

Benefits of a well managed landscape

THE Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Annual Forum 2011 held on 10th November at Folly Farm, Bishop Sutton was attended by representatives from local businesses, organisations, local authorities and parish councils. The theme was - benefits of a well managed landscape.

The AONB designation, through legislation and guidance, requires the conservation and enhancement of these nationally cherished areas recognising their value as both national assets as providers of food, fuel, water, and highly valued local places that provide a sense of well being, recreation, and basis for business.

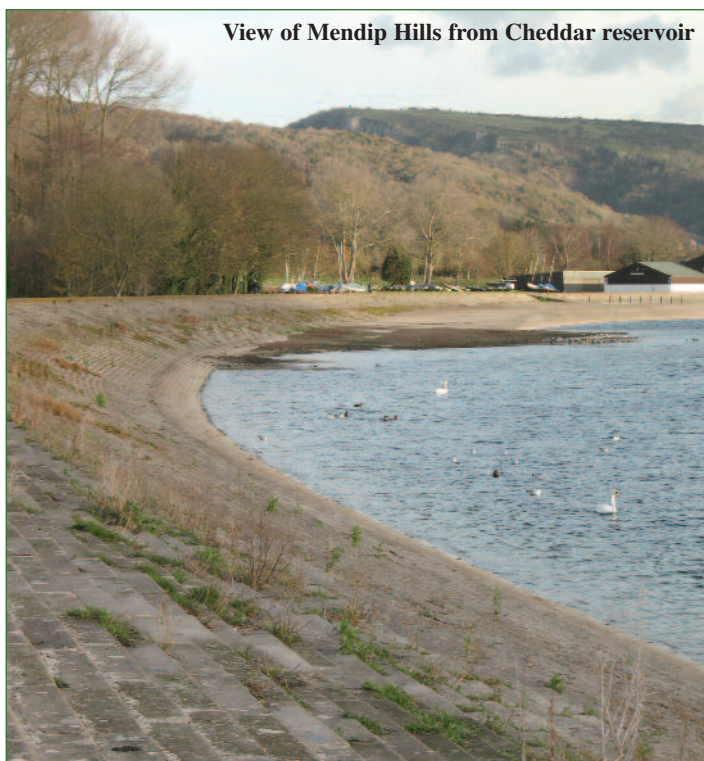
The mechanisms and funding for delivery of the AONB Management Plan are changing. Resources of both staff and finances are limited. Support for economic growth and importance of Big Society are central to current government policy.

How is this impacting and likely to continue to impact on the AONB? What do we need to do to ensure that we seize opportunities for appropriate growth and new ways of delivering but continue to conserve and enhance the Mendip Hills?

Defra Minister Richard Benyon has recognised the fundamental role of AONB Partnerships in meeting environmental objectives and delivering Big Society. As of April 2011 AONBs now have direct sponsorship from Defra confirming us as valued members of the UK's protected landscape family.

Financial challenges will trigger new, imaginative, ways of working and there are many opportunities ahead. Partnership working helps us unlock the full potential of our greatest resource – the people that care passionately about these areas and our local authorities are key players in this as they have a duty to have regard to the purposes of AONB designation.

To fund projects and activities that will conserve and enhance the area, the Partnership aim to set up a Company Limited by guarantee with charitable status by end of March 2012.



View of Mendip Hills from Cheddar reservoir



Young Rangers camping at Fernhill Farm, July 2011

Presentations at the annual forum highlighted the unique character of the area and the importance of long term planning for its care. Natural England's Mendip Hills National Character Area work will identify opportunities that will both, enhance the area and support the local economy. This will be available as an online reference tool in 2012.

The importance of the statutory Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 in setting out an agreed vision and actions to achieve it was illustrated with examples of current and recent work. These included; Sustaining Black Down Project, AONB Young Ranger scheme, a variety of volunteering and Sustainable Development Fund projects.

Local businesses illustrated how they are dependent on the Mendip Hills being a healthy, well managed landscape.

Go Wild – offer a wide range of activities – Bath Hen weekends, bushcraft, food and drink activities including cookery classes, bed and breakfast all are based in the Mendip Hills.

www.gowildweekends.co.uk

Fernhill Farm – This business located on the plateau provides accommodation, activities, events that encourage all visitors to experience and learn from the farms sustainable living approach. www.fernhill-farm.co.uk

Bristol Water – highlighted the importance of the Mendip Hills in supplying the 3 reservoirs providing water to Bristol and surrounds. www.bristolwater.co.uk

A summary report and actions from the forum workshops are available on the AONB website.

THE 2012 Annual Mendip Hills AONB Historic Environment day is to be held on Saturday 24th March 2012 at Wells & Mendip Museum.

Guest speakers include Professor Mick Aston from Channel Four's Time Team and Bob Croft, County Archaeologist for Somerset County Council.

The cost of £15 per person includes a local produce buffet lunch. Booking forms will be available in January on www.wellsmuseum.org.uk or www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk

This event is supported by the Mendip Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund in collaboration with Wells & Mendip Museum & Somerset Wildlife Trust.

The Mendip Hills AONB Unit is the voice of the protected landscape, working with landowners and the local community to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk
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