



# Agenda

## Malvern Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee

**Friday, 8 April 2022, 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, 8 April 2022, 10.00 am,**

#### **Members**

#### **Elected Members:**

John Raine (Chairman)	Malvern Hills District Council
Chris Atkins	Malven 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
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**

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1	<b>Apologies and Substitutes</b>	
2	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>	
3	<b>Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2021</b>	
4	<b>Government response to the National Landscapes Review</b>	1 - 18

Agenda produced and published by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP

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

Date of Issue: Wednesday, 23 March 2022

Item No	Subject	Page No
	<p>To receive a report from Paul Esrich, AONB Partnership Manager.</p> <p>a) To note the Government's response to the National Landscapes Review</p> <p>b) To note the position of the National Association for AONBs in relation to this response</p> <p>c) To discuss and approve the proposed position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC to the Government's response to the National Landscapes Review with any amendments</p>	
5	<p><b>A Nature Recovery Plan for the Malvern Hills AONB</b></p> <p>To receive a report from Paul Esrich, AONB Partnership Manager. To note and approve the plan.</p>	19 - 56
6	<p><b>The Malvern Hills Facilitation Fund</b></p> <p>To receive a report from Charlotte Vincent, Group Facilitator. To note the report and to raise and discuss any issues arising.</p>	57 - 62
7	<p><b>Farming in Protected Landscapes</b></p> <p>To receive a report from Sash Warden, Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer. To note the report and raise and discuss any issues arising.</p>	63 - 66
8	<p><b>Statement of Commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action</b></p> <p>To receive a paper from Cllr John Raine, Chair of the JAC. To discuss and provide feedback on the draft Statement of Commitment.</p>	67 - 72
9	<p><b>Information Items</b></p> <p>To note the items for information.</p>	73 - 76
10	<p><b>Verbal Reports from Partners</b></p>	
11	<p><b>Dates of Future Meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 November 2022</li> </ul>	
	<p>If you have any other contributions that you would like to bring to the meeting, please contact Paul Esrich tel: 01905 845057.</p>	

## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 8 APRIL 2022**

### **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPES REVIEW**

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#### **Recommendation**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- a) Note the Government's response to the National Landscapes Review;**
- b) Note the position of the National Association for AONBs in relation to this response; and**
- c) Discuss and approve the proposed position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC to the Government's response to the National Landscapes Review with any amendments**

#### **Background**

1. In May 2018 the government asked for an independent review into whether or not the protections for National Parks and Areas for Outstanding Natural Beauty are still fit for purpose. In particular, the review sought to identify what might be done better, what changes would help. and whether the definitions and systems in place were still valid. The review looked at:
  - the existing statutory purposes for National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they are being met
  - the alignment of these purposes with the goals set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan
  - the case for extension or creation of new designated areas
  - how to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets
  - the financing of National Parks and AONBs
  - how to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing designations
  - how to build on the existing 8-point plan for National Parks and connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing
  - how well National Parks and AONBs support communities
  - the process of designating National Parks and AONBs and extending boundary areas, with a view to improving and expediting the process.

- the process of designating National Parks and AONBs and extending boundary areas, with a view to improving and expediting the process.
2. On 7 December 2018 the Malvern Hills AONB JAC discussed and agreed a response to the Landscapes Review Panel's call for evidence, see: [8 MHAONB JAC draft response to Glover review 2.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#). The Panel's Final Report came back in September 2019 (this was discussed by the JAC on 8th November 2019) and included 27 wide-ranging proposals in 5 key areas:
    - a. Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty
    - b. Landscapes for everyone
    - c. Living in Landscapes
    - d. More Special Places
    - e. New Ways of Working.
  3. On 15 January 2022 the Government issued its long-awaited response to those proposals. Implementing some aspects of the Government's response to the review will require changes to legislation, subject to securing parliamentary time. The Government is therefore seeking public views on support for these proposed legislative changes, and their potential effects on different groups and interests. It is also interested to hear any wider views on other aspects of its response to the review. The consultation closes on 9 April 2022.

### **Position of the National Association for AONBs**

4. Proposal 24 of the Glover Review recommended that: '*AONBs be strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes*'. This Proposal forms the crux of the position of the National Association for AONBs (the body which provides a voice for the UK family of 46 AONBs).

**Purposes:** extension and revision of AONB purposes to reflect contemporary priorities for AONB, natural beauty with a strengthened link to nature recovery on a landscape scale and the importance of cultural heritage. A second purpose to promote understanding and enjoyment of the area.

**Powers:** strengthening the 'duty of regard' linked to strengthening the status of AONB management plan, a formal role in planning and development management.

**Resources:** a doubling of core funding over this parliament (three years), leading to a dynamic and progressive formula which reflects ambition and future needs.

**Governance:** robust minimum governance standards which provide sufficient independence to guarantee the integrity of the designation, while being dynamic and more representative of the wider UK population.

**National Landscapes:** ready to engage in a discussion on renaming where this reflects the step change above.

### **Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC**

5. An outline response of the position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC is appended for the consideration of the Committee. The publication of the consultation is welcomed and we look forward to working with Government and using this opportunity to strengthen AONBs as exemplars of 21<sup>st</sup> century designated landscapes.
  
6. AONB teams have a proven track record of collaborative working with partners, local communities, landowners and business to keep these precious landscapes special. Yet this government consultation fully acknowledges the completely inadequate current funding for managing Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Overall core funding to AONBs has been slashed by 36% over the past 10 years. Government funding between all 34 AONBs in England totals just £6m per year, significantly less than the annual budget for the South Downs National Park. An uplift will be essential to achieve all that is being asked of us in this report, and to deliver the ambition for more beautiful, species-rich and accessible landscapes set out by Julian Glover and his team.

### **Supporting documents**

Landscapes Review, Final Report, September 2019

[DEFRA - Landscapes Review - Final Report 2019 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Government's response to the Landscapes Review, 15 January 2022:

[Landscapes review \(National Parks and AONBs\): government response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Appendix 1: Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC

### County Council Contact Points

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### Specific Contact Points for this report

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**Government Response to the Landscapes Review, 15 January 2022**

**Appendix 1: Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC**

In considering the Government’s response we have taken into consideration:

- Potential beneficial effects
- Burdens
- Unintended consequences
- Potential tensions / conflicts
- 

Whilst there is some good news, overall, there is little detail and some recommendations from the Glover Review are missing.

Chapter numbers, headings within chapters and page numbers refer to the sequence set out in the Government’s response. Consultation questions are also included where relevant.

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Chapter 1: A more coherent national network	
Government’s response ( <i>and consultation Q</i> )	Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC
Strengthened AONBs (page 7)  Action needs to be a priority in AONBs in order to unlock their full potential in achieving our vision alongside our National Parks	Despite having the same status as National Parks and experiencing many of the same challenges and issues and public expectations, AONBs lack recognition, strength in law and policy, and support in resources. We strongly welcome, therefore, the Government’s acknowledgement that action needs to be a priority in AONBs. Levelling up is urgently needed.
AONBs are re-named as ‘National Landscapes’.	We can see benefits in the places that AONBs represent being re-branded ‘National Landscapes’ to manage public expectations and provide consistent messaging. Any rebranding, however, should allow flexibility within the AONB family to incorporate local individuality and values that resonates with local communities.  Any transition to National Landscapes must be properly resourced to achieve the intended benefits.

<p>Strategic direction (pages 7 and 8)</p> <p>A new National Landscapes Partnership is established for our existing partners to work together more effectively at a national level and provide stronger governance.</p>	<p>We can see merits in closer collaboration between National Parks, AONBs and National Trails as a 'national landscapes family' for a number of reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared vision for our protected landscapes</li> <li>• Consistent messaging</li> <li>• Building capacity</li> <li>• Stronger and united advocacy</li> <li>• Co-ordinated and joined up programme delivery</li> <li>• Shared resources</li> </ul> <p>The principle of stronger national leadership is also welcomed. However, the Government needs to be aware of, and sensitive to, potential tensions between any moves to centralisation, standardisation, conformity and uniformity, so losing the individuality of AONB Partnerships and their strength in being rooted in their local communities, with their unique identities and local sense of place. Differences should be recognised and retained as they add flexibility and strength.</p> <p>A new National Landscapes Partnership would need to be funded through new resources, and clearly defined relationships with National Parks England and the National Association for AONBs.</p> <p>Details on the purpose and functions of the new Partnership are lacking, as is clarification on how these will complement, differ from or replace, the current responsibilities of Natural England as statutory advisor on England's landscape.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to the relationship of the Partnership with the Defra family: Forestry England, Natural England, Environment Agency as well as Historic England, National Parks England and the NAAONB.</p>
<p>Clearer strategic direction for protected landscapes will be provided through a new National Landscape Strategy</p>	<p>Landscape has dropped off the radar in recent years and an updated and renewed focus on landscape at national level is welcomed. It could provide a helpful framework for protected landscapes but needs to be brought up to date to support delivery of wider environmental ambitions within the context of landscape character and condition.</p>
<p>Natural England's role as statutory advisor on England's landscape will be reinvigorated to</p>	<p>NE will need to be adequately resourced with the required specialist expertise to undertake this work, but the proposed stronger statutory remit around landscape generally and protected landscapes is welcomed.</p>

support national landscapes and advise government.	
A unified mission (page 8)  The statutory purposes of AONBs and National Parks are more closely aligned.	We welcome the closer alignment of the statutory purposes of AONBs and National Parks as part of the 'levelling up' between the two protected landscapes. However, greater consistency in how these areas are protected and managed will only be achieved through more equitable powers and resources.
<b>Chapter 2: Nature and climate</b>	
<b>Government's response</b>	<b>Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC</b>
The Nature Recovery Network and 30 by 30 (pages 9-10)  Protected Landscapes could play an important role in the delivery of the Nature Recovery Network and achieving the Government's role to protect 30% of our land for nature by 2030.	AONBs are ambitious to deliver more for nature and climate change and to demonstrate leadership.  The scale of such ambition needs to be matched by equivalent duties, powers, plans, monitoring, resources and governance to deliver them.  There is a fundamental misconception that protected landscapes have control and influence over the use and management of the land within their designations; whereas in fact this is not the case.
Protected landscapes support responsible authorities in preparing and delivering Local Nature Recovery Strategies	Designated landscape bodies should have a formal role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies as an essential stakeholder. Management Plans should take account of the priorities identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategies and there should be direct 'read-across' between the two. Regular monitoring and reporting will be key to evaluating delivery of the Management Plan's SMART targets and designated landscapes' contributions towards 30 by 30 and other environmental ambitions. A Nature Recovery Plan for the Malvern Hills AONB has recently been finalised. The relationship between this document and Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be an important one.
A stronger mission for nature recovery (pages 10-11)  The current statutory purpose to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty' to be strengthened to actively recover nature in protected landscapes. A revised purpose should be more specific with regards to nature outcomes and explicitly mention	AONBs are recognised as Category V Protected Areas by the IUCN: "areas managed mainly for their landscape and recreation, where the interaction of people and place over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity".  'Natural beauty' needs to be retained as the core purpose for AONBs as it is an enduring concept which embraces the landscape in its entirety (landscape quality, scenic quality, natural heritage, cultural heritage, relative wildness and relative

<p>'biodiversity'. The principle of natural capital should also be included.</p> <p><i>Q6 Should a strengthened first purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 2?</i></p> <p><i>7. Which other priorities should be reflected in a strengthened first purpose e.g. climate, cultural heritage?</i></p>	<p>tranquility). Alternatively, all these aspects would need to be included and referred to in some way. Either way, yes, the addition of more explicit terms around nature recovery would be welcomed.</p> <p>It is important that 'restore' is added to the first purpose, after all, protected landscapes cannot conserve or enhance something that doesn't currently exist.</p> <p>To ensure landscapes remain relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we must consider the key drivers of change, e.g. climate change, so consideration should be given to including climate in revised purposes or duties.</p> <p>AONBs play an important role in nature conservation, and this should be emphasised with more weight and focus being given in their Management Plans to the flora and fauna of these landscapes. AONBs and National Parks play a valuable role in delivering the Lawton principles of 'bigger, better and more, well connected.' They should have the ability to work outside of their boundaries in order to deliver these principles.</p> <p>We would question the use of 'natural capital' since such terminology can change over time. Terms must be those that will stand the test of time and be meaningful to all.</p>
<p>Setting ambition and monitoring progress (page 11)</p> <p>Improved monitoring and reporting in protected landscapes will help us to understand the state of nature and prioritise action towards desired environmental outcomes.</p>	<p>Only those sections of designated landscapes (rather than their entirety) that are well-managed and protected for nature, and are in good or improving ecological condition, as demonstrated by regular monitoring, should be counted towards the Government's target to protect at least 30% of the UK for nature by 2030.</p> <p>Protected landscapes are funded by public money so it is only right and proper that performance against management plan activities is monitored and reported in standard ways.</p> <p>Protected landscapes need access on a regular and periodic basis to a range of environmental, social and economic data. With the exception of MEOPL data (Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes) which is collected and distributed by Natural England, each protected landscape currently collects its own data independently. Much of this data is similar across Protected Landscapes, and independent collection duplicates effort and wastes resources. Centralised and co-</p>

	<p>ordinated collection and distribution of data should be a function for the new National Landscapes Partnership.</p>
<p>Agricultural transition (page 12)</p> <p>Consider options for how the special status of protected landscapes can be reflected in environmental land management schemes' design and delivery.</p> <p><i>Q8. Do you support any of the following options as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes? Tick all that apply.</i></p> <p><i>9. Do you have any views or supporting evidence you would like to input as we develop the role of protected landscapes in the new environmental land management schemes?</i></p>	<p>The new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme must be ambitious and sufficiently resourced to drive good land management for nature, climate and people in designated landscapes and across the countryside.</p> <p>Protected Landscapes should be given a pro-active role to promote take-up of the new ELM scheme in their area so that they become the trusted partner with local farming communities and have greater ability to influence targets for landscape and nature recovery. ELM needs to link to ambitions set within the Local Nature Recovery Strategies.</p> <p><b>✓ <i>Designing the environmental land management schemes in a way that works for all farmers and land managers, including the specific circumstances for those in protected landscapes, recognising that farmers in these areas are well-placed to deliver on our environmental priorities.</i></b></p> <p>Agri-environment schemes have been essential to the delivery of the purposes of designation and Management Plan priorities, particularly in the past when well targeted. ELM and other agricultural programmes will be essential, but need to be designed to take into account the purposes of designation, the special qualities of the protected landscape and the needs of the farmers and land managers who often face additional constraints within AONBs and National Parks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Using Local Nature Recovery Strategies to identify projects or habitats within protected landscapes.</i></b></li> </ul> <p>AONB Management Plans identify the priorities for the area including habitats and species. These plans have been tested through several review cycles, often balancing competing priorities against the primary purpose. Through the Colchester Declaration, AONBs have, or are preparing, Nature Recovery Plans (the NRP for the Malvern Hills AONB has recently been finalised). These plans will inform and sit alongside AONB Management Plans. LNRS should be used to identify projects and habitats. However,</p>

	<p>resulting proposals need to comply with the AONB Management Plan and associated guidance:</p> <p>✓ <b>Monitoring the effectiveness and uptake of the new environmental land management schemes in protected landscapes. Using this to inform whether further interventions are needed to ensure we are on track for wider nature recovery ambitions.</b></p> <p>However, ELM also needs to deliver for natural beauty, heritage and access within protected landscapes.</p> <p>✓ <b>Creating a clear role for protected landscape organisations in the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Our recent LNRS consultation specifically asks for views on the role of different organisations in the preparation of LNRSs, including protected landscapes.</b></p> <p>✓ <b>Building on FiPL, empowering protected landscapes to support decision-making and delivery against agreed priorities, including through dedicated project coordinators and advisers.</b></p>
Chapter 3: People and place	
Government's response	Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC
<p>Landscapes for everyone (page 13)</p> <p>Establish a national co-ordination function for the new National Landscapes Partnership to enhance and expand community engagement.</p> <p>Support or reward landowners for enhanced access to their land.</p> <p>Develop opportunities across government to strengthen the role of protected landscapes to support health and wellbeing by working with the Probation Service's community payback scheme;</p>	<p>Improving access to protected landscapes and addressing the current inequality in those accessing the landscape, is seen as a priority. Whilst this needs balancing with managing visitor pressure, we are extremely supportive of ensuring our protected landscapes are accessible to all. Note that this could bring additional burdens to highway / access authorities and additional resources are required for any meaningful improvements.</p> <p>The proposals are welcomed. However, further detail is required to be able to assess their impacts and consequences. Furthermore, with no commitment to additional funding, AONBs will be unable to deliver the long-term engagement activities required to increase the diversity of people using the landscape.</p>

<p>support capacity building in schools to engage with nature; deliver green social prescribing provision.</p> <p>Seek ways to increase the number of rangers engaging with people in protected landscapes.</p>	
<p>A stronger mission for connecting people and places (page 14)</p> <p>A strengthened secondary purpose for National Park Authorities, also extended to AONBs.  <i>Q10 Should AONBs have a second purpose relating to connecting people and places, equivalent to that of National Parks?</i></p> <p><i>Q11 Should a strengthened second purpose of protected landscapes follow the proposals set out in Chapter 3 to improve connections to all parts of society with our protected landscapes?</i></p> <p><i>Q12. Are there any other priorities that should be reflected in a strengthened second purpose?</i></p>	<p>As stated above, we welcome the closer alignment of the statutory purposes of AONBs and National Parks as part of the ‘levelling up’ between the two protected landscapes. However, greater consistency in how these areas are protected and managed will only be achieved through more equitable powers and resources.</p> <p>It is absolutely critical that national landscapes take a far more active role in helping to support communities, improve the nation’s health and wellbeing, and benefit society. The current second purpose is woefully ‘passive’ and we welcome the proposed amendments for a secondary purpose.</p> <p>If AONBs are to gain a second purpose for public enjoyment and understanding, there would need to be a clear policy statement that, where conflicts occur between conserving and enhancing natural beauty and recreation, natural beauty should take priority (i.e., the ‘Sandford Principle’). If this purpose is also supported by strengthened duties, then further clarity on expectations and potentially an additional burdens assessment would be required. For example, would there be additional expectations for management of public rights of way? – If so, would this sit with the PL body or the Highway Authority? Either way, additional funding would be required.</p> <p>The ‘core’ area of the Malvern Hills experiences very significant recreational pressure. Solutions to managing the recreational pressures in our landscape and balancing this with other priorities and objectives (for example, by providing alternative greenspace elsewhere away from the AONB to ease pressures) may not always sit easily with a new second purpose, to promote public enjoyment and understanding of the special qualities.</p>

<p>Supporting local communities (page 14)</p> <p>The Government does not propose to introduce a new third statutory purpose for Protected Landscapes to foster the economic and community vitality of their areas. Instead, the Government proposes to support its lead partners to discharge their existing duties effectively and consistently through government guidance and best practice, and by supporting programmes such as FiPL.</p>	<p>AONB Partnerships cannot solve all of the issues affecting rural communities in their areas and we note that these issues are often a result of rurality rather than being specific to protected landscapes. We therefore support the Government's position not to impose a third statutory purpose.</p>
<p>Sustainable transport (page 15)</p> <p>Local Authorities should consider opportunities to encourage more sustainable travel as part of their Local Transport Plans</p>	<p>A very recent visitor survey (2021) revealed that over 80% of the visitors to the Malvern Hills travel by car. A shuttle bus service from local communities around the AONB (the Hills Hopper) had to be abandoned a few years ago due to the unaffordable cost. We support the development of new sustainable ways to visit the area, but additional resources will be required to facilitate and support such services.</p>
<p>Open access land (page 15)</p> <p>Review open access maps to clarify rights and inform any further consideration of expanding open access rights.</p> <p>Explore the barriers that may exist to the provision of permissive access by landowners and seek to remedy these.</p>	<p>Land owned and managed by the Malvern Hills Trust in the AONB (and a small number of other areas) are classed as open access land where the public has a right of pedestrian access.</p> <p>Protected Landscapes need to develop and nurture trusted relationships with farmers and landowners. Any further expansion of open access rights on privately owned land may have the unfortunate consequence of alienating these key stakeholders and needs careful consideration. Greater encouragement for improved access through permissive routes may lead to better outcomes.</p> <p>Careful management would also be required to ensure potential conflicts between nature recovery and open access can be addressed.</p>
<p>National Trails (page 15)</p> <p>The new National Trails charity to be included as a member of the new National Landscapes Partnership.</p>	<p>Malvern Hills AONB does not include any National Trails. However, generally this would seem a positive step.</p>



<p>Sustainable tourism (page 16)</p> <p>Representatives from the Protected Landscapes to help inform the preparation of a Sustainable Tourism Plan.</p> <p>Increase the range of enforcement powers available to National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority to help manage visitor pressures.</p> <p>Explore options for protecting green lanes from damaging vehicular uses.</p> <p><i>14. Should we give National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority and local highway authorities additional powers to restrict recreational motor vehicle use on unsealed routes?</i></p> <p><i>16. Should we legislate to restrict the use of motor vehicles on unsealed unclassified roads for recreational use, subject to appropriate exemptions?</i></p>	<p>AONBs receive similar numbers of visitors (sometimes far higher) and the same visitor pressures as National Parks. Any consideration of strengthening enforcement powers also needs to apply to the local authorities that comprise AONBs.</p> <p>Happily, Malvern Hills AONB does not tend to suffer from damage from off-road motor vehicles. However, we are aware of the considerable problems this causes for other protected landscapes and would support restrictions for their use.</p>
<p>Planning reform (page 17 – 19)</p> <p>Seek views on how AONB Teams can achieve better outcomes through the plan-making process.</p> <p><i>18. What roles should AONBs teams play in the plan-making process to achieve better outcomes?</i></p>	<p>The Malvern Hills AONB does not suffer from the same sorts of housing pressure as some other AONBs. However, there is pressure for development both within the AONB and in the setting of the AONB which in our case is often highly visible due to the juxtaposition of high and low land. We would like to see a stronger role for AONBs and greater flexibility so AONBs can take a greater role in local decisions. Greater engagement – and expectation of being able to seriously influence – the development of Local Plans, NDPs etc – is necessary.</p>

<p><i>Q19 AONB Teams be granted statutory consultee status?</i></p> <p>Continue to monitor the use of permitted development rights in protected landscapes and identify future opportunities to review their use.</p>	<p>Any planning reforms must lead to improved planning decisions and outcomes for development within AONBs and their settings. The views of those with Statutory consultee status are given weight in planning decisions and, on balance, we support the proposal for AONB Teams also to enjoy this status. However, the workload implications for AONB staff should not be underestimated and we would only support this move on the basis of additional resources to enable us to discharge it effectively.</p> <p>In relation to permitted development rights we have a concern that these can lead to inappropriate/poor development in protected landscapes (we have examples in the Malvern Hills AONB). We would be keen for Government to quickly put in place a monitoring regime which would allow AONB Teams to feed in relevant examples so that these rights can be reviewed.</p> <p>A final point is to consider the interpretation of the wording of para. 172 of the NPPF with reference to NPs and AONBs. The addition of the comment that the scale and extent of development in these areas should be limited, is welcomed, but the reference to “major development” remains. The review should consider how this can be interpreted/defined. In small, highly visible areas, additional development, including small groups of houses can have an adverse impact and establish a precedent for development which can lead to a cumulative adverse impact on landscape and scenic beauty.</p>
<p>Affordable housing (page 19)</p> <p>The Government does not support the Glover Review recommendation for a new, publicly funded housing association specifically for protected landscapes, and will, instead, progress alternative means to deliver suitable housing for local communities in rural areas.</p>	<p>Providing affordable housing is very important in national landscapes where house prices may be significantly higher than the local averages. We are unsure what the right mechanism is for meeting this need, for example, a dedicated association or the use of Local Plan policies. However, this issue does need to be addressed. The definition of affordability could also usefully be re-examined in the context of national landscapes.</p>
<p>Chapter 4: Supporting local delivery</p>	

Government's response	Position of the Malvern Hills AONB JAC
<p>Local governance (page 20-22) Q21</p> <p>Minor reform of National Park Authorities and Conservation Boards such as size, diversity and appointments.</p> <p>Natural England to produce clear governance principles, processes, and structures for AONB that local authorities would be expected to follow, linked to Defra grant agreements.</p>	<p>We welcome the intention to provide clarity through guidance but are disappointed in the largely limited proposals for AONB Partnerships. However, we recognise that that they are local authority-based so there is less opportunity to influence. Greater input from NE to provide consistency etc. would help.</p> <p>Those governing National Parks and AONBs should have significant experience, expertise and passion across their statutory purposes, especially to address the nature and climate emergency.</p> <p>National support, oversight and scrutiny should be provided to facilitate a 'race to the top' on achieving targets and delivering transformative action in designated landscapes for nature, climate and people.</p>
<p>Management plans (page 22)</p> <p>Proposed National Landscapes strategy will provide strategic direction.</p> <p>Natural England will produce an outcomes framework, provide annual reporting to track progress against the outcomes, and advise on where further action is needed.</p>	<p>Management Plans are important tools for designated landscape bodies to help deliver for nature, climate and people. However, they must be impactful and strengthened to contain specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets and actions to tackle the nature and climate emergency and to connect all parts of society to designated landscapes.</p> <p>To ensure the delivery of the Management Plan, relevant bodies should be given a duty to act jointly to support its implementation (not just its development) and to report on how they are achieving this. Designated landscape bodies should also be required to coordinate and report on their overall implementation.</p>
<p>A clearer role for public bodies (page 22)</p>	<p>The existing duty on all relevant bodies (including designated landscape bodies, Natural England, Forestry Commission, local authorities and utility providers) in relation to the statutory purposes of designated landscapes should be strengthened from 'have regard' to 'further' the amended statutory purposes of designated landscapes.</p>

<p><i>Q.22 The wording of due regard to be strengthened so that that they are given greater weight when exercising public functions.</i></p> <p><i>23. Should statutory duties be made clearer with regards to the role of public bodies in preparing and implementing management plans?</i></p>	<p>In addition, all relevant bodies should be more accountable and report (e.g., through Management Plans) on how they are supporting the delivery of the statutory purposes. This should include policies, decisions and the management of public landholdings that lie within protected landscapes.</p> <p>As above, to ensure the delivery of the Management Plan, relevant bodies should be given a duty to act jointly to support its implementation (not just its development) and report on how they are achieving this. Furthermore, designated landscape bodies should be required to coordinate and report on their overall implementation.</p>
<p>Sustainable financing (page 23-24)</p> <p>Scale of the ambition matched by equivalent resources, particularly in AONBs.</p> <p>Grant allocation model should also be reviewed to ensure transparency</p> <p>Private and blended financing models for nature recovery and nature-based solutions.</p> <p>A dedicated national finance team, part of a proposed national landscape partnership, to generate additional income through green finance initiatives and joint funding bids and coordinate a pipeline of investment-ready projects.</p> <p>The national landscapes partnership should publish a commercial strategy within a year of being established.</p>	<p>We welcome the focus on AONBs but are disappointed that the Government's proposals fall short of Glover's recommendations.</p> <p>Designated landscapes must have sufficient resources and robust governance to deliver their purposes and Management Plans, and any new responsibilities and burdens arising out of the review should be fully funded immediately.</p> <p>The Government should commit to increased and long-term funding for designated landscape bodies and delivery partners. For AONBs, where the greatest need for additional resources lies, the Glover proposal to double their modest funding from £6.7 million to £13.4 million should be implemented without further delay. This must be done by increasing the overall funding available for designated landscapes to ensure it does not lead to any reduction in funding available for National Parks.</p> <p>Any new funding should not require an increase in local authority funding, but lock-in at least current levels</p> <p>The proposed new funding model, with more diverse sources of funding, such as private finance for nature-based solutions and a role for the new landscapes partnership to harness commercial and sponsorship opportunities, does not provide protected landscapes with the certainty they need to plan ahead. Private investment will be important in the future, but this must not be seen as a replacement for sufficient, reliable core funding which can properly support the work of AONB Teams. Private</p>

	investors (even if they are forthcoming) will want to see a return for their investment on the ground – they will not want to provide core funding as that support is invisible.
Q.24 General power of competence (page 24-25)  Broaden the legal competence of National Park authorities and the Broads Authority to a more general power, similar to that of local authorities	No comments.



## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 8 APRIL 2022**

### **A NATURE RECOVERY PLAN FOR THE MALVERN HILLS AONB**

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#### **Recommendation**

**The Committee is recommended to note and approve the plan.**

#### **Background**

1. 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. Then, a year later, at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2021, members received a presentation from Robert Deane of Rural Focus Ltd and considered a draft Nature Recovery Plan. A range of issues in relation to the draft Plan were raised and discussed.

#### **Summary**

2. Following two earlier phases of stakeholder engagement, formal consultation on a draft Nature Recovery Plan took place between 10<sup>th</sup> January and 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022 with an additional two weeks given to those who needed it. 21 responses were received from a variety of members of the public, landowners, community groups, NGOs, local authorities and government agencies.
3. Many of the comments received were of a relatively minor nature. Comments made and the AONB Unit's responses to them can be viewed at:  
<https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/>
4. The Plan was updated with revisions in light of the comments received and the final version of the Nature Recovery Plan is attached (also available on the AONB website as above). This document will now be used to help inform the work of the AONB Partnership, including in the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. It is expected that this plan will be integrated into the AONB Management Plan when the latter is reviewed in 2023.

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# Nature Recovery Plan



March 2022

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) encompasses large areas of nature-rich habitat and is an important regional reservoir of biodiversity. However, it has experienced many of the same declines in nature and faces the same threats as those across England as a whole.

**This Nature Recovery Plan aims to halt and reverse the loss of nature in the AONB,** providing an inspiring prospectus of what is possible and practical solutions for achieving it. The Plan is for everyone who has influence over, and benefits from, nature in the Malvern Hills AONB – including public and voluntary bodies, farmers and landowners, local residents and visitors.

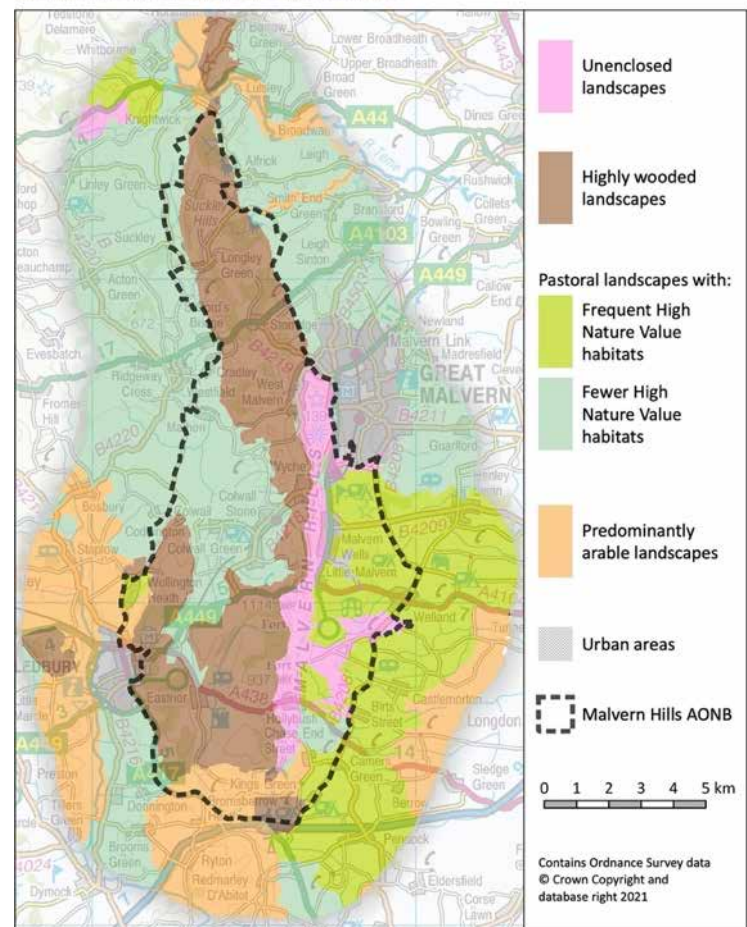
This Plan covers the 105 km<sup>2</sup> of the AONB and also takes account of its wider setting and connectivity, defined by the 3km-wide area around its boundary. The Plan area includes a wealth of natural habitats and features, including a long geological history, ancient woodlands, flower-rich meadows, traditional orchards and parkland. These areas provide a range of important benefits to society ('ecosystem services') and they will face significant challenges and opportunities in coming years. These include climate change, the impacts of development, the agricultural policy transition and support for local food production.

**Our strategy for nature** is driven by five guiding principles:

1. Ensuring better condition of what we have
2. Creating bigger and more joined-up habitats
3. Harnessing community support and action
4. Making steady and concerted progress
5. Recognising that the past isn't necessarily a guide to the future



*The Nature Recovery Plan area, showing simplified landscape zones used to identify land management opportunities*



The Plan identifies **three priorities for action:**

- A. The management of land for nature in the AONB.** This centres on 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 five key landscape zones.
- B. Connections between people and nature in the AONB.** This highlights 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. The importance of the AONB in the Regional Nature Network.** This emphasises 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.

**The Delivery Action Plan** describes a set of short-term actions for the AONB Unit and its partners.

The Plan concludes with a review of **monitoring indicators** for tracking progress with nature recovery.

## 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.<sup>i</sup> The 2019 UK wide State of Nature report<sup>ii</sup> gives a sobering picture of the UK's wildlife. The climate crisis is disrupting natural systems, shifting climatic zones and exacerbating land degradation<sup>iii</sup>, increasing pressure on nature.

Despite its outstanding landscape, the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has not escaped these changes. Although it retains large areas of important wildlife 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 plan for what is possible, and practical solutions for achieving it. It recognises and takes account of the other special qualities of the AONB including its historic environment.

This is a Plan for everyone who has influence over, and benefits from, nature in the Malvern Hills AONB. It seeks to guide the land management decisions of the many private landowners in the AONB and the policies and incentives provided by public bodies and environmental organisations. It also aims to influence the actions of local residents and visitors as consumers of what the countryside provides and as stewards of nature in their own gardens and neighbourhoods.

### AONBs leading nature recovery

In the light of the climate and biodiversity crises, AONBs across the country made a collective statement on nature in 2019, known as the Colchester Declaration.<sup>iv</sup> It states that AONBs should be places of rich, diverse and abundant wildlife. It also reaffirms the importance of Natural Beauty and its intrinsic value which means so much to people. It places nature recovery at the centre of the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. 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."<sup>v</sup> The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan

aims to deliver this recommendation by "Developing a Nature Recovery Network to protect and restore wildlife, and provide opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside."<sup>vi</sup> 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 represent our biodiversity. This and the soils and underlying geology of the Malvern Hills AONB, 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 (often referred to as 'ecosystem services'). These include 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 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.<sup>vii</sup> These actions and interactions between nature and people within the AONB has resulted in the distinctive character of the landscape.

This plan does not advocate 're-wilding' the AONB or wholesale change of the current landscape framework. This is because many of the special places that exist here – including ancient, unenclosed commons, traditional orchards, parklands and semi-natural

woodlands – can be rich in wildlife as well as culture. However, for nature to flourish, it will be important that land management practices that can conserve the nature-rich landscapes of the AONB, such as grazing, coppicing, and orchard management<sup>vii</sup> are reinstated and/or able to continue. Recovering nature across the AONB also requires targeted change in the spaces between these special places.

The close relationship between nature and landscape character means that throughout the Plan 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.

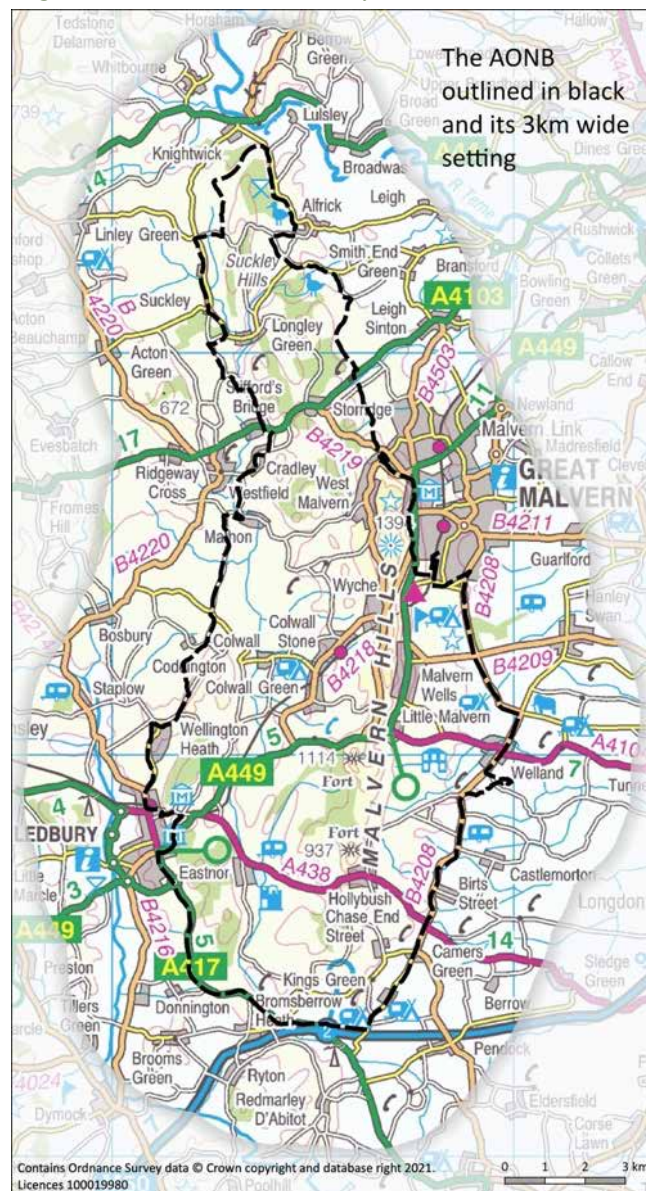
### What is the area covered by this Plan?

This Plan is centred on the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area of some 105 km<sup>2</sup>. 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.

### Relationship with other plans and policies

This Plan builds on a number of existing documents including the AONB Management Plan (2019-24) and Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan. There are many new initiatives under development that will also 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 new documents are developed, there will be a need to review and revise the strategy and actions in this Plan. In time, it is expected that this Nature Recovery Plan will form an integral part of the statutory five-year management plan for the AONB.

Figure 2: The Nature Recovery Plan area



### How this document can be used

The audience for this plan will be broad. It should be of interest to those who plan for nature strategically, farmers and land managers when deciding on the future of their land as well as interest groups, community groups and communities themselves who are looking to see how they can make the MHAONB a better place for nature.

This Plan will in turn influence and help implement many of the new policies and national initiatives that have emerged from the 25 Year Environment Plan. Biodiversity Net Gain, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the Environmental Land Management Schemes will all require nature recovery actions to be prioritised and coordinated. This Plan prioritises actions across a range of spatial scales from the regional network to local land management opportunities.

## THE NATURE OF THE AONB

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

A good understanding of nature starts with its geology. This section uses the geology to highlight the variation in nature in different parts of the Plan area.

### The Malvern Hills

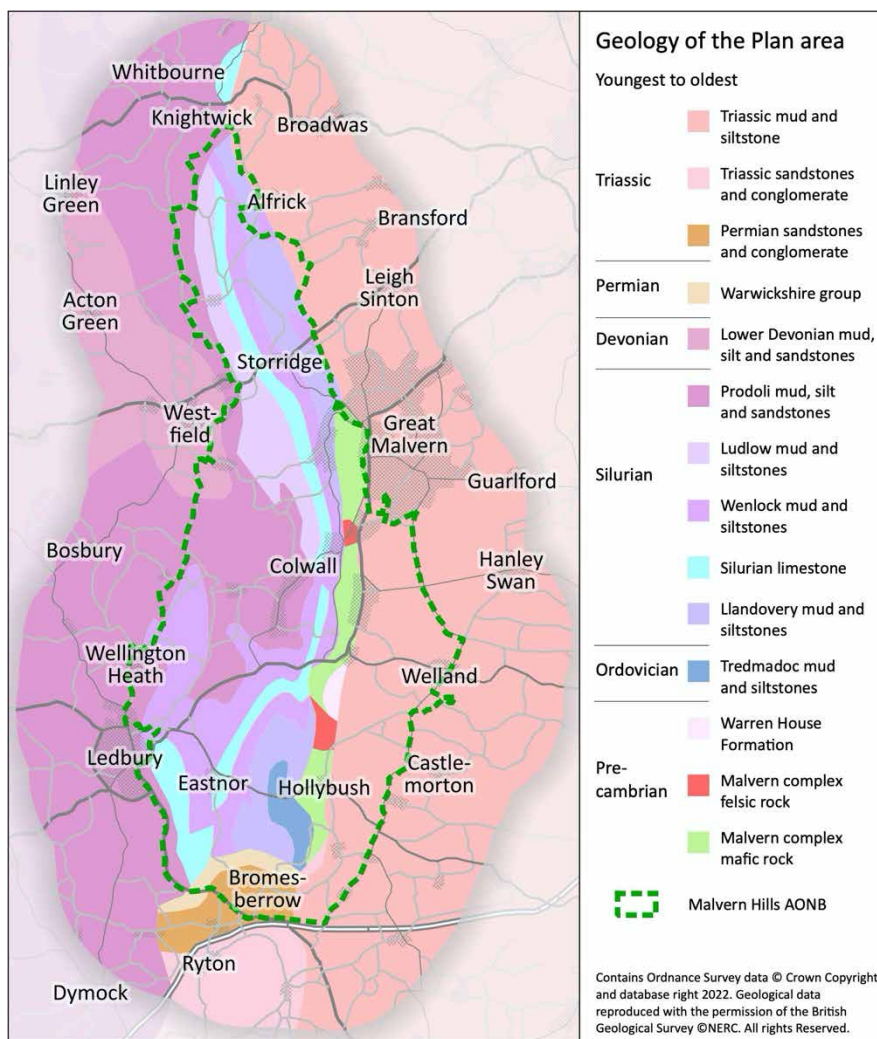
The Hills themselves are made from some of the oldest rocks that can be seen in England, dating from the pre-Cambrian period some 680 million years ago. These hard igneous and metamorphic rocks, extending eight miles from North Hill to Chase End Hill, have produced the steeply sided ridge that dominates the landscape and provides panoramic views in all directions.

The hardness of these ancient rocks has resulted in the thin and acid soil on the top of the Hills, supporting acid grassland and wildflowers such as heath bedstraw, sheep's sorrel and harebell. Rarities include upright chickweed and spring cinquefoil. A few areas of heathland, including heather and bilberry, occur such as around the Worcestershire Beacon. In pockets of less acid soil, flowers such as wild thyme and lady's bedstraw occur. Birds that breed, or have bred, on the open grassland include the meadow pipit, wheatear and skylark.



Wheatear

© Anne Burgess



On the more sheltered sides of the Hills where deeper soils have accumulated there is bracken, scrub and woodland. These support birds such as whitethroat, willow warbler, tree pipit and sparrowhawk. Under the Hills, a disused tunnel is home to one of the largest known winter colonies of the lesser horseshoe bat in England.

Water that is stored in the fractures of these ancient rocks emerges from the many springs and wells around Malvern. Malvern water has been valued for its purity and constancy since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century and this led to the development of Great Malvern as a Spa town with its 'water cure' during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There are a number of large disused quarries around the sides of the Hills, such as Gullet and Tank Quarries. These allow the geological stratigraphy to be seen and support unusual plants such as fenugreek, buck's-horn plantain, carline thistle and Smith's pepperwort.

## West and north of the Hills

Moving on through geological time, during the Silurian period, the Malvern Hills marked the eastern edge of a shallow sea that extended across what is now Herefordshire and Wales. The rocks to the west of the Hills were laid down in this sea, with subsequent geological folding producing bands of limestone, mudstones and siltstones, often containing marine fossils.



*Favosites fossil near Park Wood*

© Peter Creed

The bands of limestone, being formed of harder rocks and less agriculturally productive soils, create the wooded ridges to the west of the Hills, from Ankerdine Hill in the north, along the Suckley Hills to Eastnor in the south. This area provides an important ecological connection for lime-loving plants and insects between the limestone outcrops of the Cotswolds and Wye Valley/South Wales.

Most of the woodlands in this area are ancient (probably wooded continuously since the ice age) and many, such as Hay Wood (Ankerdine), Halesend Wood (Storridge) and Ridgeway Wood (Eastnor) have a rich flora and fauna, especially where the understorey has a long history of being coppiced.

Notable woodland plants include the nationally rare large-leaved lime, and flowers such as herb-Paris and bird's nest orchid. The ancient woodlands are an important habitat for animals such as dormice. Where grasslands on the limestone have not been agriculturally improved, they contain a particularly rich flora including carline thistle, autumn gentian, fairy flax and dyer's greenweed. Uncommon birds found in this area include the redstart and lesser-spotted woodpecker.

Wood pasture and parkland, in which ancient trees support many birds insects and lichens, are another important features of the area to the west of the Hills, including significant areas at Eastnor Castle and Hope End. This side of the Hills also supports a dense

network of large hedgerows, water courses and shelterbelts, amidst generally small fields, creating an ancient (pre-enclosure) farmed landscape that can be rich in nature.

To the north, the river Teme is a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its aquatic species and geomorphology. Whippets Brook is home to one of the last populations of white-clawed crayfish in Worcestershire.

Grazed orchards, grown particularly for cider apples, are a significant landscape feature and wildlife habitat, particularly in the Teme Valley in the north of the area and through parishes such as Colwall. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century almost every farm had its own orchards, often placed close to the farmhouse producing cider and eating apples for their own use and for sale.

A survey undertaken in the 1930s shows over 2,400 ha of orchards in the Plan area, covering 8% of the land. The area of traditional grazed orchards has now reduced to 470 ha and the remaining areas are some of our most important places for nature, supporting wildlife including wild daffodils (which have their national heartland in this area) and uncommon birds such as woodpeckers and bullfinches.

## South of the Hills

To the south of the Hills around Bromsberrow is an area of sandstone rocks formed during a period of arid desert and sand dunes during the Permian period. The sandstones have created deep rich soils, giving rise to the most productive agricultural land (grades 1 and 2) found in the Plan area. Amongst the mostly arable fields there are a number of traditional orchards, including perry pears and cherries.



*Traditional orchard, Mathon*

© Derek Harper (cc-by-sa/2.0)

## East of the Hills

Later still in geological time, during the Triassic period, the eastern side of the Hills was an area of broad mud-flats and wide rivers which produced heavy Mercia mudstone soils across much of the Severn Vale. Much more recently, during the Ice Age, a layer of clay, silt, sand and gravel was deposited on both sides of the Hills. These have been reshaped on the eastern side by the River Severn, leaving terraces of free draining gravels over the heavier subsoils.

At the base of the Hills, many of these gravel terraces support poor soils and have remained as unenclosed commons (Castlemorton, Hollybed and Malvern Commons), with common rights to use the land held in local properties. These commons include a matrix of habitats, from dry grassland to wetlands and scrub. One of the characteristic features of these commons are the Black Poplar trees which are nationally rare but occur frequently here.



*The distinctive red catkins of the Black Poplar*

© Bob Embleton (cc-by-sa/2.0)

Many of the small streams that rise on this side of the Hills, flowing east to the Severn, support important aquatic and wetland species. Whippetts Brook

Much of the farmland to the east of the Hills is a relatively modern landscape, established through parliamentary enclosure in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Farmland consists mainly of improved pasture and arable divided by narrow trimmed hedges or fences, with relatively little woodland.

A special feature of the area is the scattering of traditional hay meadows which include plants such as the green-winged orchid, yellow rattle, and adder's tongue fern, all of which rely on the late cutting of hay to set seed.



*Large white butterfly feeding on yellow rattle*

© Linda Bailey (cc-by-sa/2.0)

### Habitats of Principal Importance found in the AONB\*

- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland meadows
- Traditional orchards
- Wood pasture and parkland
- Rivers and streams
- Hedgerows and hedgerow trees
- Wet woodland
- Ponds

### Species of Principal Importance found in the AONB\*

- Noble chafer
- High brown fritillary butterfly
- Grayling butterfly
- Bullfinch
- Skylark
- Song thrush
- Adder
- Great crested newt
- Dormouse
- Polecat
- Bats: lesser horseshoe, Barbastelle, soprano pipistrelle and Bechstein's

\* as defined under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Source: Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan, 2019-24.

## THE STATE OF NATURE IN THE AONB

In recent decades, the AONB and the area surrounding it have been subject to the same pressures and declines in nature as those across Britain as a whole. National data shows that 97% of wildflower meadows were lost between the 1930s and 1984 and 90% of lowland ponds were lost in the 20th Century<sup>ii</sup>.

In the area covered by this Plan, 80% of the traditional orchards present in the 1930s have gone, unenclosed heathland has declined by 30% and almost all the flower rich meadows have been replaced by agriculturally improved pasture and arable, the latter having increased significantly. Many of the remaining areas of habitat have become isolated, disconnecting their small populations of plants and animals.

The area of woodland in the Plan area has increased significantly in the last 80 years. This is partly due to the self-seeding of woodland onto steep ground on the edges of the Hills (leading to a loss of acid grassland which is a valuable habitat) and partly due to new planting on farmland in areas such as Longley Green, Mathon, Beggar's Ash and Bromesberrow Heath.

The lack of comparable data makes a precise figure on the increased woodland difficult to obtain. The map on the following page shows change between the 1930s and present day (note that the 1930s map does not show narrow belts of woodland but these are shown in the 'Now' map). An overall increase in woodland of around 40% is likely.

### Designated sites of national importance

The AONB contains many areas that are considered of national importance for their biodiversity or earth science which are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There are 16 SSSIs lying partly or wholly within the AONB. These represent 10.9% of its total area (11.45 square kms)<sup>vii</sup> which is a density that is far higher than in most of the surrounding counties.

Assessments by Natural England show that half of the area of these SSSIs is in favourable condition for its biodiversity and most of the other half is in unfavourable but recovering condition. 'Recovering' condition indicates that suitable management is in place but this does not guarantee success.

### Sites of local importance

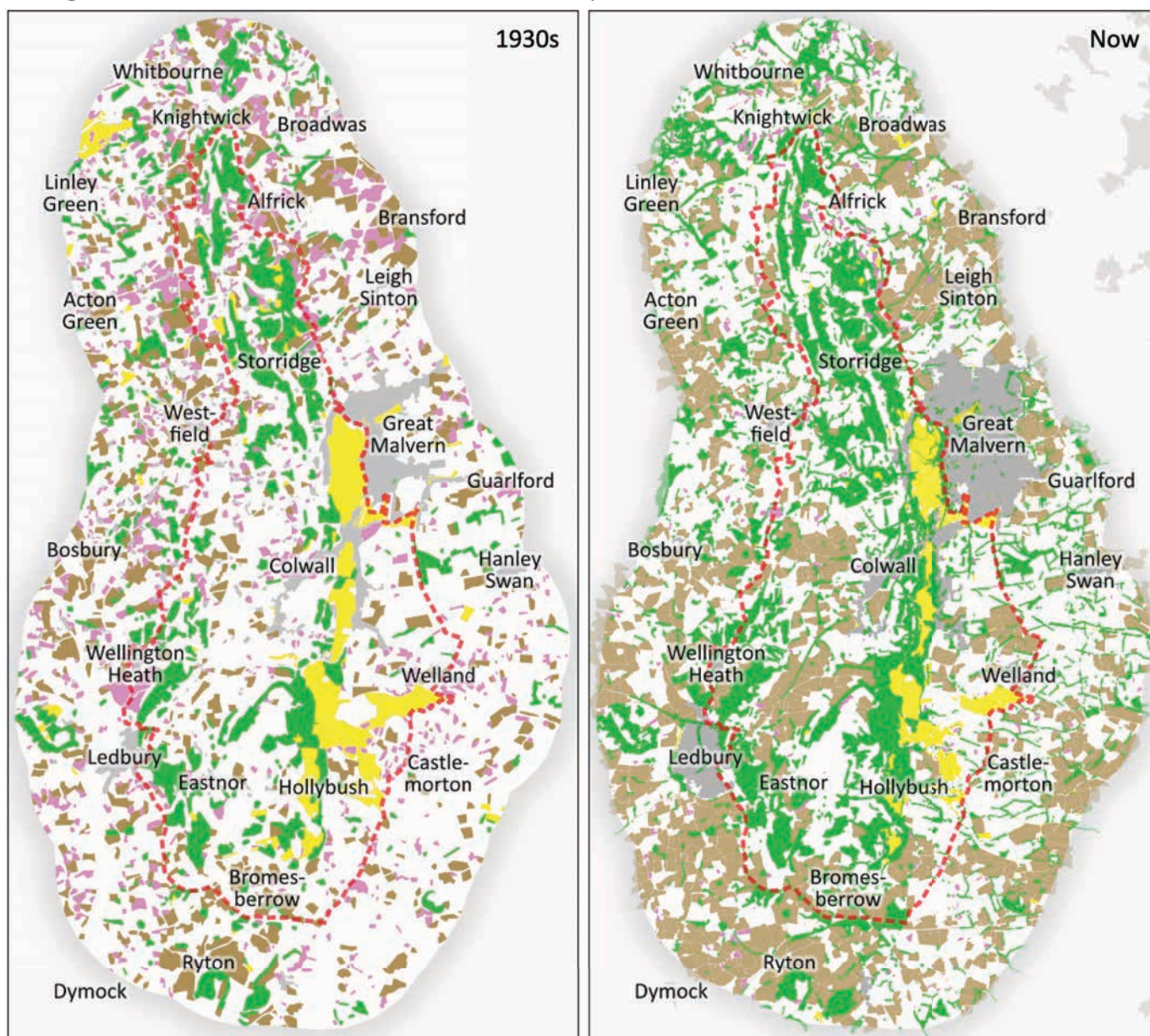
Areas that are considered of at least county importance for their biodiversity and geology are designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and Local Geological Sites (LGS).

These sites occur more frequently across the landscape than nationally designated sites and are often of equal quality to SSSI's if managed favourably. Local Wildlife Sites are key elements of the ecological network spanning the AONB and their restoration, management and integration into a more biodiverse landscape will be an important consideration in delivering the plan objectives.





## Change in land cover between the 1930s and the present



Land cover types shown on the map (Blank areas consist mainly of agricultural grassland)



0 1 2 3 4 5 km

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2022

### Sources for these maps:

The 1930s map uses The 1930s Land Utilisation Survey of Britain. This was carried out under the leadership of Professor L. Dudley Stamp. The surveying was done largely by volunteers including schoolchildren who shaded maps of the fields in their surrounding area. The data have been digitised for this Plan from scans of the original maps © L. Dudley Stamp/Geographical Publications Ltd, Audrey N. Clark, Environment Agency/DEFRA and Great Britain Historical GIS.

The current map is based on available land use and habitat data undertaken by the Gloucestershire Centre for Environmental Records. Sources include the National Forestry Inventory (FC), Priority Habitats (NE), Land Cover Map 2019 (UKCEH) and local habitat surveys (WCC and HC).

## 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. This is the result of continuous cropping and the use of agrochemicals. Soils under permanent pasture are in better condition but may be locally compacted.

Many farmers are now adopting soil management and grazing practices which will improve soil health.

- **Water and wetlands.** The Environment Agency measures the status of waterbodies based on a range of measures including their ecological, chemical and physical status.

The latest (2019) data for the rivers and streams in the Plan area shows that their condition is not good, largely as a result of diffuse pollution and sediment run-off. The majority (81%) of monitored stretches of river are in moderate condition), 14% in poor condition (the Bushley and Longdon Brooks flowing into the Severn and the Sapey Brook flowing into the Teme) and 8% were in the worst, bad, condition (the Suckley Brook).

Climate change is adding to the problems facing rivers and wetlands, causing more frequent and intense flooding and also low summer flows which exacerbate problems for aquatic life.

- **Woodlands.** It is estimated that only 55% of woodland in the Malvern Hills AONB is actively managed.<sup>viii</sup> Many tree species 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.
- **Habitat diversity.** Variety in the structure and species composition of common habitats such as farmed grassland, hedgerows and water-courses is crucial in providing food and shelter for wildlife.

Loss of this diversity and of key habitats such as traditional orchards and meadows is one of the main reasons for the declines in diversity and abundance of once common groups such as birds, small mammals and moths.

## Current and future pressures

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

### *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. In the AONB habitats most susceptible to harm are the rivers and streams, heathland and wet woods<sup>ix</sup>. Examples of the impacts on nature include pest and diseases (ash dieback being a new and 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 is likely to be a reduction in the tranquillity that can be experienced in the AONB (for instance dark night skies) and growing numbers of recreational users, putting pressure on its natural environment. Changes to air quality, arising from traffic, industry and also agriculture, may also occur. 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).

### *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 availability of labour; promotion of low carbon / net zero farming techniques; pests and diseases (including bovine TB); and changes to farming export markets.

## 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 adjustments to the new policies and funding mechanisms that can 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 influence landowners and their advisors in their delivery of nature and other public goods (Figure 1). The Plan should be a key influence on ELM delivery and a source of guidance to farmers and their advisers.

### *Biodiversity Net Gain requirements*

The introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will require developers to create new habitats for those removed by land use change. This Plan can start to guide and co-ordinate where these new habitats can be located to provide greatest benefits to nature, local communities and the other special qualities of the AONB.

The AONB aspires 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 that put a tradable value on carbon in soils or vegetation and in other 'nature-based solutions'. These private investment markets may be of interest to some landowners. This Plan could have a role in shaping use of these markets, ensuring synergies with landscape and nature recovery.

## *Local Food Markets*

As noted in the AONB Management Plan, the area has a relatively affluent 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 Plan.



### *Community interest*

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). This Plan 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 on the area. The challenge is to shape this change so that nature can recover from past harm and adapt to the future. Nature can help us address many of the pressing issues facing society such as poor health and climate change ('nature-based solutions') and we need to give nature the space to do so.

We may need to alter our perceptions of treasured landscapes, 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) as the climate crisis takes hold, will help us evaluate what is special about our cherished landscapes and reimagine them for the future.

A particular challenge for the MHAONB is to balance this need for change with the purpose of the AONB designation which is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. The 'special qualities' of the area justify its designation and identify the characteristics that should be conserved and enhanced.

Some of MHAONB's special qualities relate to its distinct and dramatic geology that will be less sensitive to change from sources such as the climate or changing agricultural practices. However, other special qualities particularly those that relate to land use, wildlife and how people use and relate to the AONB are very likely to be susceptible to change.

It will be important to understand whether or which of the AONB's special qualities are 'non-negotiable' (their loss fundamentally threatening its status) and which others might be reimaged or adapted for the future.

There will always be trade offs between nature and people but through enhancing ecosystem services a new more balanced future for this landscape can be found.



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## OUR STRATEGY FOR NATURE

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 priorities to shape the way land is used and managed for nature. Each of these operates at a different scale.

### Part 1 - Guiding principles

The Malvern Hills AONB is fundamentally a ‘cultural’ landscape where nature and people have evolved together over thousands of years, particularly through the actions of farming and forestry. The following principles recognise that nature recovery must work with the functions and fabric of the landscape, and through the owners, managers and users of the land, many of whose livelihoods depend on it.

#### *1. Ensuring better condition of what we have*

Protecting and conserving the nature we have is the starting point for helping it to recover. Every effort should be made to limit further loss of habitats, deterioration of soils and water resources, and harm from invasive species and other external pressures. Reinstating and maintaining sympathetic management practices such as extensive livestock grazing, woodland coppicing and restoration of species-richness in grasslands can be a challenge but is essential to nature recovery in the area, supporting diversity and abundance of wildlife.

#### *2. Creating bigger, more & more joined-up habitats*

Strengthening our ecological networks is the best way to overcome the past fragmentation of habitats and give nature greater resilience to threats like climate change. A planned spatial approach, expanding and buffering existing core habitats and creating corridors for wildlife between them, will be most effective. A draft ecological network map for the AONB is shown later in this Plan (page 18).

#### *3. Harnessing community support and action*

This Plan is for everyone who lives and works in and around the AONB. 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. Figure 3 shows how the Plan provides the means to co-ordinate appropriate actions in the area using the resources and guidance from national and local policies and schemes.

Figure 3. How the Plan joins top-down policies to bottom-up 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 interest can be a positive influence on both the policy making process and encouraging the uptake of new ideas in land management, industry and commerce. An example is changing public attitudes to road verge management which is now driving change in practice by highways authorities and others.

#### *4. Making steady and concerted progress*

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 everyone has in 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. All need to play their part if nature recovery is to become a reality.

#### *5. The past isn’t necessarily 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 ensuring that the qualities that make the AONB special are revalued or reimagined. Our landscapes will need to be dynamic and reevaluating them for the future is essential if they are to survive as special places.

## Part 2 - Priorities for nature

On the following pages, the Nature Recovery Plan advocates three key sets of Priorities for nature in the AONB and the area it serves. These are as follows:

### *Priority A. The management of land for nature in the AONB*

This considers the 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 five key landscape zones.

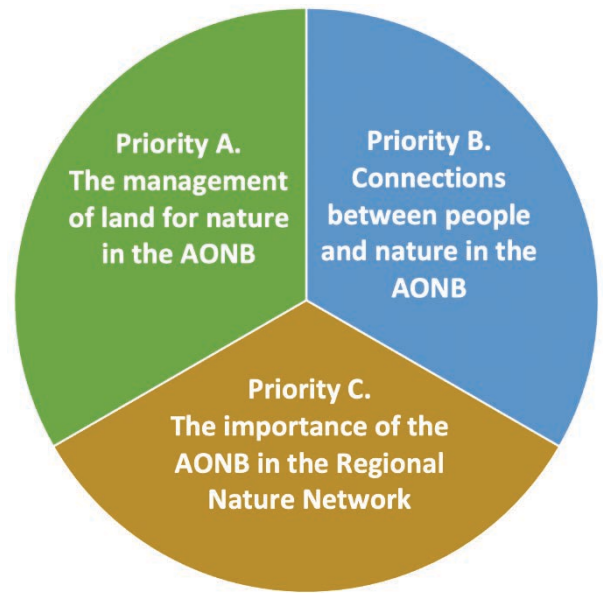
A map showing the connectivity of different types of habitat across the whole area is also used to suggest how the nature network can best be reinforced.

### *Priority B. Connections between people and nature in the AONB*

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.

### *Priority C. The importance of the AONB in 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.



In contrast to the five Principles on the previous page (which are about 'how' the Plan will be achieved), these three Priorities focus on the outcomes or long term results that it seeks to deliver.

Each of these Priorities operates at a different scale. Priority A focusses on land management in the AONB and its immediate setting. Priority B looks to the way people living in and visiting the AONB value and care for its nature. Priority C focusses on the contribution that the AONB makes to nature at a regional scale.



## Priority A. The management of land for nature in the AONB

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 will involve activity with and by individual farmers and landowners to develop appropriate action for nature on their land and also collectively across landholdings to strength the nature networks.

Land management opportunities are suggested for five key landscapes which are mapped in Figure 5. These areas are based on the landscape character typology for the AONB and its surrounding areas (See Appendix 2 for details).

### A starting place for dialogue

The suggested land management opportunities are intended as a starting place for discussion with landowners and managers. Not all will be applicable, and within each landscape area, it may be that special features and relatively uncommon land holdings require

a different approach informed by available evidence. The priorities focus mainly on maintaining and enhancing existing nature value and landscape character, but they should not preclude more radical land use change where this is justified by adaptation and mitigation for climate change or the incentives that will be offered through Defra’s Environmental Land Management schemes.

### Planning for nature between habitats ...

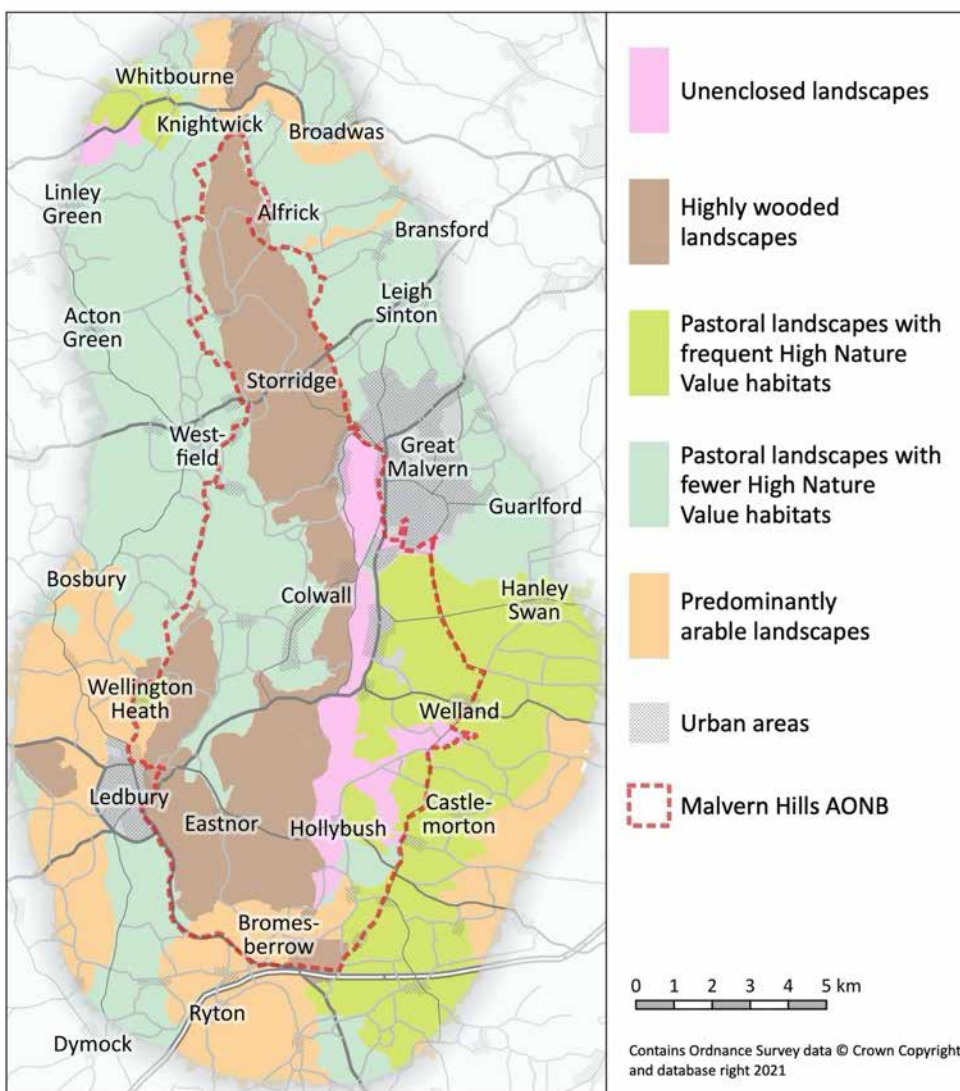
This Plan recognises the value for nature of transitions between habitats (known as ‘ecotones’) which can support different species and are an essential component of a wildlife rich landscape. Examples of these transitional areas include woodland edges and glades, wood pasture, scrub and rough grassland edges around arable fields. Helping the AONB’s biodiversity will involve enhancing and creating more of these often overlooked areas in the countryside.

### ... and across landscapes

There is a risk that, in subdividing land management opportunities between separate landscape areas, the need to enhance connectivity for nature across the whole area is overlooked. To address this, this section concludes with an ecological network map for the whole Plan area.

This map suggests priority areas for open and wooded habitats based on the distribution of core, highest value, habitat. Co-ordinated effort by groups of landowners in an area is essential to recovering nature at a landscape scale. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership provides training, advice and support to clusters of land owners and managers for this purpose.

Figure 5. Simplified landscape types used to identify land management opportunities



## Unenclosed landscapes

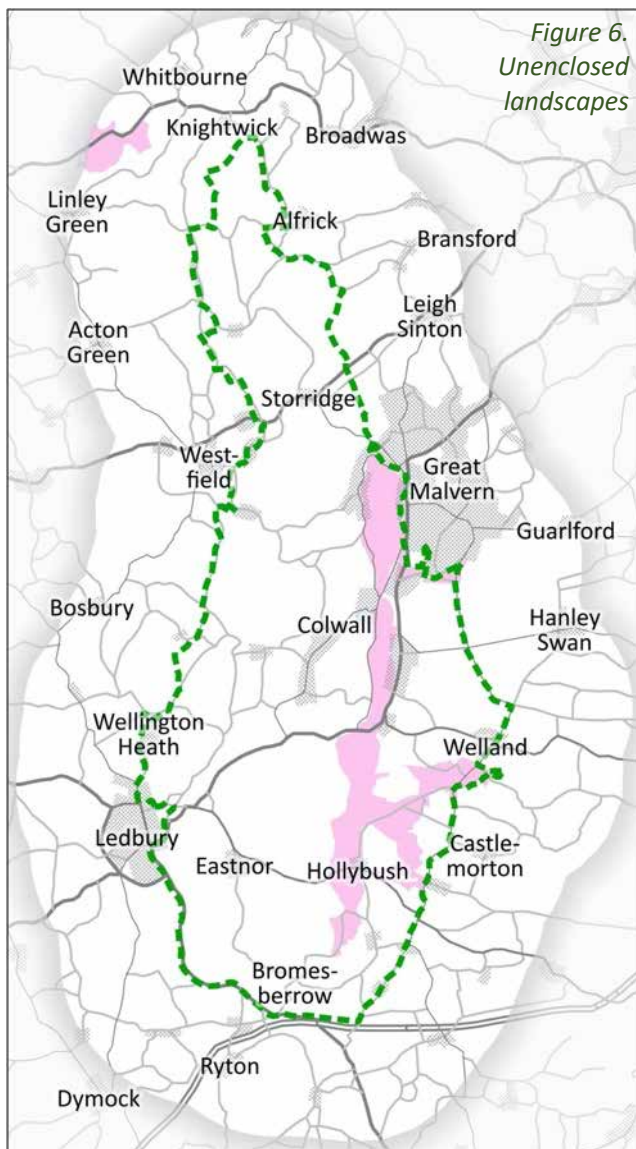
This landscape zone consists of unenclosed acid grassland and heathland on the tops of the Malvern Hills and on Castlemorton and Hollybed Commons. There is also a smaller area at Bringsty Common in the north west of the Plan area.

These areas are of high nature and landscape value and provide high levels of many ecosystem services. Over half is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to their biodiversity and/or their geology and three quarters is registered common land, often providing open public access.

They are of high historical interest, both as medieval common land and because of the hill forts and other archaeology. Castlemorton and Hollybed Commons deliver high levels of water regulation (absorbing rainfall and reducing flood risk) and their soils are a good store of carbon.



*Cattle grazing on End Hill*



*Figure 6.  
Unenclosed  
landscapes*

The Malvern Hills Trust plays the main role in managing most of these areas, where appropriate working with registered commoners and volunteers.

Land management priorities for nature in these areas will include:

- Maintaining the extensive cattle grazing on the Hills, and cattle and sheep grazing on the lowland commons, supporting diverse sward structures.
- Managing a harmonious balance between livestock and people in areas of high levels of public access. On the lowland commons this includes avoiding conflicts between drivers on the public roads, livestock, and recreational users.
- Using grazing and scrub clearance to maintain a balance between open land, scrub and, where present, woodland. Managing grazing levels can provide nesting and foraging areas for ground nesting birds such as skylark.
- Regular management will be needed to keep a mosaic structure on the slopes where bracken and brambles may otherwise dominate.
- Protecting the heritage value of rock outcrops, keeping them clear of soil and vegetation so they can be studied and appreciated, also enabling dependent species such as the Grayling butterfly to thrive.
- Maintaining an access strategy to reduce soil erosion, vegetation damage and disturbance to wildlife in sensitive areas.



## Highly wooded landscapes

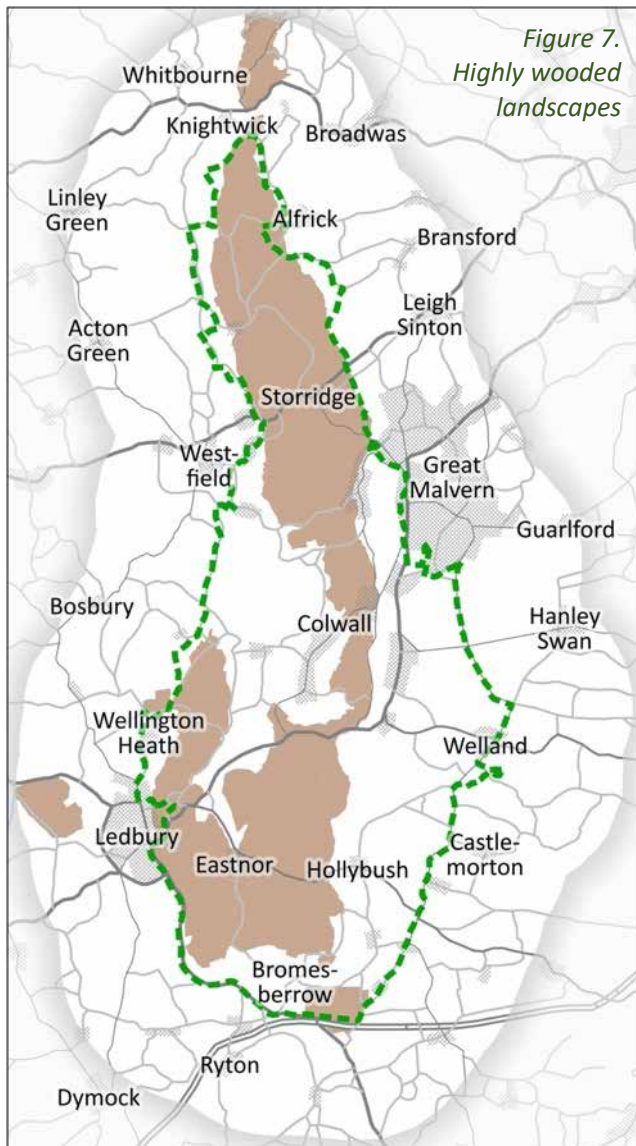
Large areas in the northern and southwestern parts of the AONB are highly wooded. Smaller areas occur outside the AONB in the 3km setting area north of Knighwick and west of Ledbury.

In these landscapes near 40% of the land area is covered by woodland, most of which is broadleaved. The wooded character is further strengthened by the dense network of large hedgerows, and areas of parkland, wood pasture and traditional orchards. Alongside wooded habitats these areas have high concentrations of permanent pasture.

These areas provide high levels of many ecosystem services including biodiversity, scenic and historical value, soil health, carbon storage and water regulation.



*Glade clearance in ancient semi-natural woodland, West Malvern*



*Figure 7.  
Highly wooded  
landscapes*

Land management priorities in these areas include:

- The introduction or continuation of sustainable forestry practices based on agreed Management Plans.
- In ancient woodland, the reintroduction or continuation of historical practices such as coppicing and new planting to reconnect fragmented areas. Where ancient woodlands have been planted with conifers, their replacement with native broadleaves.
- Conserving the diversity and carbon storage potential of all older permanent pastures and meadows using managed livestock grazing and later cutting of hay.
- Enhancing the diversity and species richness of previously 'improved' grasslands through the introduction of wild flower and grass seed, ideally from local sources.
- Conserving remaining traditional orchards, using restorative pruning to prolong the life of old trees as well as restocking with traditional varieties on standard rootstocks.
- Similarly, conserving veteran trees in parkland and wood pasture and restocking with new trees.
- Protecting the geological heritage value of quarries, keeping rock faces clear of soil and vegetation.
- Exploring opportunities to create and manage transitional habitats such as scrub within and on the edge of wooded areas.
- Buffering narrow or small woodlands with new tree planting.
- Reinstating and managing the historic enclosure pattern of hedges and watercourses. This includes allowing hedges to grow bushy an/or taller and ensuring a diverse age structure of hedgerow trees to provide strong habitat connections between woodlands and to shelter orchards and hops.
- Managing watercourse vegetation to provide both shade and light.

## Pastoral landscapes with frequent High Nature Value habitats

This landscape zone is dominated by grassland farming (60% of land cover as permanent pasture). It has significant areas of high nature value open habitats (principally unimproved neutral grassland and some traditional orchards). It has relatively 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 southeastern part of the Plan area, in the 3km setting to the AONB and a smaller area in the north west of the Plan area.

These areas provide high levels of many ecosystem services including biodiversity, scenic value, food provision, soil health and water regulation.

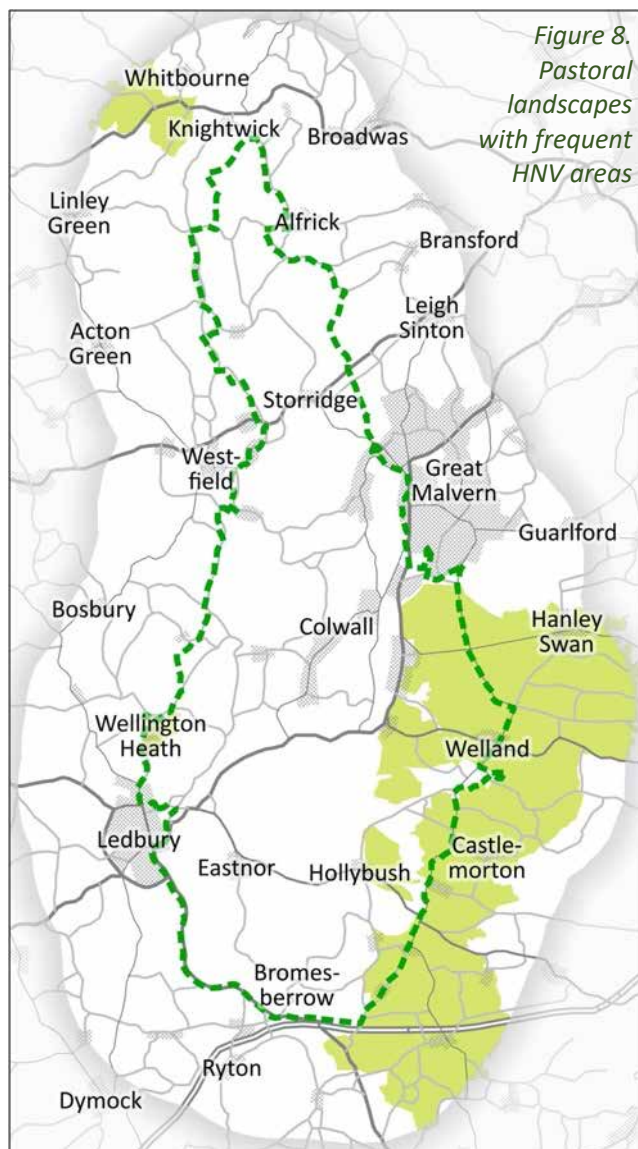


Figure 8.  
Pastoral  
landscapes  
with frequent  
HNV areas

Land management priorities for nature in these areas will include:

- Conserving the diversity and carbon storage potential of all older permanent pastures and meadows using managed livestock grazing, including traditional/regenerative techniques. Cattle and hardier native breeds of sheep are important where rougher vegetation is present/desirable.
- Enhancing the diversity and species richness of previously 'improved' grasslands through the introduction of wild flower and grass seed, ideally from local sources.
- Low or no inputs of fertiliser and later cutting of hay in flower-rich meadows (where appropriate) is recommended.
- Maintaining the historic enclosure pattern of hedges and watercourses, including two or three yearly trimming of hedges where possible and ensuring a diverse age structure of hedgerow and field trees.
- Planting new hedgerows and / or allowing small hedgerows to grow bigger, providing new corridors for wildlife.
- Retaining and protecting field ponds and wetlands, ensuring clean natural water supplies and periodic cutting back of overhanging trees.
- The creation of appropriately sized new woodland, connecting existing woodland and other habitats, integrating trees into productive land through agroforestry or silvopasture.
- Conserving remaining traditional orchards, using restorative pruning to prolong the life of old trees as well as restocking with traditional varieties on standard rootstocks.

## Pastoral landscapes with fewer High Nature Value habitats

This landscape zone 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 such as unimproved grassland or wetlands. Woodland cover is around 8% and 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 wood pasture and small traditional orchards.

This landscape zone occurs in the central western part of the AONB between Mathon and Eastnor and covers most of the northern part of the 3km setting around the AONB.

The ecosystem services provided include food provision, scenic value and water regulation.

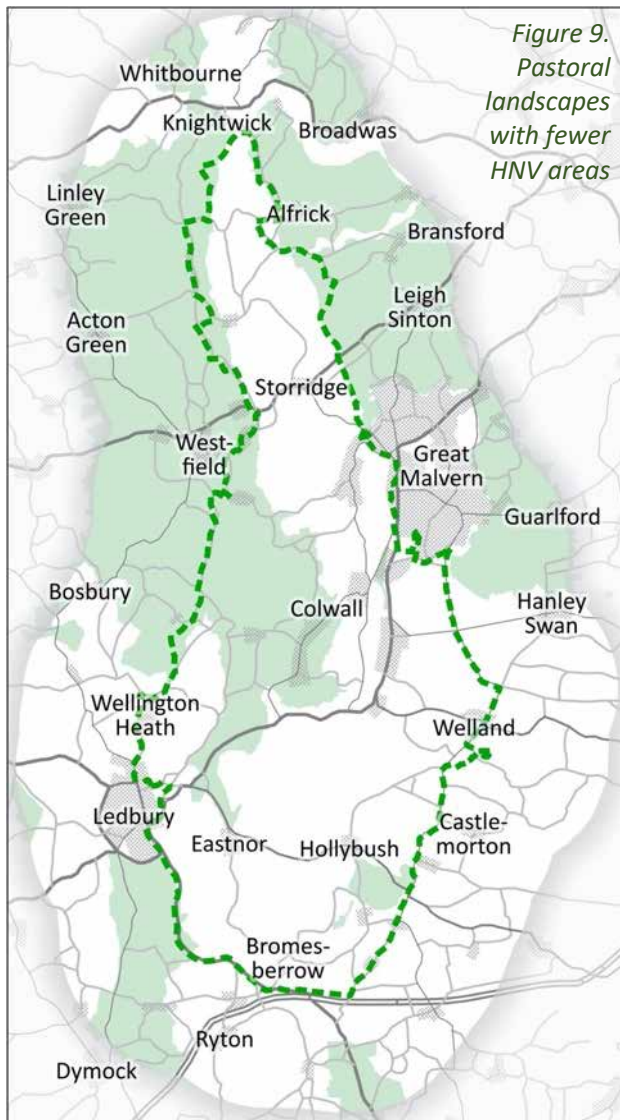


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Land management priorities for nature in these areas will include:

- Conserving the diversity and carbon storage potential of all older permanent pastures and orchards using managed livestock grazing, including traditional/regenerative techniques.
- Enhancing the diversity and species richness of previously 'improved' grasslands through the introduction of wild flower and grass seed, ideally from local sources.
- Protect and sympathetically manage roadside verges that are rich in wildflowers and restore to species richness those that could become so.
- Low or no inputs of fertiliser and later cutting of hay in flower-rich meadows is recommended.
- Where appropriate, revert arable areas to permanent pasture to help realise multiple ecosystem benefits.
- Maintaining the historic enclosure pattern of hedges and watercourses, adopting two or three yearly trimming of hedges where possible and rejuvenating old and tired hedges.
- Leaving a wider margin around pasture fields for the hedgerow to grow out and create a corridor of rough grassland.
- Planting hedgerow and field trees to achieve a diverse age structure, providing shade for livestock, ecological variety and contributing to landscape character.
- Retaining, protecting and expanding watercourses, field ponds and wetlands areas, ensuring clean natural water supplies.

The creation of new woodland in blocks or belts, connecting existing woodland and other habitats. Including shrubs/scrubby vegetation on the edges of new woodland areas creates a valuable transitional habitat for many birds and insects.



## Predominantly arable landscapes

Areas where arable farming is the dominant land use (accounting for half of land cover in these areas), 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 of these areas, field boundaries consist of low annually trimmed hedges, often beside watercourses and streams.

The ecosystem services provided by this landscape zone include food provision and water flow regulation.



Combine harvester, Mathon parish

© Malvern Hills AONB Unit

Land management priorities for nature in these areas will include:

- Monitoring soil health and adopting measures to increase soil organic matter where needed including incorporating straw and stubbles and using minimum tillage to establish crops.
- Leaving unfertilised rough grass margins (ideally sown with wildflower and grass seed) around all fields to buffer hedges and watercourses, provide winter shelter to wildlife and food for insects.
- Maintain soil cover in winter (autumn sown crops, stubbles and cover crops) to reduce erosion, soil capping and emissions of nitrous oxide and provide food for wildlife.
- Minimising the harmful impacts on nature of pesticides and fertilisers, especially close to non-cropped areas and watercourses, reducing diffuse pollution.
- Maintaining the historic enclosure pattern of hedges and watercourses, adopting two or three yearly trimming of hedges where possible.
- Maintaining a diverse age structure of hedgerow trees, establishing new trees in anticipation of the loss of ash trees due to ash die back.
- Not ploughing, cultivating or cropping under the canopy of field trees, providing protection to the shallow roots.
- Seeking opportunities to replace important landmark veteran trees in appropriate locations.
- Creating new woodland in blocks or belts, connecting existing woodland and other habitats. Including shrubs on the edges of new woodland areas creates a valuable transitional habitat for many birds and insects.

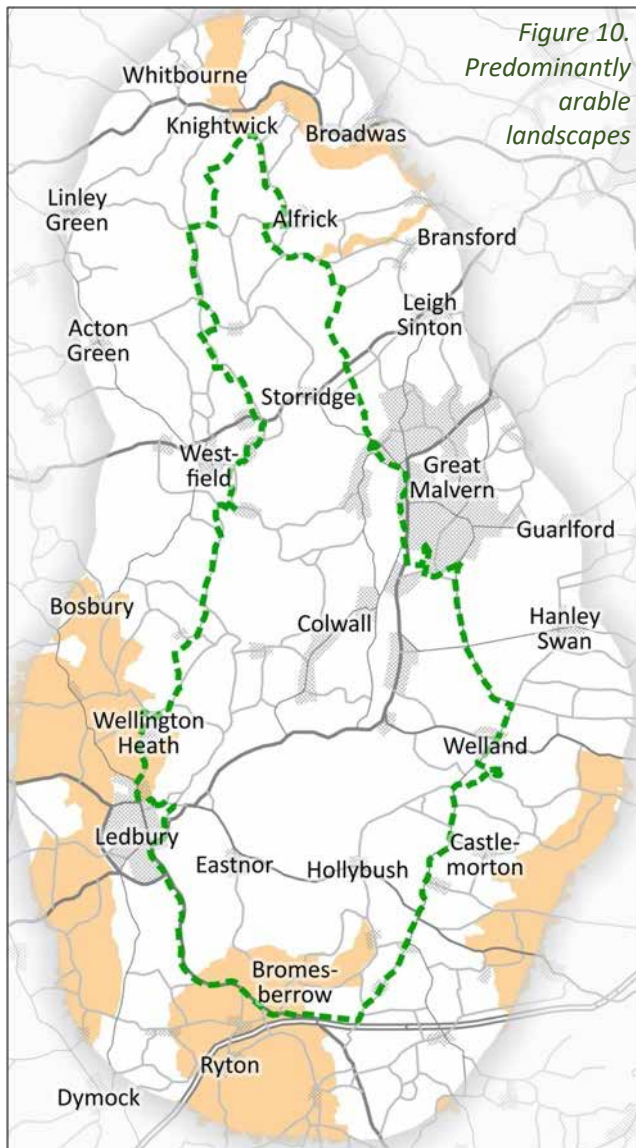
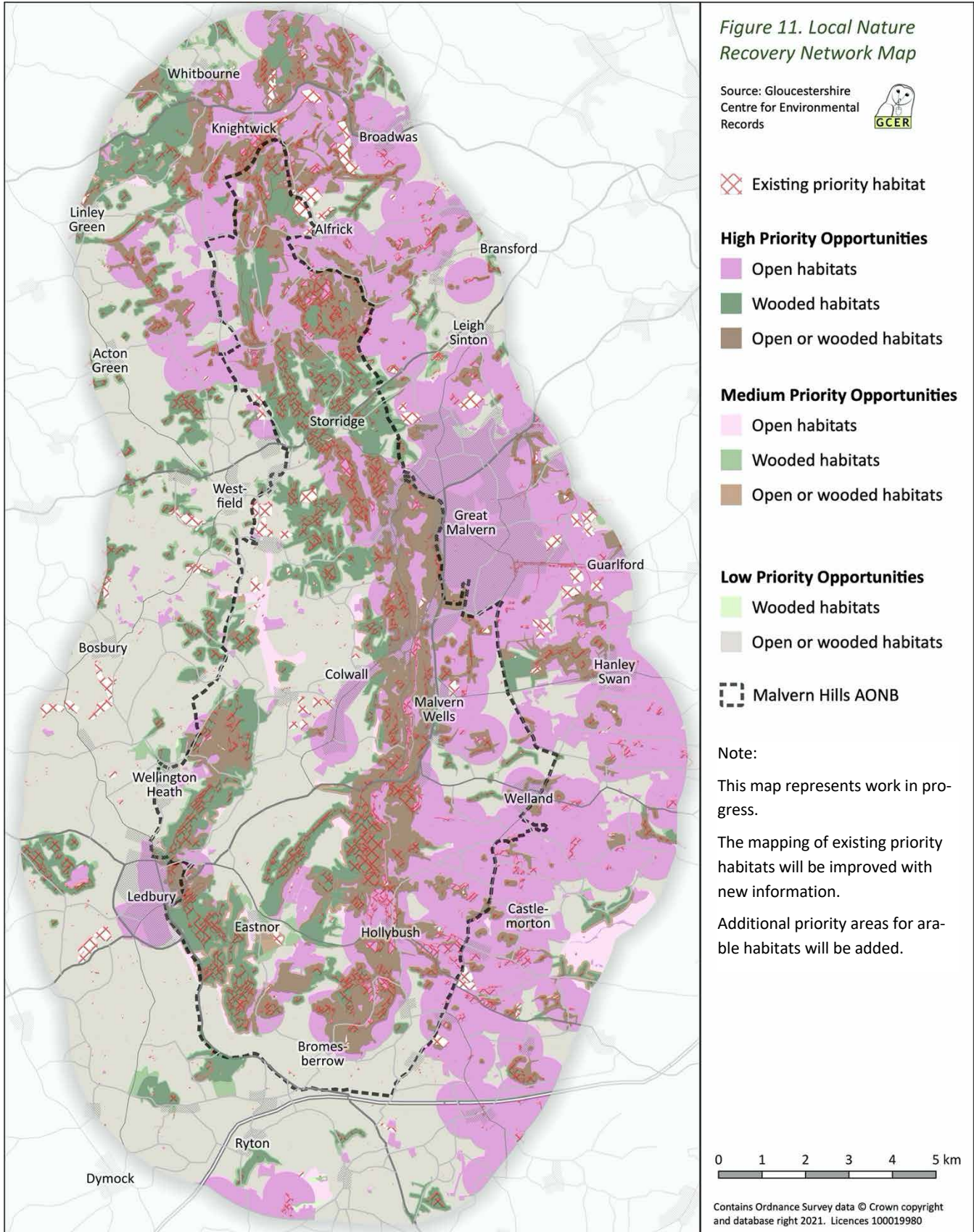


Figure 10. Predominantly arable landscapes

## Enhancing the nature recovery network across the whole Plan area

The map below shows the areas where there is highest priority for expanding or creating different habitat types, based on the location of existing habitats and the way key species move between them. The AONB has large areas with a high priority as native woodland and open habitats (grassland and heathland). To the east,

there is a high priority for expanding or creating open habitats, and to the west it is either for woodland or open habitats. The map should be used, alongside the area based priorities, when considering and planning for change on the ground.



## Priority B. Connections between people and nature in the AONB

Reinforcing people's relationships with nature and the benefits they gain from it is central to achieving nature's recovery. The AONB's Colchester declaration<sup>iv</sup> 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 some of 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.

Understanding the benefits we all gain from nature, whether pollinating the crops we eat, providing a place of tranquillity to visit, filtering the air we breathe or protecting our historic landscape character, is an important step to reinforcing 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 and encouraging community organisation and activity can be powerful and effective ways of encouraging change. This can include showcasing diverse voices from different generations and backgrounds. It is important to understand the values that people have and to recognise that values and aspirations differ.
- **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.

### Case study 1: Colwall Orchard Group – bringing the community together for their orchards

Colwall Orchard Group (COG) is a great example of a volunteer community group that is supporting nature. It's objective is to restore, promote and celebrate traditional orchards. It owns two community orchards which showcase good land management practices for wildlife and community use. Working in partnership with organisations such as MHAONB, COG have extended their work into neighbouring areas creating new or restoring traditional orchards and giving advice to orchard owners to enhance the future health and condition of their orchards.

COG started the Traditional Orchards for the Future Initiative (TOFI) in 2020 in partnership with the MHAONB and so far have planted of over 200 trees to create new, or gap up existing, traditional orchards. In addition in the last 2 years COG have assisted in the purchase of almost 400 orchard trees to be planted locally. The majority of the 30 traditional orchards in Colwall Parish, and 20 or so garden orchards, have benefitted from their management activities. As an entirely volunteer-run group, the contribution of volunteer time to helping local orchards is usually in excess of 3,000 hours annually.

The local community has benefitted from COG's activities in a variety of ways. In addition to the 200 members, local communities have been actively engaged through annual events such as the Wassail and education activities. These include trips to COG's orchard wildflower meadows, tree planting, apple picking and juicing. Local food production is actively promoted and in 2020/21 over 400 jars of jam, jelly and chutney, together with over 500 litres of apple juice were made and sold by COG. <https://colwallorchardgroup.org>



Children from The Downs School Colwall harvesting apples

## Case study 2: Transition Malvern Hills – fostering local action on global issues

Transition is a global movement where communities step up to address the big challenges they face by starting local and coming together to create solutions through local, community-led initiatives. It is hoped that this helps people become happier and the towns and villages they live in become more sustainable, stronger and more resilient.

*Practical local action to tackle climate change and build a sustainable community*

Transition Malvern Hills is an active group of local people that have had a number of successes such as establishing a car club, a garden-share scheme and reskilling workshops. It provides a mechanism for people and organisations to work in partnership, raise awareness and share ideas to



make the Malvern Hills a better place. One focus of Transition Malvern Hills work is around food including supporting local food. Recent meetings include A call for action on food, which included sharing information on plant-based diets, local foods and food waste in order to tackle climate change and build a sustainable community.

## Case study 3: Geological Site Volunteer Group

Since 2014 a volunteer group supported by the MHAONB and drawn from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust (EHT) and three local geology clubs have made a significant difference to the quality of earth heritage within the AONB. In 2008 75.6% of Local Geological Sites in the AONB were in 'desirable' condition, declining to 61.5% in 2013. By 2018 this decline was reversed to 83.3% of sites in 'desirable' condition, thanks to the work of the volunteers.

Almost fifty geological sites have been substantially improved and made accessible for researchers and the interested public by an investment of about 300 volunteer days, together with some additional work supported by the Malvern Hills Trust.

Most of the sites the Geological volunteers have worked on in the AONB are SSSIs or Local Geological Sites, such as Dingle Quarry SSSI in West Malvern which excellently showcases local geology including a variety of igneous rock types and structures such as intrusions and faults. Formerly regularly used for student visits it had become



overgrown and was unable to be used for this purpose. However, annual maintenance sessions held by the volunteers mean that the main features are clearly visible and educational visits are resuming.

## Priority C. The importance of the AONB in the Regional Nature Network

The map below shows where there are concentrations of high nature value habitat (dark green shapes) in the AONB (which is ringed in red) and in surrounding areas.

The lines of crosses on the map 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 potential nature corridors show how important the AONB is as a reservoir of core habitats and as a cross-roads for connectivity to other regionally important areas.

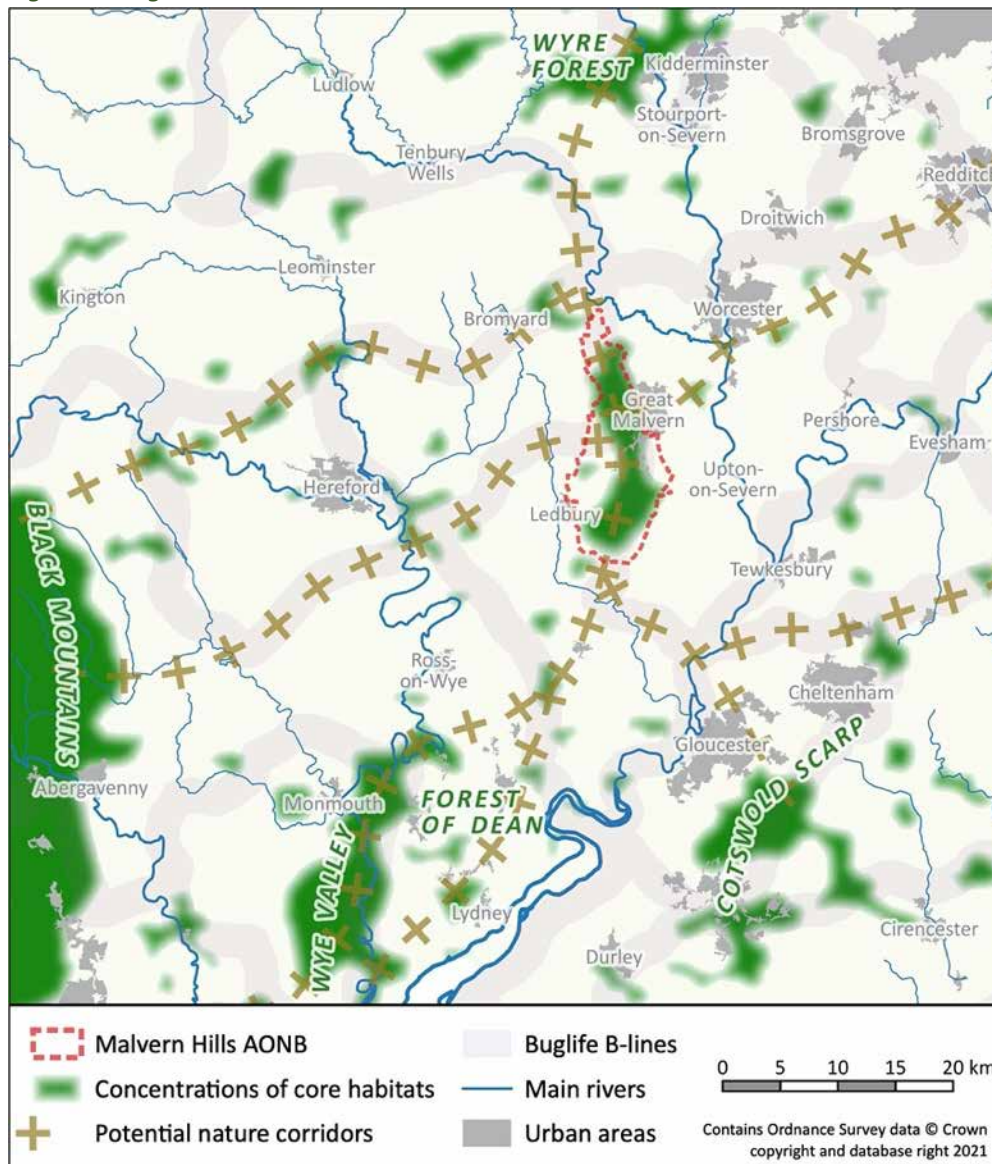
These key connections are:

- To the north: The Wyre Forest (ancient woodland and heathland),
- To the east: The Forest of Feckenham (species-rich meadows, wood pasture and ancient woodland),
- 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).

### 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 protected landscapes, the strengthening of **connections to other regionally important areas.**

Figure 4. Regional Nature Connections



Note: The 'concentrations of core habitat' shown in this map are areas where more than 40% of land cover is classified by Natural England as a priority habitat, such as semi-natural woodland, heathland, grazing marsh or acid grassland).

The 'Buglife B-lines' are aspirational 'insect pathways' running through our countryside and towns which have been identified by the charity Buglife.



## DELIVERY ACTION PLAN

This section sets out a series of actions for each of the strategic themes and priorities described earlier in this Plan. Due to the significant changes expected in national policy, the timescale for these actions covers the two years 2022 and 2023. It is intended that the Actions Table will be reviewed and updated during this period.

Theme and priority	Action	Lead bodies	Priority
<b>Priority A. The management of land for nature in the AONB</b>			
A.1. Work with and support individual farmers and landowners to develop appropriate action for nature on their land, supporting them through the Government's Agricultural Transition.	A.1.1. Ensure the <b>Farming in Protected Landscape</b> programme for the Malvern Hills AONB is used to support nature and the delivery of this Plan	MHAONB	High
	A.1.2. Continue to hold/build on <b>demonstration and training events on farms and estates</b> to promote beneficial land management and promote uptake.	MHAONB and AONB Partners including MHT	High
	A.1.3. Identify and promote suitable <b>Local Nature Recovery Scheme actions</b> , working with LNRS convenors.	MHAONB with Local Nature Partnerships	Medium
	A.1.4. Promote and support the development of <b>high value sustainably produced products</b> from the land.	AONB Partners	Ongoing
A.2. Work with farmers and landowners at a large scale across the AONB and its setting to strength core areas and networks for nature	A.2.1. Continue and build on <b>cluster group working</b> with farmers and landowners across the AONB following the end of current funding for the Farm Facilitation Groups in March 2022.	MHAONB	Medium
	A.2.2. Investigate with Defra and local partners the potential for a <b>Landscape Recovery Scheme</b> project to strengthen nature connectivity within the AONB.	MHAONB Partners	Low
	A.2.3. Explore opportunities for <b>coordinated land management initiatives</b> that could benefit key habitats at the landscape scale, e.g. establishment of a Deer Management Group.	MHAONB Partners	Medium

Theme and priority	Action	Lead bodies	Priority
<b>Priority B. Connections between people and nature in the AONB</b>			
B.1. Connect and join up activities on the ground for nature	B.1.1. Research the need for and explore the opportunities to develop and promote <b>an online resource for local organisations and community groups</b> to post information about their own activities assisting nature in the AONB. This could include a directory of contacts, events and services offered by groups interested in nature in the AONB and its surrounds.	MHAONB	High
	B.1.2. Explore <b>a one-day celebration event</b> for local organisation and groups to showcase their activities and aspirations for nature, seeking to generate longer term networking and coordination between interested individuals, businesses, and communities.	MHAONB	High
B.2. Partnership working for a unified approach for nature recovery	B.2.1. Convene a meeting of appropriate authorities and organisations to plan for <b>coordinated delivery of related policies and programmes</b> including Biodiversity Net Gain and other private sector investment, woodland establishment, ELM schemes, catchment/water activities and related initiatives.	WCC	High
	B.2.2. With Partners, <b>agree focal points and local lead organisation responsibility</b> for different issues related to nature.	MHAONB	Medium
	B.2.3 Support the work of <b>local citizen science/volunteer groups</b> which can support nature recovery in the AONB and surrounding areas		

Theme and priority	Action	Lead bodies	Priority
<b>Priority C. The importance of the AONB in the regional nature network</b>			
C.1. Recognise the importance of the AONB as a core area for nature of regional significance.	C.1.1. Engage with Natural England and the <b>NRN network</b> in the West Midlands to raise awareness for and promote the importance of core high value habitats (woodland, unimproved grassland, orchards, etc.) in the Malvern Hills AONB.	MHAONB	High
	C.1.2. Use the preparation of the <b>Local Nature Recovery Strategies</b> in the three counties to advance knowledge of, and enhance, regional connectivity between the AONB and other regionally important areas. The Strategies must address cross-border priorities and opportunities.	Local Nature Partnerships (Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire)	High
	C.1.3. Coordinate and work closely with other organisations who <b>promote a regional approach to biodiversity</b> (such as Buglife's B lines projects) to identify how the AONB can become a hub for these existing projects, amplifying the impact of these projects.	AONB Partners	Medium
C.2. Promote, with partners including other projected landscapes, the strengthening of connections to other regionally important areas.	C.2.1. Work with <b>other protected landscape bodies</b> (Cotswolds and Wye Valley AONBs and Brecon Beacons NP) and authorities in other high nature value areas (Wyre Forest and Forest of Dean) to identify how they can work together to promote the connections between their areas.	Protected Landscape Bodies (AONBs and NP)	Medium
	C.2.2. Take forward the <b>Severn Treescapes initiative</b> , creating a 60 miles N-S corridor across the 3 counties, from the Lower Wye Valley to the Wyre Forest.	Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (with Herefordshire and Worcestershire WTs)	Medium
	C.2.3. Explore with Natural England what practical information on <b>climate change adaptation plan</b> could be made available in the AONB and surrounding areas. If appropriate, commission new work to better understand the pressures and opportunities of climate change for nature and the AONB's special qualities more widely.	MHAONB	Medium

## MONITORING PROGRESS WITH NATURE RECOVERY IN THE AONB

The AONB Management Plan 2019-24 describes the suite of indicators that are regularly monitored and reported on in State of the AONB Reports. These include measures that are relevant to nature recovery such as:

- the proportion of woodlands in active management;
- the condition of SSSIs; and
- the ecological status of waterbodies.

The Government is developing a framework of indicators to monitor progress with its 25 Year Environment Plan. These are still under development but several indicators in the wildlife, natural resources and natural beauty / engagement sections of the framework are relevant to nature recovery in the AONB and may be able to be tracked in the Plan area using national or local data sources. These are shown below.

### National 25 Year Environment Plan indicators that could be tracked locally in the AONB in future

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| D1 | Quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats   |
| D2 | Extent and condition of protected sites – land, water and sea                                |
| D3 | Area of woodland in England  |
| D4 | Relative abundance and/or distribution of widespread species                                 |
| E7 | Healthy soils  |
| G1 | Changes in landscape and waterscape character  |
| G2 | Condition of heritage features including designated geological sites and scheduled monuments |

In the meantime, while these indicators are under national development, information can be collected by the AONB Unit on progress with initiatives locally.

### Local indicators for interim monitoring of progress in the AONB

- 1 **Public investment in nature recovery projects** through the Farming in Protected Landscapes fund and, when introduced in 2024, the Local Nature Recovery Scheme.
- 2 **Ongoing land use and habitat surveys** monitoring changes in the extent and condition of sites.
- 3 **Engagement with and between local groups** interested in nature, including meetings, events and conservation volunteering activities.



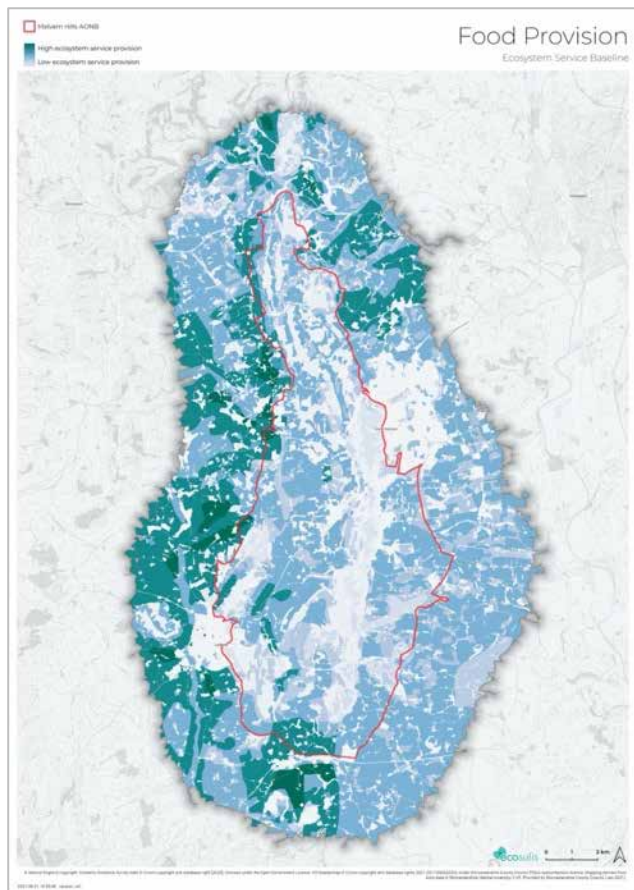
## Appendix 1. State of Nature – Provision of Ecosystem Services

This appendix presents a set 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.

A total of 13 maps of baseline ecosystem service provision have been produced for the Malvern Hills

AONB. These maps and full details of the methodology and matching sets of opportunity maps are provided in the research report: Ecosulis (2021). *Natural Capital and Ecosystem Service Mapping for the Malvern Hills AONB. Methodological approach and output specifications*<sup>x</sup>.

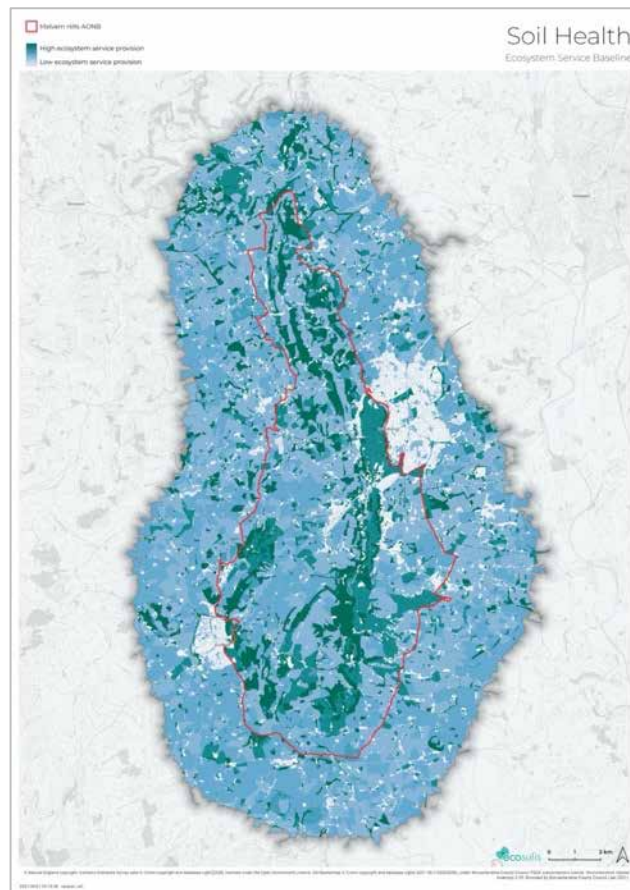
### Food provision



This map is based on a Habitat Service Scoring Matrix with each habitat scored on its ability to produce food. For example, modified grassland and arable habitats are very important for food provision and so score 10 for food provision whereas bracken only scores a 1 (the lowest value possible). These data were then modified using the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) data produced by Natural England.

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.

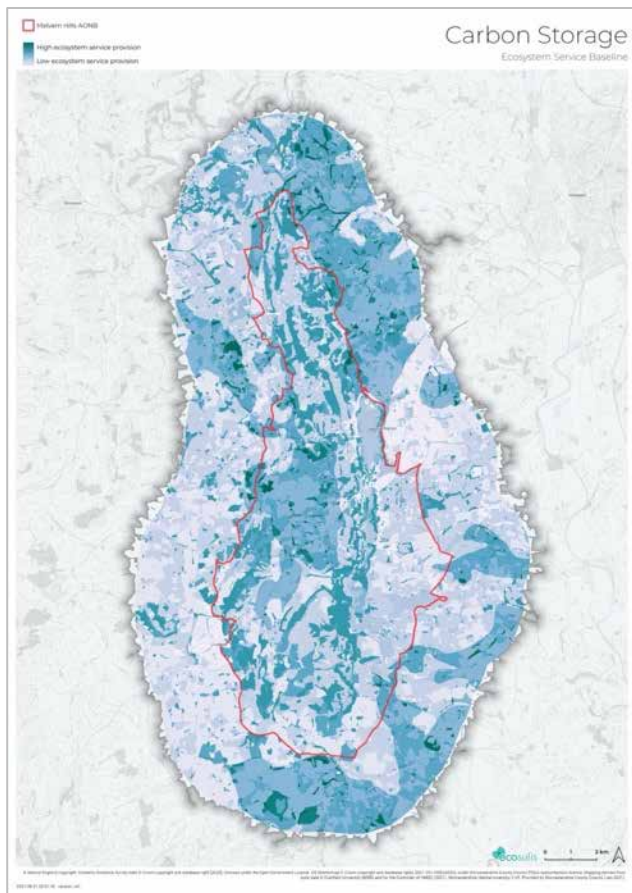
### Soil health



This map is based on the Habitat Service Scoring Matrix.

It shows that soil health is high to medium throughout most of the Malvern Hills AONB and surrounding area. High-quality woodland and grassland habitats offer the greatest contribution to the soil health baseline in the area, while sealed surfaces within settlements represent the lowest scoring areas.

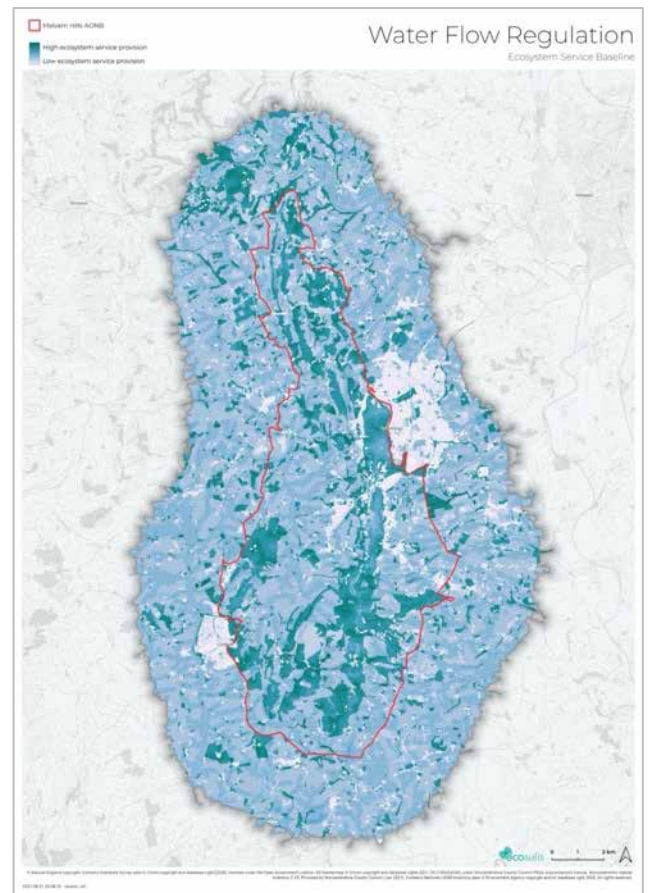
## Carbon storage



This map is based on the Habitat Service Scoring Matrix with each habitat scored on its ability to store carbon. As a modifier to identify the contribution of soils below 30cm depth, National Soil Map (Cranfield University, 2021) classifications were used to identify deep soils.

It shows that areas of high carbon storage are concentrated within the woodland of the AONB and surrounding areas, alongside areas where soils have been classified as deep. Areas of lower carbon storage provision are located within the cropland and urban areas of the study area.

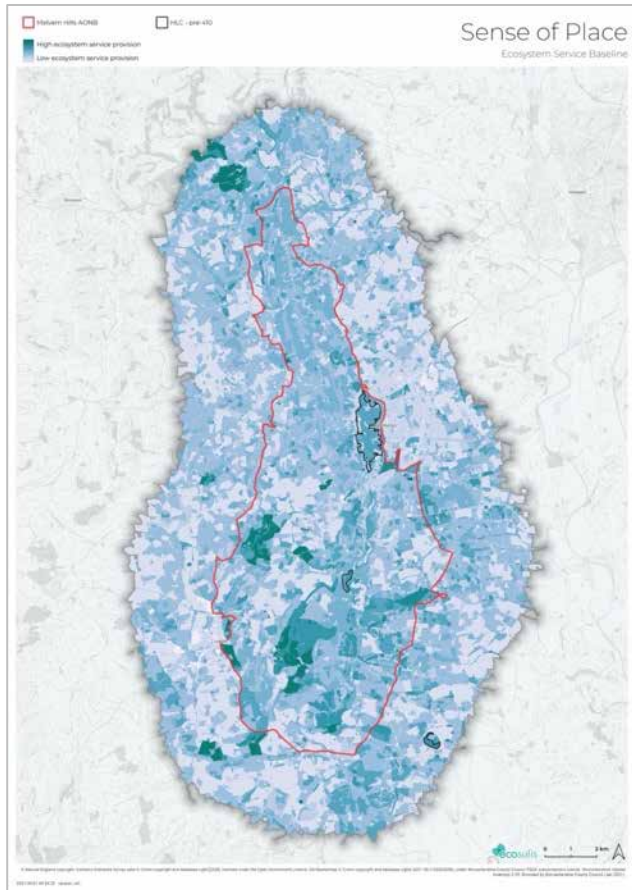
## Water flow regulation



This map is based on the Habitat Service Scoring Matrix with each habitat scored on its ability to regulate water flow. A spatial modifier has been applied to the water flow regulation baseline using flow pathways (a 2m-resolution digital surface model derived from LiDAR data).

It reflects the high scoring of woodland habitats within the Habitat Service Scoring Matrix, with these habitats being the areas of highest water flow regulation in the AONB and surrounding area – in particular where woodlands are in close proximity to flow pathways.

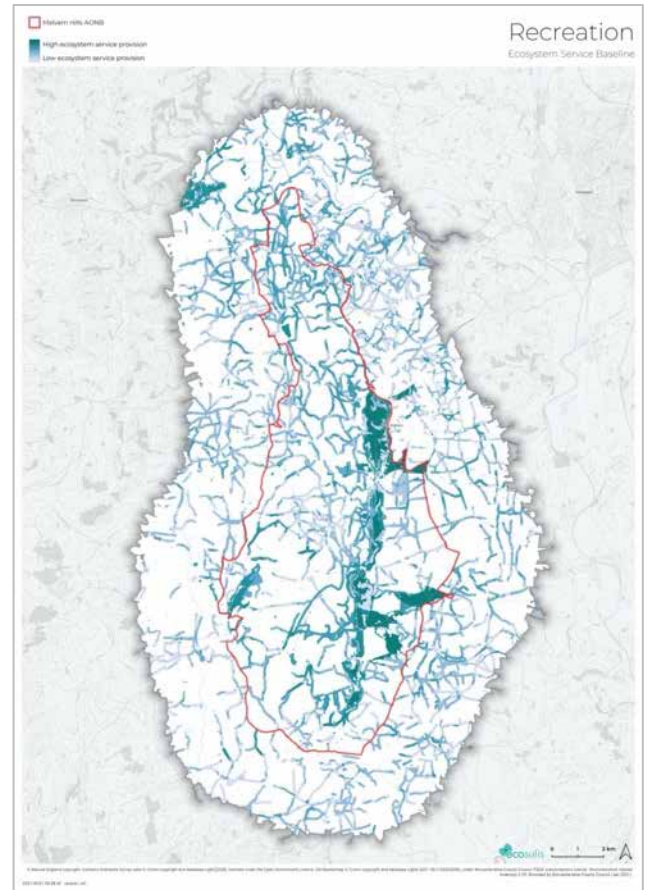
## Sense of place



This map is based on cultural ecosystem service analysis with each habitat scored on its contribution to sense of place. A spatial modifier was applied by integrating historic environment record (HER) data with sense of place scores.

It shows that provision of the sense of place service is relatively uniform throughout the AONB and surrounding areas. There are, nonetheless, several areas that stand out as supporting a high level of ecosystem service provision. These are often associated with specific areas of historical importance, for example, Eastnor Castle, Bromesberrow Place, and Hope End Park. Provision of the sense of place ecosystem service is typically lowest in the improved grassland habitats which surround the AONB.

## Recreation

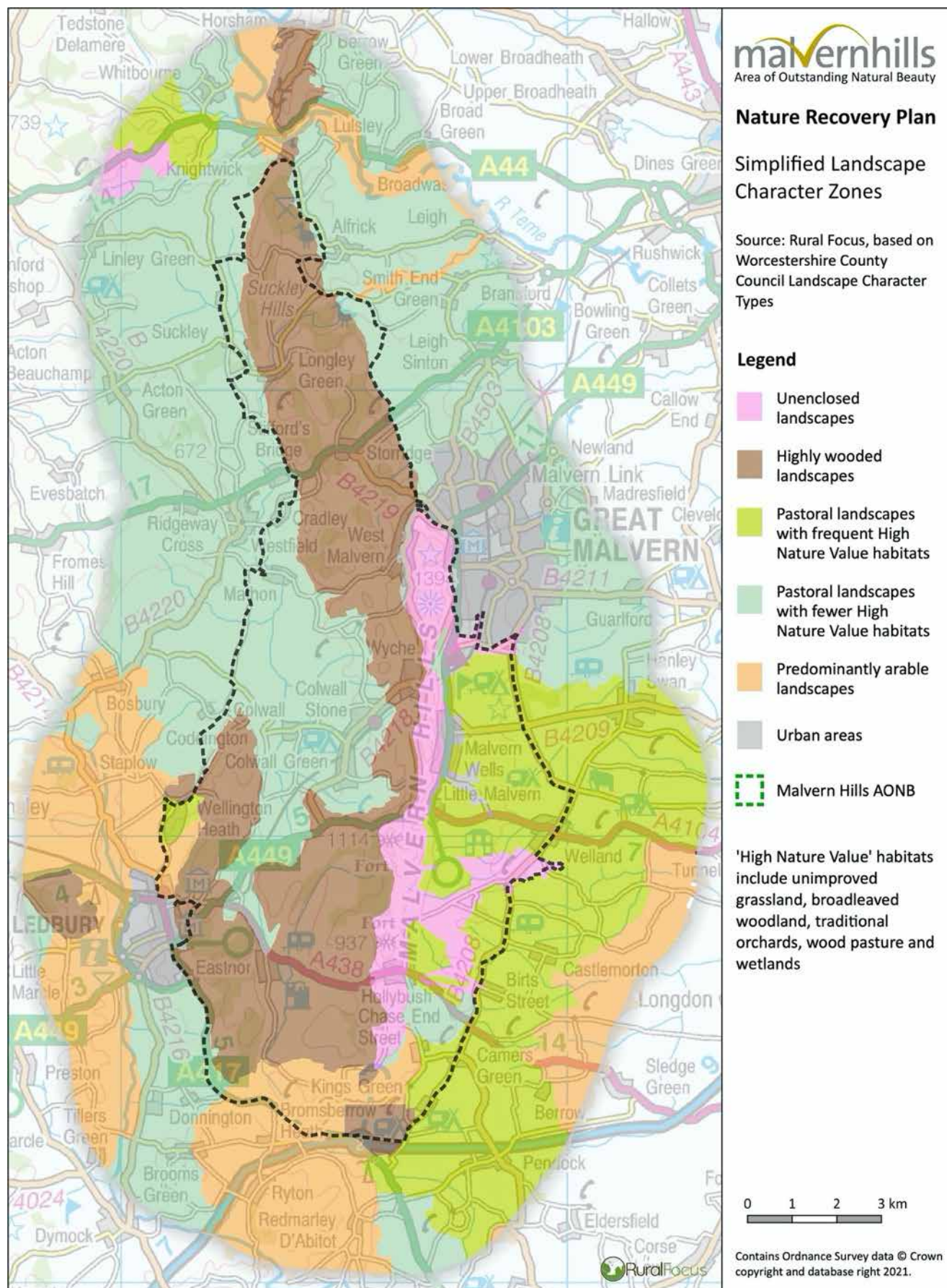


This map is based on cultural ecosystem service analysis with each habitat scored on its ability to provide recreation. A spatial modifier was applied to recognise the accessibility of land to people, distinguishing between open, semi-restricted and restricted access.

It shows that that provision of recreational access varies most notably between semi-restricted and open-access land, with the majority of high-scoring areas being located within open-access land. These areas are mostly located along the Malvern Hills and commons, though small patches of open-access land are also dispersed across the study area.

## Appendix 2. Simplified Landscape Zones

This Plan uses six simplified landscape zones 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 zones

Simplified landscape zone	Unenclosed landscapes	Highly wooded landscapes	Pastoral landscapes with many High Nature Value habitats	Pastoral landscapes with fewer High Nature Value habitats	Predominantly arable landscapes	Urban areas	The AONB	Whole NRP area
<b>Constituent landscape character types</b>	High hills and slopes, Unenclosed commons, Principal wooded hills, Wooded hills, Wooded hills and farmlands, Wooded estatelands, Enclosed commons	Principal wooded hills, Wooded hills, Wooded hills and farmlands	Wooded estatelands, Enclosed commons, 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		
<b>Proportion of the AONB area</b>	11%	47%	13%	22%	5%	2%	100%	
<b>Proportion of the whole NRP area</b>	4%	18%	17%	39%	18%	5%		100%
<b>Percentage land cover in each simplified landscape zone across the whole NRP area</b>								
High Nature Value open habitats	54%	19%	22%	11%	6%	6%	21%	15%
Woodland	26%	38%	5%	8%	8%	3%	23%	13%
Agriculturally improved permanent pasture	4%	29%	39%	35%	29%	6%	28%	31%
Arable	0%	8%	23%	33%	48%	1%	17%	26%
Built up areas and gardens	8%	6%	9%	8%	6%	84%	8%	11%
Other land cover	8%	1%	2%	4%	4%	1%	3%	3%

## Photo credits

Page	Attribution
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4	Favosite fossil in Silurian limestone near Park Wood. MHAONB Management Plan 2019-24, page 32. © Peter Creed.
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6	Woodland management, Bromesberrow. MHAONB Management Plan 2019-24, page 52. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
9	Bumblebee on Forget-me-not flower. MHAONB Management Plan 2019-24, page 54. © Mel Mason.
9	Farmers' Market, Abbey Road, Great Malvern. Creative commons licence <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/">cc-by-sa/2.0</a> - © <a href="https://www.geograph.org.uk/p/2852646">Bob Embleton</a> - <a href="https://www.geograph.org.uk/p/2852646">geograph.org.uk/p/2852646</a>
10	Gapping up in a traditional orchard, Hollybed. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
12	Tree planting, Mathon. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
14	Cattle grazing on End Hill. Creative commons licence <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/">cc-by-sa/2.0</a> - © <a href="https://www.geograph.org.uk/p/1540179">Richard Law</a> - <a href="https://www.geograph.org.uk/p/1540179">geograph.org.uk/p/1540179</a>
15	Glade clearance in ancient semi-natural woodland, West Malvern. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
16	Species-rich hay meadow, Suckley. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
16	New tree planted in a broad native hedgerow, Castlemorton. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
18	Combine harvester, Mathon parish. MHAONB Management Plan 2019-24, page 49. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
20	Children from The Downs School Colwall harvesting apples © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
21	Volunteers at work in Dingle Quarry. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit
26	Replanting parkland trees, Mathon Park. © Malvern Hills AONB Unit

## Footnotes

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<sup>i</sup> 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)

<sup>ii</sup> 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.

<sup>iii</sup> 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 Die-men, 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.)].

<sup>iv</sup> Colchester Declaration (2019). The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. <https://landscapesfor-life.org.uk/projects/colchester-declaration>

<sup>v</sup> 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

<sup>vi</sup> 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](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024

<sup>viii</sup> Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2019-2024

<sup>ix</sup> Natural England (2020). Climate Change Adaptation Manual. Evidence to support nature conservation in a changing climate. 2nd edition published 2020

<sup>x</sup> Ecosulis (2021). *Natural Capital and Ecosystem Service Mapping for the Malvern Hills AONB. Methodological approach and output specifications*<sup>x</sup>. See: [https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/211220-Malvern-Natural-Capital-Report-full-report\\_v4\\_issue.pdf](https://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/211220-Malvern-Natural-Capital-Report-full-report_v4_issue.pdf)



Plan prepared for Malvern Hills AONB  
by Rural Focus Ltd. [www.rural-focus.co.uk](http://www.rural-focus.co.uk)

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## MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 8 APRIL 2022

### COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP FACILITATION FUND

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#### Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to:

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

#### Background

1. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership participated in a three-year Countryside Stewardship agreement between March 2018 and March 2021 to set up and manage a Facilitation Fund Group, The Malvern Hills Group. The purpose of the group was to raise awareness, advise and assist farmers and landowners in the Southern and Central part of the AONB to enhance their land for the benefit of nature and the special landscape features notable in the area. David Armitage was the facilitator for the Group during this period.
2. Subsequently, a one-year extension agreement was offered in Spring 2021 to build on the work carried out in the initial 3 year term. A local adviser, Charlotte Vincent, was contracted to assist Paul Esrich with managing the group and the agreement administration during this extension period. The extension year ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.
3. Information on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme can be found at: [Facilitation fund: Countryside Stewardship - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

#### The extension year

4. **Funding** – a budget of up to £16,652 was made available to the AONB Partnership to maintain the group, organise and run training events and meetings, and to manage the Agreement itself. This funding came through the Rural Payments Agency.
5. **Staffing** – Charlotte Vincent was contracted to manage the Agreement, having significant previous experience managing another Facilitation Group Agreement in the Wyre Forest and also having worked for Natural England.
6. **Membership** – Membership at the end of the initial 3-year agreement (end of March 2021) was counted at 15. However not all of these transferred to the

new extension agreement due to changes in the eligibility criteria set out by Rural Payments Agency (RPA). Membership of the group is now 22.

- The total members' holding area, which began at 3062ha and reached 3600ha at the end of the first 3-year Agreement, has now swelled to 4723ha today.

## Events

- Each event needs to be based on one of the Objectives/Outcomes which were identified at the start of the Agreement. Those for our group link to the AONB Priority Habitats of Traditional Orchard, Woodpasture and Parkland, Ancient and Native Woodland and Lowland Meadow, and also to the Landscape Priority of Hedgerows, and to an overarching Water Quality brief.
- Nine meetings and training events were held during 2021-2022. The first three were over Zoom due to Covid-19 restrictions/concerns. Later meetings have been variously indoors and outdoors, although the indoor events have been with jumpers due to needing all windows and doors open to maintain good air circulation. Risk assessments are always undertaken prior to any event. However the current Covid climate has added a new risk threat which has been carefully considered and mitigated each time.

Event Title	Date	Participants
New agreement: Introduction and FiPL announcement – by Zoom	27 <sup>th</sup> May 2021	6
Meadow Enhancement with Rory Johnson - by Zoom	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	7
Soil Health with Niels Corfield – by Zoom	29 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	7
Regenerative Agriculture at Risbury Court, Leominster by kind permission of Richard Thomas	11 <sup>th</sup> August 2021	6
Nature Recovery Planning at Colwall Hotel	9 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	8
Meadow Enhancement in practice by kind invitation of Roland Trafford-Roberts at Old Colwall	24 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	9 plus COG volunteers
Woodland Pests with Ed Brown (Wyre Forest), Dave Sykes (FC) and John Evans (FC). Visit to Frith Wood.	15 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2021	11

Hedgerow Management courtesy of Malvern Hills Trust and Razorback.	15 <sup>th</sup> February 2022	12
Orchard Tree Management	8 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>73</b>

10. There has been a good variety of events, all building on the 6 events held during the first Agreement. In total over the 4 years of CSFF there have been 15 events.

11. During the extension year notes compiled at each event have been circulated to all group members to benefit those who might have wanted to attend but were unable to do so.

### Costs Claimed in extension period

#### 12. OVERALL COSTS

	Running (Salary)	Direct (e.g. room hire, catering)	
Q1	£1,245.00	£400.00	
Q2	£1,420.00	£250.00	
Q3	£1,256.70	£866.57	
Q4	£1,800.00	£280.00	not yet finalised
	£5,721.70	£1,796.57	£7,518.27

13. The allocated budget from RPA included allowance for Paul Esrich's time. However it was deemed unwieldy to extract his costs and associated evidence of time sheets and separate defrayal from the Finance Team, when his time is legitimately allocated to other core spend budgets.

### Future of the group

14. From the AONB Unit's perspective, the success of the group, its growing membership and the confidence gained by those attending events, is without question. Whilst it is not always/often possible to draw a straight line between a particular training session or conversation and a change in behaviour, it is hoped that the FF events will have informed landowners and managers and contributed to their current and future decision making. We are starting to see evidence of more collaborative discussion and working between land holders, e.g. management planning across woodlands and parklands in shared ownership – another aspiration of the group. We hope that landowners and managers feel they have gained from opportunities to meet with their

neighbours, discuss land management challenges and explore opportunities for doing things differently. Evaluation forms completed by participants suggest that this has indeed been the case.

15. Another round of Facilitation Group funding was announced by Government at the end of 2021. However, after discussion, it was decided not to make an application to Defra/RPA for financial support to maintain the group and arrange future events. An estimate of 30% of facilitator time is spent on administering the Facilitation Fund Agreement; claims, queries, change-logs, new member registration, and frequent and repeated liaison with RPA, rather than actually getting on with the job. We are also conscious that the administrative requirements imposed by the RPA can be an annoyance for members, e.g. needing to complete evaluation forms and approve quarterly claims. However, the principle of better supporting landowners and managers in the AONB is felt to be imperative, especially in light of growing challenges and changes affecting the area, including the advent of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM). Therefore, it is hoped that landowner liaison and support work will be maintained in the period after 31/03/22 through the core AONB budget.
16. In addition to the Facilitation Fund Group, work has been carried out over the last 18 months to assemble an informal group of landowners in the north of the AONB, again with the idea of facilitating discussion, opportunities for learning and collaborative working. This group currently comprises 14 members with a combined land holding of approximately 1000 ha. Consideration is currently being given to the possibility of establishing a single landowner group for the AONB.

## Summary

17. The extension year to the Facilitation Fund Group agreement is felt to have been successful, building on the start made with the initial 3-year agreement. Staff dedicated to managing the group, supported by the wider AONB Team, have enabled the group and the AONB to benefit from varied sources of funding and advice, including most recently the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.
  - New orchards have been/ will be created and well managed;
  - Hay meadows have been enhanced with increased floral diversity, supporting pollinators, birds and mammals.
  - The hedgerow network in the AONB will be consolidated by new and restored hedgerows, and better managed by more sensitive cutting regimes.
  - Woodlands have been assessed for damage by pests, and plans established to manage them, thus protecting these ancient habitats.
  - A better understanding of soil health and the part this, and more controlled stock grazing, plays in relation to water quality, has had far reaching benefits.
18. These benefits and enhancements have been applied in varying degrees over many of the holdings in the group, sometimes including holdings that link



together. This has started to create the landscape scale change so needed to secure our nature and special landscape in the future.

**Charlotte Vincent**  
**Malvern Hills Facilitation Group**  
**Facilitator**  
**March 2022**

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## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **8 April 2022**

## **FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES UPDATE**

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### **Recommendation**

The Committee is recommended to:

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

### **Background**

1. Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme was launched in early July 2021. The 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**

2. 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>

Key points and developments regarding Farming in Protected Landscapes in the Malvern Hills AONB are as follows:

### **Timing**

3. 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 marked the end of the first year of the FiPL programme in the Malvern Hills AONB. This was not a complete year since the programme was not launched until early July 2021.

### **Funding**

4. Following reprofiling of the FiPL budget in November 2021, (undertaken for all Protected Landscapes) the Year One Budget for FiPL in the Malvern Hills AONB was amended to £90,000. At the close of the 2021/22 Financial Year, this budget

has been spent, with £72,810 on projects and the remaining £17,190 on Advice & Guidance and Admin.

5. The FiPL budget for the area in 2022/23 Financial Year is £235,838, of which, £45,950 has already been allocated for “Year 2” of the “Two Year Projects”, approved in Year One.

### Staffing

6. Staffing remains unchanged from that reported at the previous JAC Meeting.

### Grant Assessment Panel

7. The MH AONB FiPL Local Assessment Panel has met a total of 5 times, with the final meeting of the year taking place on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

### Enquiries

8. Since the previous JAC meeting there have been a further 11 enquiries into the FiPL Grant, bringing the total number for the 2021/22 year to 30. Some of the enquiries relate to projects that are not suitable for FiPL funding. These have been redirected to the Malvern Hills AONB Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grant, Farming Transformation Fund, or the Forestry Commission’s Woodland Creation Grant.

### Projects

9. A total of 5 projects have been completed in Year 1 with a further 3 part completed. Table 1 provides a summary.

Table 1

<b>Project applicant</b>	<b>Nature of project</b>	<b>Year of Project</b>	<b>Total grant value</b>
Malvern Hills Trust	New hedgerows, field trees and pond restoration	Yr 1	£11,231.80
Colwall Orchard Group (in conjunction with landowners)	New fruit trees in 6 old orchards	Yr 1	£8,520

Colwall Orchard Group (COG)	Equipment to manage COG land, to support advisory work and to help support participation and engagement at Colwall Village Garden	Yr 1 and 2	£22,414.38
Private Individual	Farm diversification towards regenerative agriculture on a livestock holding	Yr 1	£15,356.58
Private Individual	Restoration of an old orchard	Yr 1	£3,960
Malvern Hills AONB Unit (in conjunction with 5 land owners)	Development of a Conservation Management Plan for Hope End Park	Yr 1 and 2	£21,352
Malvern Hills Trust	Restoration of a Donkey Shed	Yr 2	£14,456
Private Individual	Restoration of an old Orchard	Yr 2	£2,556
Private Individual	Orchard Pruning, Fruit Tree planting and Species-Rich Meadow Creation	Yr 1 and 2	£6,790
Private Individual	Tree planting for shelter belt to lagoon, aesthetics to AONB and bank stabilising	Yr 2	£2,745
Malvern Hills AONB Unit	Purchase of a Brush Seed Harvester and maintenance accessories	Yr 1	£8,087.44

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## **MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 8 APRIL 2022**

### **STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT FROM AONB CHAIRS ON CLIMATE ACTION**

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#### **Recommendation**

**The Committee is recommended to discuss and provide feedback on the draft Statement of Commitment.**

#### **Background**

1. Through the year 2021 a subset of AONB staff from across the country, with the support from the National Association for AONBs, has come together to create and take forward a collaborative climate change action programme (thereafter 'the Collaborative Programme') aiming to:
  1. Develop a greater, data-based understanding of climate change and its impacts on AONBs and people, enabling decision and action;
  2. Generate a strong evidence base for an AONB offer and narrative on the inter-connected climate and ecological emergencies;
  3. Generate tangible outputs at a national and local level.
2. This Collaborative Programme brings focus on five workstreams to enhance the AONB teams' and partnerships' capacity to assess issues and deliver tangible solutions: Agriculture, Nature-based Solutions, Building Design and Planning, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Tourism and Transport.
3. This Collaborative Programme directly supports the pledge set out in the Colchester Declaration: 'by 2024, to ensure all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero'.

#### **Summary**

4. Appendix 1 sets out a draft Statement of Commitment on Climate Action.
5. This draft has been co-created with the National Association, seven AONB chairs and two Lead Officers. They trust the attached is a good reflection of the collective ambition and position on climate action in AONBs. The aim is to have a tool for both internal and external communication on climate action.

6. The Statement directly aligns with, and refers to, a Climate Action Framework & Toolkit which is currently being developed. The Framework & Toolkit will be made available to all AONB staff and their partners via the NAAONB website in late March / early April.
7. The toolkit will aim to support AONB staff, their partners, and also communities in planning activities and taking decisions around climate change issues in AONBs. Specific pull-out versions will be made available too (e.g. advice to farmers, advice on retrofitting old buildings, AONB narrative on key issues, etc.). Finally, the Framework & Toolkit will start spelling out elements of potential future delivery and required resourcing.
8. AONB Chairs have not yet been asked to sign this Statement but this is expected to happen in due course.

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# Appendix 1: Draft Statement of commitment from AONB Chairs on Climate Action

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated for the precious landscapes they enfold. As such they must make an important contribution to face climate change and its consequences. **AONB teams and partnerships must now more than ever confirm their leading role and ambition in addressing this challenge.**

Climate change mitigation and adaptation will **in part** be delivered by AONB teams but they are small and cannot do everything. AONB partnerships bring many stakeholders together and this capacity must be harnessed. These stakeholders also extend their reach and activities beyond AONB partnerships thus multiplying this capacity and placing AONBs as **trusted partners**. In parallel, AONB teams and partnerships must continue to support **land managers and communities** within AONBs to take their own action.

Rising to this challenge means **working collaboratively** across the national Family of AONBs teams, their partners, and their communities, using the AONB designation to influence relevant stakeholders. This ambition will only be achieved if AONBs are supported both in terms of **funding and policy changes** to the levels recommended by the **Landscapes Review**.

This statement of commitment from AONB chairs is the evidence that **AONBs teams and partnerships are ready to act** but it is also a **call for more support** to help them achieve their ambition.

## Context

Through the year 2021 a subset of AONB staff from across the country, with the support from the National Association for AONBs, has come together to create and take forward a **collaborative climate change action programme** (thereafter ‘the Collaborative Programme’) aiming to:

1. **Develop a greater, data-based understanding** of climate change and its impacts on AONBs and people, **enabling decision and action**;
2. **Generate a strong evidence base** for an AONB offer and narrative on the inter-connected climate and ecological emergencies;
3. **Generate tangible outputs** at a national and local level.

This Collaborative Programme brings focus on **five workstreams** to enhance the AONB teams’ and partnerships’ capacity to assess issues and deliver tangible solutions: **Agriculture, Nature-based Solutions, Building Design and Planning, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Tourism and Transport**. They are described in the **Climate Action Framework and Toolkit** [*link to be added when made available*].

This Collaborative Programme directly supports the pledge set out in the [Colchester Declaration](#): ‘by 2024, to ensure all AONB management plans include meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation, including clear, measurable targets to support Net Zero’.

The Collaborative Programme also acknowledges that it must carefully **align with the 25-Year Environment Plan** and **other relevant policies** developed by central government.

In November 2021 the National Association for AONBs signed the [Protected and Conserved Areas Joint Statement on Climate Change and Biodiversity Crises](#), asserting the crucial role designated landscapes must play in relation to the connected challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Finally, since January 2022, [AONBs teams are working to articulate what a 21<sup>st</sup> century landscape designation looks like](#) and how to get there, in the context of the ongoing consultation on the Government response to the Landscapes Review. **Climate change is a major challenge** of this start of the century and has to be highlighted as **a key priority for national landscapes**, here and now.

## Commitments

**We, as chairs** from AONB partnerships across England and Wales, and in conjunction with our Lead Officers, **assert our support for the Climate Action Framework and Toolkit** emerging from the Collaborative Programme. We **reassert our support for the collaborative way of working** fostered by the National Association as a key mechanism to develop and deliver climate solutions urgently and at scale.

We abide by the global commitments set out in the Protected and Conserved Areas Joint Statement. We also acknowledge the imperative to **remain aligned with evolving national policies** connected to climate change issues.

As chairs we are **custodians of the AONB partnerships' power to convene** and are responsible for opening and maintaining space for debate and empowerment. **We support and encourage our Lead Officers and AONB teams to take action forward on climate change.**

We commit to:

- **Stimulate debate and generate engagement** across our partnerships for ambitious, tangible climate action across the five workstreams and adapted to our local areas,
- **Empower our partnerships** to explore their full potential in terms of climate action: what they can deliver directly and what they can influence,
- Each with our own capacity and ability and in alignment with emerging results from the Collaborative Programme, **support the creation of a collective, broad-level climate action plan** for all AONBs and **lead the development of a local action plan in our own AONB partnership** by the end of 2022.

To these ends, we will:

- **Bring climate action to our AONB partnerships as a top agenda item by June 2022,**
- **Promote and use the Climate Action Framework and Toolkit** and make it **immediately** accessible to partnership members, to enable them to take meaningful actions on climate change issues;
- **Facilitate ongoing conversations to include tangible climate action in AONB Management Plans** and associated business and delivery plans, in line with the present Statement, the Climate Action Framework and Toolkit and the Colchester Declaration;
- **Maintain awareness** on other parallel or relevant activities taking place in our local areas,
- **Support each other** in fulfilling these commitments through sharing learning and demonstrating collaborative behaviours across the AONB Family.

To support us in this process, the Collaboration Advisory Group leading on the Collaborative Programme commits to ensure a mechanism is in place to provide information and a space for conversation and ongoing collaboration for AONB chairs.

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## MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### 8 APRIL 2022

## INFORMATION ITEMS

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**Management Plan ref.  
(abridged)**

**Project**

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

See FiPL report.

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

Hope End Park Conservation Management Plan

Consultants have been appointed and work to prepare this plan has commenced, with the focus thus far being on the evaluation phase including establishing ownership and existing management practices, undertaking documentary research and completing baseline surveys.

**FP2 Bring woodlands, orchards and other characteristic habitats into favourable conservation condition through encouraging and supporting management regimes that provide an economic return.**

Woodland Management Plans

A Woodland Management Consultant has been engaged to help support a small number of small woodland owners to produce management plans for their woods.

**FP5 Support appropriate measures to monitor and control pests, diseases and invasive non-native plant and animal species to protect food production and biodiversity resources**

Understanding pest impacts

Squirrel impact assessments have been completed in a small number of woods in the AONB. An initial discussion has taken place with Forestry Commission staff on the subject of possible Deer Management Group for the area.

**BDO1 The distinctive character and natural beauty of the AONB**

NDP consultations

Comments were submitted on behalf of the AONB Unit to consultations on the Regulation 14 Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) for Little Malvern and Welland

**will be fully reflected in the development and implementation of consistent statutory land use planning policy and guidance across the AONB.**

**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**

**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**

and for Ledbury. This is part of helping to ensure that these important documents help to conserve and enhance the AONB.

#### Recreational impacts study

An initial study to better understand visitor origins and recreational impacts on the Malvern Hills SSSI was completed at the end of 2021. However, a secondary phase of work has now been commissioned by the South Worcestershire Planning Authorities, supported by the AONB Unit, Natural England and the Malvern Hills Trust. It is hoped that the conclusions will provide part of the evidence base for the South Worcestershire Development Plan review.

#### Eastnor Park Information Boards

Eastnor Park is being opened up to public. There's now the Woodshed Cafe in the park and to make the park-walkers' visit more informative, we've been working with the Estate to put information boards around the park.

#### Planning Committee Support

In February 2022 staff at the AONB Unit gave a presentation (followed by Q&A) to members of the MHDC Area Planning Committees. The purpose was to raise awareness of the AONB designation, the issues of concern re. planning and what constitutes good development in the AONB.

#### Visitor Map Update and Reprint.

Our popular Visitor Map and Guide has now reprinted. 10,000 copies will be distributed around the area.

#### Website Revamp

Our current website is in need of updating; and that is nearing completion. As a result it will be much easier for the team to update and keep fresh without employing external help. The Three Counties Traditional Orchard website has been amalgamated onto it in order to save costs and enable easier administration.

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

Arts Programme

We have working up an arts programme for next year that could include a 'countryside-activity well-being' day; this would have our movement in the landscape project in a starring role. We're also collaborating with the Ledbury Poetry Festival, Malvern Walking Festival, and the National Trust on their re-assessment of Midsummer Hill fort.

## **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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