadows, Sandstone estatelands, Settled farmlands on river terrace, Wet pasture meadows	Urban		
Proportion of the AONB area	21%	47%	3%	22%	5%	2%	100%	
Proportion of the total NRP area	10%	18%	12%	39%	18%	4%		100%
Percentage land cover by simplified landscape type and in the AONB and whole NRP area								
High Nature Value open habitats	36%	19%	22%	11%	6%	6%	21%	15%
Woodland	16%	38%	4%	8%	8%	3%	23%	13%
Agriculturally improved permanent pasture	23%	29%	40%	35%	29%	6%	28%	31%
Arable	11%	8%	24%	33%	48%	1%	17%	26%
Built up areas and gardens	9%	6%	9%	8%	6%	84%	8%	11%
Other land cover	5%	1%	2%	4%	4%	1%	3%	3%

Footnotes

ⁱ Natural History Museum (26/09/20) “UK has led the world in destroying the natural environment – analysis of the Biodiversity Intactness Index (PREDICTS: Projecting Responses of Ecological Diversity In Changing Terrestrial Systems). <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2020/september/uk-has-led-the-world-in-destroying-the-natural-environment.html> (accessed 1/10/21)

ⁱⁱ Hayhow DB, Eaton MA, Stanbury AJ, Burns F, Kirby WB, Bailey N, Beckmann B, Bedford J, Boersch-Supan PH, Coomber F, Dennis EB, Dolman SJ, Dunn E, Hall J, Harrower C, Hatfield JH, Hawley J, Haysom K, Hughes J, Johns DG, Mathews F, McQuatters-Gollop A, Noble DG, Outhwaite CL, Pearce-Higgins JW, Pescott OL, Powney GD and Symes N (2019) The State of Nature 2019. The State of Nature partnership.

ⁱⁱⁱ IPCC, 2019: Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.- O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M. Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)].

^{iv} Colchester Declaration (2019). The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/projects/colchester-declaration>

^v Professor Sir John Lawton CBE FRS (Chair) (2010) Making Space for Nature: A review of England’s Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network Submitted to the Secretary of State, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 16 September 2010

^{vi} HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

^{vii} Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 5 NOVEMBER 2021

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Recommendation

1. The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the report; and
- b) Raise and discuss any issues arising.

Background

2. At its meeting on 23 April 2021 members of the JAC considered a paper on advising and supporting landowners and managers in protected landscapes. This included reference to a new programme of Defra grant funding called Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL). This programme forms part of the Agricultural Transition Plan (published on 30 November 2020), with funding available for all English National Parks and AONBs across 3 financial years, from 2021 – 2024.

Summary

- Information on the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/funding-for-farmers-in-protected-landscapes>
 - Guidance for applicants, tailored to the Malvern Hills AONB, can be found at: <https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Annex-F-Guidance-for-Applicants-211011.pdf>
3. Key points and developments regarding Farming in Protected Landscapes in the Malvern Hills AONB are as follows:
- **Timing** – the programme was launched by Government at the start of July 2021
 - **Funding** – a total budget of £216,309 was offered to the Malvern Hills AONB in 2021/22 with a provisional £153,738 indicated for 2022/23 and 2023/24. NB All Protected Landscapes have recently been given an opportunity to reprofile their budgets across the 3 years.
 - **Staffing** – the total budget includes funding for staff to provide advice and support to applicants and to help administer the programme. A Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer – Sarah Warden – has been

employed for 4 days a week in the Malvern Hills AONB, since 4 October 2021.

- **Grant assessment** – a local grant panel has been established to assess all grant applications. Its membership can be viewed in Table 1. The panel has met twice, once for induction and once to consider applications.

Table 1 – Local Grant Assessment Panel members

Name	Role and organisation	Expertise/reason for involvement
Paul Esrich	MHAONB Partnership Manager	Knowledge of AONB, local landowners, AONB Management Plan. Defra requires a local Protected Landscape rep on the panel.
Danny Newman (Chair)	Land Management Adviser, Natural England	Knowledge of the local patch and local owners and managers. Knowledge and experience of implementing agri-environment schemes. Defra requires a Natural England Officer on the panel.
Ian Horsley	Farmer, Suckley	Practises regenerative agriculture. One of a group/cluster of 10 landowners operating in the north of the AONB.
Janet Lomas	Recently retired farmer and land management advisor (edge of Malvern Wells, southern part of AONB)	Long experience of managing a large mixed farm on the edge of the AONB as well as providing land management advice to others as part of FWAG and in a freelance capacity.
Nick Packham,	Senior Engagement Officer, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust	Experience of working with/managing people and access in the countryside as well the interactions between people and nature.
Sarah Faulkner (or a named other)	Environment and Rural Affairs Adviser, National Farmers Union	Understanding of challenges and issues facing farmers, latest developments, opportunities, policies etc. Represents farming interest on the Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee.
Sarah Tunnicliffe	Senior National Rural and Landscape Adviser, Historic England	Extensive knowledge of the historic environment. Runs grant programmes for HE. Represents HE on all FiPL grant assessment panels.

- **Inquiries** – discussions about potential FiPL applications have taken place with approximately 20 landowners in and on the edge of the AONB.

- **Applications** – 6 applications have been submitted and approved (subject to conditions/modifications) by the grant assessment panel. This includes one application from the Malvern Hills AONB Unit itself. The total grant value of these applications is approximately £106,000. A summary of the applications can be viewed at Table 2.

Table 2 – FiPI projects (thus far) in 2021/22

Project applicant	Nature of project	Grant value
Malvern Hills Trust	New hedgerows, field trees and pond restoration	£11,231.80
Colwall Orchard Group (in conjunction with landowners)	New fruit trees in 6 old orchards	£8,520
Colwall Orchard Group	Equipment to manage COG land, to support advisory work and to help support participation and engagement at Colwall Village Garden	£22,414.38
Private individual	Farm diversification towards regenerative agriculture on a livestock holding	£30,000 (approx.)
Private individual	Restoration of an old orchard	£4260
Malvern Hills AONB Unit (in conjunction with 5 land owners)	Development of a Conservation Management Plan for Hope End Park	£30,000 (estimated)

County Council Contact Points

County Council: 01905 763763
 Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765
 Email: worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk

Specific Contact Points for this report

Sash Warden, Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer
 Tel: 01905 844686
 Email: swarden@worcestershire.gov.uk

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MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 5 NOVEMBER 2021

THE MALVERN HILLS AONB PLANNING REPORT 2020 - 2021

Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the report;**
- b) Raise and discuss any issues arising.**

Background

1. There are five Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) who are responsible for planning applications within the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (MHAONB): Herefordshire Council, Worcestershire County Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Malvern Hills District Council and the Forest of Dean District Council. It is these LPAs which create the Local Plans and policies that apply to the AONB and which determine planning permissions within the AONB.
2. National planning policy requires that conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty must be given great weight in AONBs. The AONB may also be a consideration in development proposals outside the AONB boundary, if the proposals might affect the AONB itself.
3. The AONB Management Plan (2019-24) is a material consideration in planning within the AONB and its setting, so planners should refer to the Management Plan and supporting guidance when making their decisions on both planning applications and policy formulation. Developers are also encouraged to refer to these documents when drawing up plans and designs.

The role of the AONB Unit in planning

4. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit contributes to the planning process in the following ways:
 - Assistance in preparing Local Plans with Local Planning Authorities including strategy and planning policy development.
 - Providing specialist advice to LPAs on individual planning applications, for example, those that are classified as major developments and/or have a significant effect on the natural beauty of the AONB. We also comment on individual development proposals where they would have an impact on the character of the AONB or where they might establish a precedent for future applications. NB The National Landscapes review of 2019 recommended that AONB Partnerships

become statutory consultees for planning applications within their boundaries and settings and a decision on this is awaited.

- Developing guidance on a range of planning related topics. AONB guidance amplifies the content of the Management Plan in relation to development in the AONB and so helps to deliver the plan.
- Supporting the preparation of Local Neighbourhood Plans (LNPs) which can contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

5. The AONB Unit, via the National Association for AONBs, also contributes to the national debate about planning; for example, by commenting on the development of planning white papers and proposed changes to the planning system.

6. Planning casework was identified through the Weekly Lists prepared by each of the Local Planning Authorities. Table 1 below summarises the planning applications identified as being within the AONB or relevant to the AONB setting for 2020 - 2021. The numbers in brackets represent numbers of applications recorded last year (19 – 20) for comparison purposes.

A summary of planning applications in the AONB 2020-21

Table 1 - Number of planning applications identified as within the AONB or its setting, between April 2020 and March 2021

Local Authority	No. of applications identified	In the AONB boundary	In the AONB setting
Malvern Hills District Council	111 (105)	80 (82)	32 (23)
Herefordshire Council	65 (133)	62 (109)	2 (24)
Forest of Dean District Council	7 (2)	4 (2)	3 (0)
Gloucestershire County Council	0 (0)	0	0
Worcestershire County Council	0 (1)	0 (0)	0 (1)
Totals	183 (241)	146 (193)	37 (48)

(2019-20 figures in brackets)

7. The total number of applications identified in 2020 - 21 was only slightly lower than in 2019-2020, this is similar to the previous year which also saw a small decrease in the number of applications identified. Within these figures there was a slight increase in the number of applications identified in the Malvern Hills District Council and a large decrease in the numbers for Herefordshire Council. The reason for such a large decrease in Herefordshire is unknown but is most likely to be linked to Covid related difficulties for applicants.

8. Each application was assessed by the AONB officer to determine whether any response was required. Approximately 42% (78) of all identified applications (184) were determined as needing to be fully evaluated. This is a lower figure than for 2019

- 20 (117) but, given fewer applications overall, is only a slightly lower percentage than the previous year (48%).

9. Responses were made either as a full written response or, increasingly, as a short comment on the relevant planning portal. The increased use of the planning portal for direct comments has proved more efficient since this can often be done whilst appraising applications. These less formal comments are used where the AONB wishes to comment on e.g. colour or materials, rather than on layout or more complicated design issues.

Table 2 - Number of responses made to planning applications April 2020 to March 2021

Local Authority	No. of written responses	In the AONB boundary	In the AONB setting	No. of objections
Malvern Hills District Council	40 (45)	32 (30)	8(10)	6 (4)
Herefordshire Council	32 (43)	31 (38)	1 (5)	5 (8)
Forest of Dean District Council	0 (1)	0 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Gloucestershire County Council	0(0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Worcestershire County Council	0 (1)	0 (0)	0 (1)	0 (0)
Totals	72 (90)	63 (74)	9 (16)	11 (12)

(2019-20 figures in brackets)

10. The number of written responses to planning applications decreased this year by 18 (20% decrease) when compared to last year's numbers, with 5 fewer responses submitted to Malvern Hill District Council, 11 less for Herefordshire Council, and no responses for the Forest of Dean District Council. The lower number of responses submitted ties in with the decrease in the numbers of planning applications being identified and assessed. However, although there has been a decrease in the number of written responses made, the number of objections made remain broadly similar to the previous year. The percentage of objections made is approximately 13.5% for both years.

11. The decrease in numbers of planning applications identified, received and assessed seems largely due to the Covid lockdowns which were in place for much of 2020 – 21. Some changes in the WCC planning team and in the way in which applications searches are carried out (now wholly by the AONB Unit) may have also affected the decisions on the type and, therefore, the number of applications requiring a response.

12. It is believed that issues with staffing and with processing applications across all the LPA's may have meant that in 2020 – 21 the listing of applications on the portals may have been somewhat 'ad-hoc' and many have been sent through by email, sometimes at short notice. This has made assessing them less efficient. It should be noted however that, despite working from home and around home schooling for much of this period, individual planning officers have been extremely helpful in

highlighting applications, in sharing their own opinions and information and in allowing extensions of time for responses.

Written responses & planning decisions

Table 3 – Summary statistics for planning decisions April 2020 to March 2021

Local Authority	No. of written responses	Approved/ Prior approval not required	Refused/ Prior approval/ permission required/ Appeal dismissed	Withdrawn	Pending/ Pre-app/ Determination declined etc.	% successful*	Compliance **
Malvern Hills District Council	40 (45)	27 (30)	9 (9)	2 (0)	2 (6)	80% (53%)	😊
Herefordshire Council	32 (43)	28 (25)	2 (11)	1 (3)	1 (4)	77% (34%)	😊
Forest of Dean District Council	0 (1)	0 (0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(100%)	N/A
Gloucestershire County Council	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	(0)	(0)	N/A	N/A
Worcestershire County Council	0 (1)	(1)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(100%)	N/A
Totals	72 (90)	55 (57)	10 (21)	(3)		79% (52%)	😊

(2019-20 figures in brackets)

* % of planning decisions which refused proposals due to their potential impact on the AONB and planning decisions which included full mitigation of potential impacts on the AONB

** < 50% = 😞, 50% - 75% = 😊, ≥ 75% = 😄

13. Table 3 shows that the comments made by the AONB Unit in response to applications have been effective. 79% of applications had decisions where proposals were refused or had conditions attached to mitigate the effect of potential impact in the AONB. Conditions often related to colour and materials, and it is these seemingly small details which cumulatively prove the biggest threat by cumulatively impacting on the AONB character. These figures demonstrate the very positive impact that the planning work is having and the need for it to continue to safeguard the Malvern Hills AONB.

Objections – impact of AONB comments

14. Out of the 72 responses to planning proposals the AONB Unit made last year eleven of them were objections. Last year only 2 of those objections made by the AONB unit resulted in a refusal of the application, 8 were approved despite the AONB's objection and 1 is still pending. In one instance the AONB unit made an objection which was later removed following requested amendments to the scheme.

Planning decisions

15. As detailed above, 79% of planning decisions where the AONB responded complied with the AONB Unit's advice; this is a 27% increase from the previous year and demonstrates the value that this service is providing. The upsurge in figures could be attributed to better relationships with the LPA's and a better understanding of what can and can't be achieved through the planning process.

16. Although these figures are good, it should also be noted that of the 11 objections that were made only 2 of those resulted in a refusal. As a result some more work may need to be undertaken to examine why the AONB advice was not taken on board on those occasions where the unit has made objections but approval was still granted.

17. As detailed earlier the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have had an impact on the numbers of applications that were submitted in this period and it will be useful to note if this is still perceived to have an impact on next year's figures. In addition, there has been a change in the way searches are undertaken, leading to a more focused approach to assessment of the planning applications that need a written response.

18. Last year it was suggested that the AONB Unit achieves greater benefits by focusing on a smaller number of applications where there are significant concerns over impacts on the AONB's special qualities, rather than on a larger number of minor applications. This also suggests that there is a need for the AONB Unit's continuing involvement in planning matters as well as further discussion/liason with local planning officers. This is what we can see demonstrated in this year's report, which clearly shows the impact this approach is having.

Overarching trends

19. The following trends have been identified in the last year:

Materials and colours

20. As with previous years, on many occasions conditions in relation to materials and colours suggested by the AONB Unit have been included within approvals. Whilst this guarantees some control over choices, the conditions very rarely include a requirement for a specific material or a specific colour, merely advising that the applicant should liaise with the AONB. This means that there was often a need for additional AONB Unit involvement during the discharge of conditions stage. There were also a small number of cases when the AONB unit suggested an alternative colour and these suggestions were not applied to conditions.

21. The following application details a positive result after discussion about the use of colour on an agricultural storage building for an equine facility. (20/02061/FUL Tundridge Stud, Suckley, Worcester, WR6 5DR) Here the AONB unit asked the applicant to change the colour of the steel cladding from Juniper Green to a dark grey. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) responded "*As confirmed by the AONB Unit Juniper Green can often stand out in the landscape during the winter months and if the tall hedging that would screen the building was reduced it must be ensured that the colour of the building would recede into the landscape when viewed from public vantage points. Following these discussions, a revised plan has been*

submitted which now specifies that the roofing will be finished in anthracite grey and the wall cladding will be finished in olive green both of a leather grain effect. It was established as part of the discussions that a suitable dark grey could not be found for the wall covering and it was decided that Olive Green would be a more muted green as opposed to the vivid Juniper Green and would recede into the browns and greens of the winter season landscape". This is seen as a positive outcome for the AONB as it offers greater certainty over the final choices for external materials for the proposed structure. The AONB Partnership Unit would welcome similar conditions on other decision notices where practical.

22. An example of a less satisfactory outcome was for a large area of industrial storage units (P201130/F Land adjacent to Little London, Gloucester Road, Ledbury Herefordshire, HR8 2JB) This is another example of the AONB Unit requesting that a more suitable colour rather than juniper green is used, this being the 'go to' colour for most countryside barns and sheds. On this occasion the LPA did not take on this suggestion and stated the following *"the presence of a number of buildings already on site of a similar appearance means that the suggested building colours, by the applicant, are appropriate in this instance"*.

23. In response to the on-going issue of the use of appropriate colour in developments within the AONB the AONB Unit hopes to commission an easy-to-use checklist for planning officers, providing information which they can use in determining and advising on applications.

Agricultural buildings/Permitted development applications

24. As noted in previous reports the AONB's comments are not always considered when considering applications for prior approval for agricultural buildings. Badly designed and inappropriately coloured agricultural buildings can have a disproportionate effect on the rural landscape. Of particular concern was a large barn (Ref P203187/PA7 The Brays, Mathon WR135PS) erected in a location highly visible from the AONB and featuring a very light coloured roof. This application site was close to another development which was also the subject of complaints from the AONB regarding the lack of consultation and suitable conditions on approval. The officer report states, *'In regard to the siting of the proposed building, although it is detached from an established farming unit, in this case the location is considered relatively secluded in the corner of a field with the benefit of established trees to the west which shield the site.'* There was no mention of the highly sensitive visual receptors on a large part of the Malvern Hills, from which this site is visible. This example prompted further correspondence with Herefordshire planners about agricultural buildings.

25. In a second example planning permission was given for a large barn at Woodfield Farm, Ledbury (Ref 200945) which was to be coloured Juniper Green with light grey cement roofing. The application was approved but no mention was made of colour despite the AONB making comments about this.

26. Although the communication regarding Permitted development applications seems to have improved there is still too much disregard of the need for buildings to 'fit' within the wider AONB landscape. In response to this issue the AONB Unit intends to commission a 'go-to' checklist with tips for suggesting colour and layout for barns and other rural buildings.



New barn, Mathon

The visual effect of agricultural buildings in the landscape will be considered at a training session for MHDC Councillors in 21-22.

Equine developments

27. The number of equine developments continues to increase, which is a concern in some areas of the AONB where the additional stables, fencing etc. has a large impact on both the appearance of the AONB and the quality of the pasture. Menages continue to be a popular addition to smallholdings and bring with them fencing, non-grass surfaces and often lighting. One example of a successful outcome is a large menage at Grounds Farm, Hancocks Lane, Welland (Ref 21/00142/FUL) where negotiations following pre-app objections by the AONB unit resulted in the menage being re-aligned to better fit with landscape character and with a traditional orchard adjacent being replanted.

28. As a result of this increase in equine applications work began on revising the Guidance on keeping horses in the landscape, increasing the information about planning issues and exploring the idea of equine management plans as part of planning permissions.

Affordable housing

29. The AONB Unit recognizes that a shortage of affordable housing can be an issue in National Landscapes and Policy BDP3 of the AONB Management Plan states that priority should be given to affordable housing. Best practice within other protected landscapes suggests that, where planning permission is granted, 100% affordable housing should be the starting point and that 75% should be the absolute minimum, with at least 50% of any affordable housing that is provided being affordable in perpetuity (e.g., social-rented housing).

30. The AONB Unit expressed their concerns over the affordable housing provision land at Former Bottling Plant, Primeswell Close, Colwall, located within the AONB. This application was for the erection of one apartment block comprising 23 no. retirement apartments and a carer's apartment; one apartment block comprising 9 no. retirement apartments; and associated works. The proposal does not appear to be in line with the indicative 40% of affordable housing target set out in Policy H1 of the Herefordshire Local Plan. We understand the need for the project to be affordable/profitable for the applicant but would encourage exploration of the potential for affordable housing, including social housing, on this site. This application is still pending so it is not yet known whether the AONB Units comments will be taken on board.

31. The AONB has referred to this best practice in its response to the SWDP review, asking that this is included, along with a requirement for housing need figures to reflect the parish in which housing is built rather than drawing on a much wider area, as has been the case in some recent developments.

Complex cases

32. As pressure grows for development land within the AONB the number of more complex planning applications rises. These cases often require a large input from both planners and the AONB Unit, both liaising with applicants and making formal comments, suggestions or objections. One such example is the application for building 9 flats within the Malvern Wells Conservation Area and AONB at the top the of Wyche Road, Malvern. (Ref 21/00617/FUL 60 Old Wyche Road) The AONB has been involved in extensive discussions about this site, resulting in an eventual re-design by the applicants and a new revised application in March 2020. The planning negotiations continue and the application has still not been resolved. This type of intensive input looks set to increase.

Specialist advice

33. On some occasions it is necessary to involve more specialist consultants to provide both comments on applications and advice to the AONB. Examples of this include pre-app advice provided by AONB officers on the siting and appearance of solar panels at Baston Hall, Crews Hill, Alfrick (Ref 21/00194/PA), with help from other National AONB officers, where the applicant decided not to proceed with a solar array next to an area crossed with footpaths.

34. Detailed advice on materials and colour was given to an applicant to allow the satisfactory discharge of a planning condition for work to a historic property at Colwall (Ref P200248/FH) using advice provided by consultants. This property will feature in forthcoming 'good practice' notes. Specialist advice was also provided for a more modern development and adjacent to the Croft, Wellington Heath (P200681/F condition 7) allowing the new developments to blend in more successfully.

35. Technical specialist advice was provided to the AONB to assist with making a written submission to the Appeal for planning permission for homes North of Ledbury Viaduct. This was advice about the impact of the development upon the tranquillity of

the AONB. Unfortunately, the appeal by the developer was upheld by the planning inspector.

36. There is a limited pool of consultants available to carry out this work and one aim for the future must be to expand this, particularly as the same consultants are also in demand from applicants.

Pre-app advice

37. There has been an increase in the demand for pre-application advice and many applicants are approaching the AONB directly, given the backlog of planning work in local authorities.

38. We welcome discussion with applicants, which can often be constructive, but this short-cutting of the planning process has implications for both workload and effectiveness of the planning process. If this continues the AONB may wish to consider formalising the pre-app process and charging for advice.

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MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

5 NOVEMBER 2021

INFORMATION ITEMS

**Management Plan ref.
(abridged)**

LP3 Promote positive change to landowners, managers, developers etc.

Project

Facilitation Fund/supporting owners and managers

The work of the Malvern Hills Facilitation Group (financially supported by the Rural Payments Agency) has been extended for an extra year. An external Facilitator (Charlotte Vincent) has been brought in to support the group which currently has 16 members in the southern part of the AONB covering 4600ha of land. Events this year have included a visit to a farm near Leominster to look at regenerative agriculture in practice and advice on how to restore species richness to meadows.

In the north of the AONB a group of 12 landowners covering c.1000ha of land has been established. In July this year 18 local farmers attended an event to look at species-rich grassland, how to get it and how to manage it.

BP4 Improve knowledge and understanding of the AONB's biodiversity

Grassland survey

A botanist visited 13 different land holdings in the summer to survey areas of grassland and record their species richness. At the same time soil samples were taken. The information combined is of use to those who may be considering opportunities to enhance the diversity of their fields for nature.

HP1 Conserve and enhance the historic and cultural environment of the AONB

Hope End Park Conservation Management Plan

A specification has been produced to develop a Conservation Management Plan for Hope End Park registered park and garden. Quotes are being invited to undertake the work.

HP3 Promote greater public understanding and engagement with the historic environment of the AONB

Barton Court History Talks

Having published the book, George Demidowicz gave a talk on the book that was so over subscribed that we had to run it twice.

Unearthing Mathon's History

James Barnes, a local amateur field archaeologist, with great expertise in detecting items underground and enhancing the images of the finds, gave a talk about his finds in Mathon.

RP4 Developments that are likely to lead to an increase in negative recreational effects in an area should contribute to the costs of mitigating and managing these effects

IP1 Raise awareness of being in the Malvern Hills AONB and the significance of the designation

TP2 Provide a Quality public realm with good access and facilities that attract tourists

IP3 Raise awareness of the MHAONB and the significance of its designation

Vision 2040: people are connected emotionally, and spiritually to the area.

Recreational impacts study

A study to better understand visitor origins and recreational impacts on the Malvern Hills SSSI has been completed. It is hoped that the conclusions will provide part of the evidence base for the South Worcestershire Development Plan review.

On-line arts project

Supported by a small grant from the Sustainable Development Fund, local theatre company, Re-Action theatre, have been working throughout lockdown to produce an on-line film about living in the AONB. Able and less able participants have been supported to get outside and experience the area and to then record their thoughts and feelings about nature and the landscape. The short film will be available to view on the MHAONB website from mid-April.

Visitor Map Update and Reprint.

Our popular Visitor Map and Guide is due an update: it was last updated in 2016, and a reprint: the 10,000 we had printed have all but gone.

Website Revamp

Our current website is in need of updating; that's both the content and operating system. A contract has just been let for a redesign that will subsequently allow the MHAONB to edit the website and employ all types of digital media easily to promote our cause.

Movement in the Landscape

Enjoying the outdoors is not all about bobble hats and cycling helmets. We believe we are the first protected landscape to try a movement in the landscape project. Over the summer Sebastian and Cydney have been filmed telling the story of love and the landscape after covid. The short film is currently being edited. It will then be shown at a public event, and attendees will be coached in expressive responses to the landscape by Aphrodite, the choreographer.

Recommendation

Members of the JAC are requested to note this information report and contact the AONB Unit if they wish to be involved in any consultations or to receive further information on any of these agenda items.

Contact Points

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