

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

# Annual Review 2022/23





# Chair's Foreword

This year has seen growth at the AONB, both in the resources available and the achievements of the Partnership. Our excellent Farming in Protected Landscapes programme grew financially with over £208,000 awarded in grants, delivering a huge boost to nature and people throughout the AONB (see page 6). Defra also recognised the achievements of this programme by extending it and by providing enhanced funding over the next 2 years.

The first stage of our new Access for All programme has seen six projects share £46,000, helping to make the AONB more accessible for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. This important work recognises that many people who could potentially benefit hugely from the AONB can find it difficult to access this special place.

The AONB staff team has also grown through the recruitment of our first ever dedicated Planning Officer, Josh Bailey, who, in the spirit of protected landscapes' collaboration, is also working for the neighbouring Wye Valley AONB.

As ever, people are at the heart of all our achievements, and it has been heartening this year to see a significant growth in the membership of the AONB landowner group, which exists to support knowledge exchange and to promote good practice in land management. In addition, the work of community groups and many individuals has once again been inspirational in helping to ensure the delivery of significant positive improvement within the protected area.

This past year, I was also especially pleased to welcome back, after Covid, the annual JAC 'field day' which provides a valuable opportunity for members of the AONB Joint Advisory Committee to see first-hand some of the on-going work and exciting projects within our area. On a lovely day, in late September, we visited a number of the nature-related projects recently completed in the north of the AONB. Indeed, the day provided several wonderful illustrations of how this Partnership is delivering in its mission to "conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area" – an area which so many people value so highly.

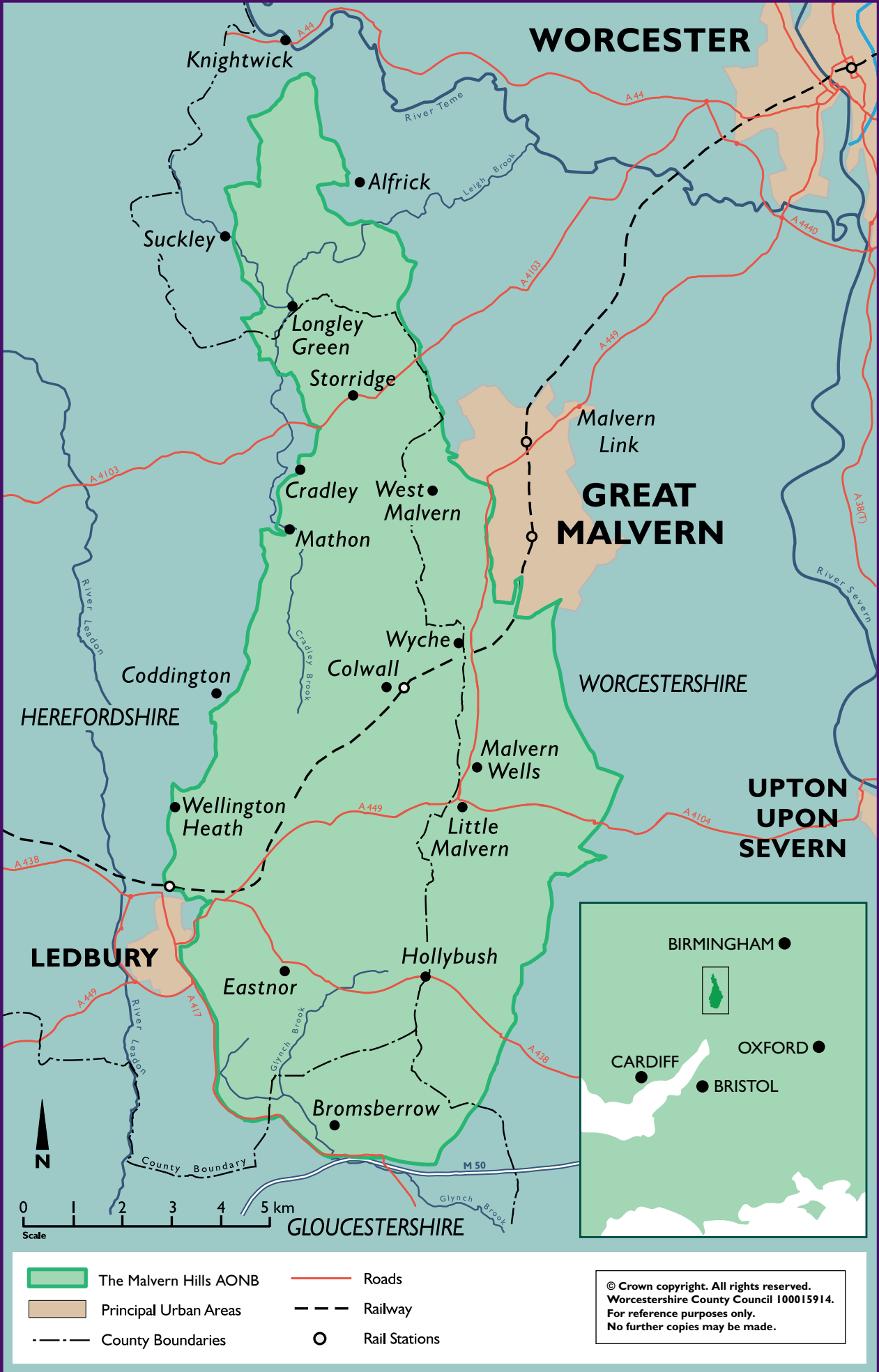


*John Raine*

John Raine  
Chair, Malvern Hills AONB

Cover photo: Volunteers sowing wildflower seed.

# Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



# An Overview of Key Points

The AONB Unit commented on **95 planning applications**



**£10,485 awarded to 8 practical community projects** through the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.



**The JAC 'field day' returned this year**, after an absence during Covid, visiting new orchards and wildflower meadows.



**£46,000 distributed** to 6 Access for All projects in the AONB helping a wider range of people to visit and enjoy it.



**The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme supported 25 projects**, providing c.£208,000 in grants to local land managers for nature friendly farming.



**6 Parish/town councils made a financial contribution** to the work of the AONB Partnership



**8.4ha of habitat conserved** or improved for biodiversity through 10 projects



**1,216 people attended AONB events** such as training sessions for farmers, 'Eco' and Well-being days and poetry walks. 101 young people were involved.



**105 Volunteers actively supported the work of the AONB** with an 'in kind' value of £31,000



**12 draft strategies/plans appraised or developed by the AONB team including:**  
2 Herefordshire Council Local Plan consultations and 2 management plans for local historic parklands.



**Josh Bailey joined the team** as Planning Officer





# Land Management and Nature Highlights

Management Plans were produced for historic parks at Hope End and Dingwood Park, near Ledbury.



Road verge management for wildflowers in Little Malvern & Castlemorton.



12.25 ha of traditional orchards were restored or planted anew.



5 old ponds were restored and 3 new ponds were created.



The AONB Landowners Group grew to 44 members covering 6000 ha of land.



An 'ark' (refuge) site for endangered White Clawed Crayfish was established near the Malvern Hills.



5 Woodland Management Plans (covering more than a dozen woods) were written.



6.5 ha of wild flower meadows were restored at 4 sites.



65 ha of grassland across 10 holdings were surveyed for plant interest.



2 booklets were produced by volunteer Naturalist Groups following wildlife survey work.





# People and Place Highlights

Under Defra’s **Access for All Programme** a new Tramper disabled buggy was provided for Eastnor Park.



A new information board was put up in the churchyard at Wellington Heath to celebrate its designation as a local wildlife site.



A grant from the **Sustainable Development Fund** of £1000 helped to buy an e-bike for the community run ‘E-bike to work’ project, helping rural people without access to cars or public transport to get to work.



The Geosite Volunteers restored 4 geological sites.



A Natural Health Day was held at Barton Court to showcase conventional and less conventional countryside pursuits in the AONB.



With the **Ledbury poetry Festival**: 5 walks with poets through the landscape of the AONB, including one devised specifically for children.



Under **Defra’s Access for All** programme walking kit was purchased to allow the visually impaired to go for guided walks.



The **Sustainable Development Fund** helped the Malvern Green Network with a seed and plant swop in the heart of Malvern.



The **Sustainable Development Fund** supported the Colwall Greener Day, where the AONB had a stall. 600 people attended including 82 children.



3 **Landowner Group** events were held to raise awareness about wildflower seed collection, horse grazing and deer management.





# Farming in Protected Landscapes

This was the second year of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, funded by DEFRA to support farmers and land managers, improve nature and benefit people in protected landscapes. Just over £208,000 in grants were approved to help deliver 25 projects across 90 ha of land. Here are a few of the highlights (see also page 4 of this report).

152 kilos of wildflower seed was harvested from 3 species rich meadows and used to restore diversity to 4 grasslands.



The last remaining donkey shed in the Malvern Hills was restored.



Restoration/management work took place across 3 historic parklands.



155 fruit trees were planted by volunteers in 5 old and 5 new traditional orchards in the parish of Colwall.



1.42kms of new and 0.6km of restored hedge were created across 8 land holdings, creating new habit and corridors for wildlife.



Disabled toilets were installed at a rural café to help support access to the countryside for all.



Woodland management was carried out to promote biodiversity, control invasive laurel and support educational use by a local primary school.

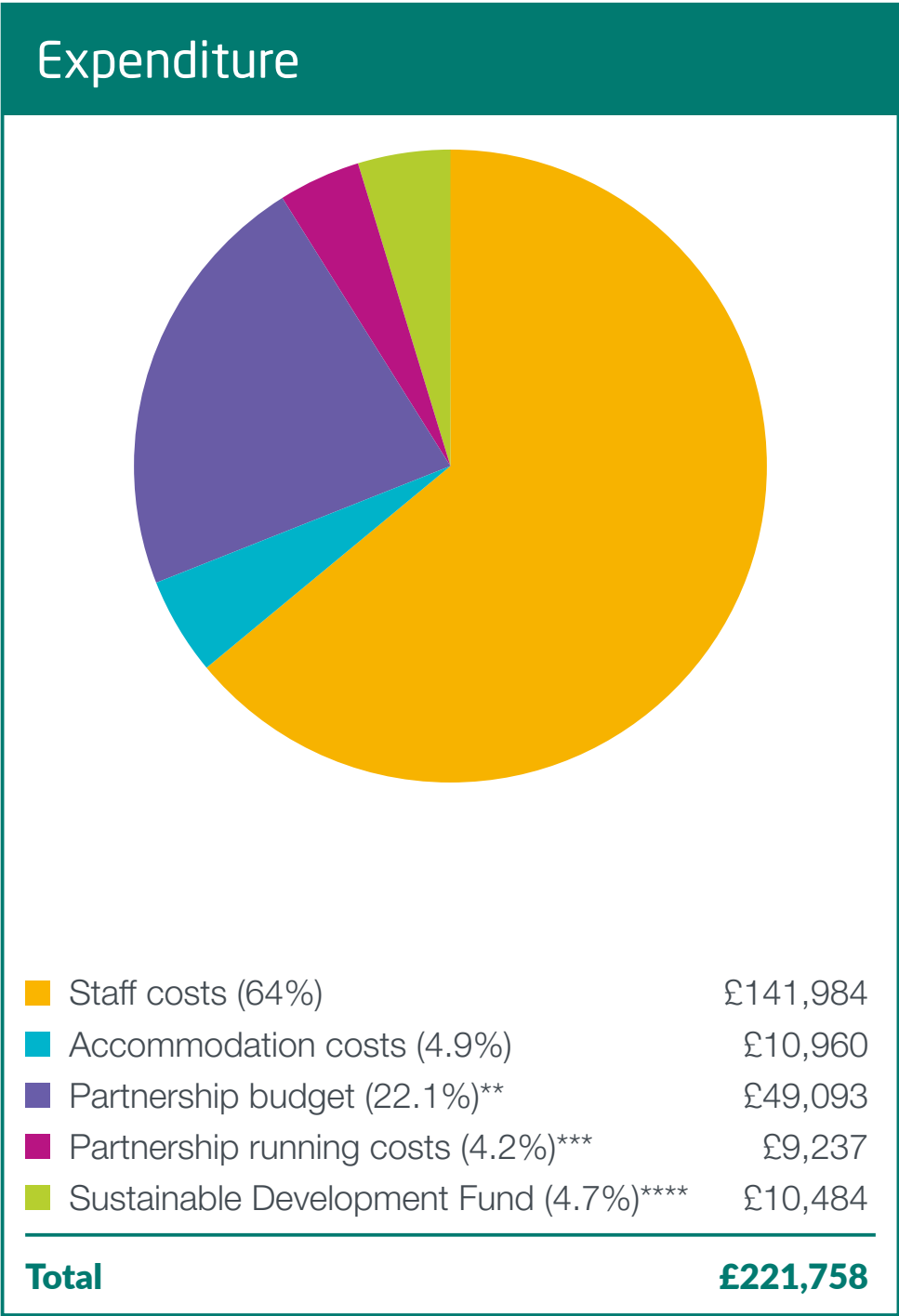
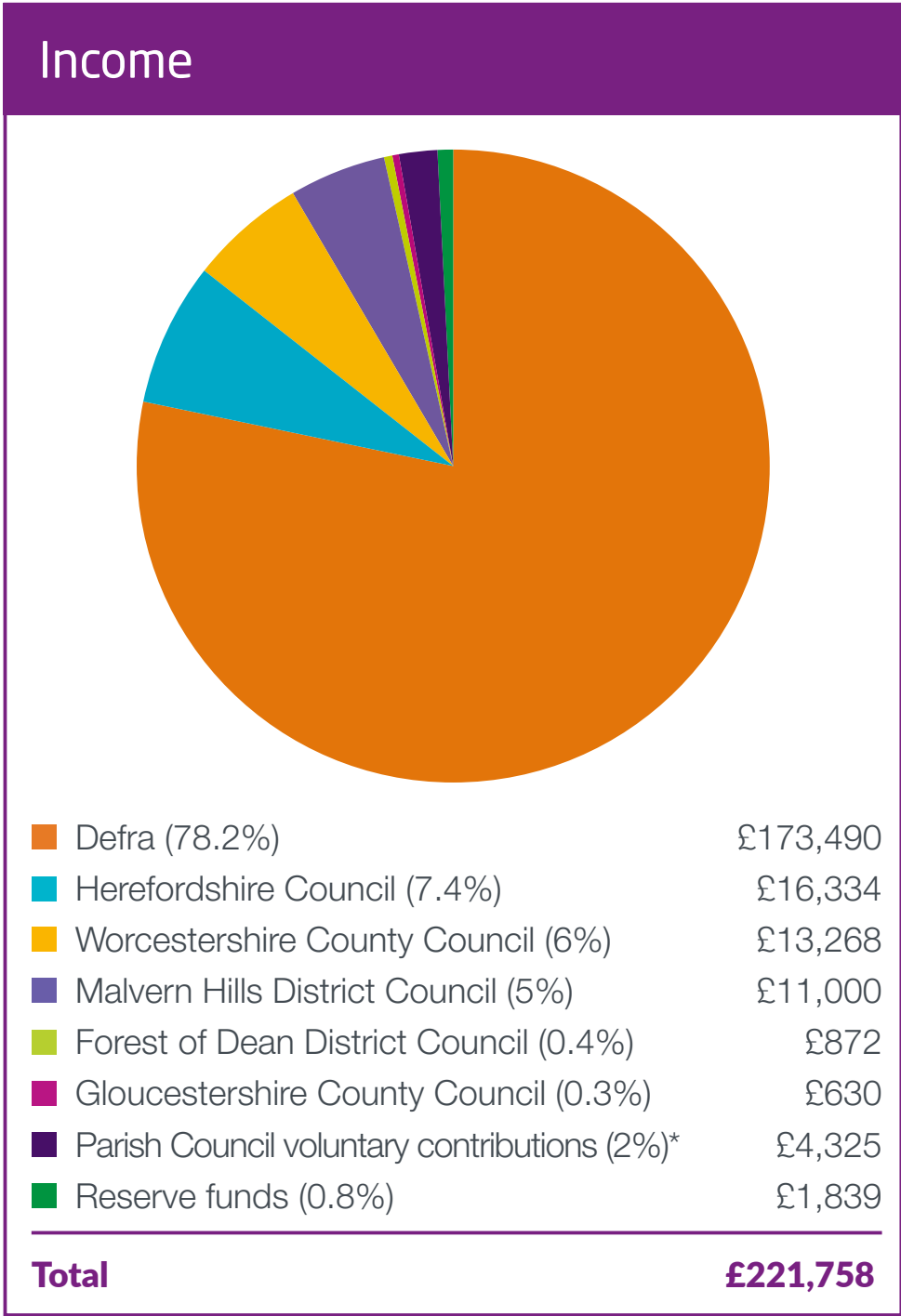


Sheep grazing was supported with the addition of livestock drinking water supplies and new fencing.





# AONB Unit Financial Structure



Additional project income (and expenditure)	
Access for All grant programme	£46,069
Farming in Protected Landscapes grant programme	£243,739
<b>Total</b>	<b>£289,808</b>

- \* Warm thanks to the Parish Councils of Colwall, Cradley, Malvern Wells, Little Malvern, West Malvern and Wellington Heath.
- \*\* This supports a wide variety of projects undertaken by partners and the AONB Unit.
- \*\*\* This is paid to our host authority, Worcestershire County Council in return for services such as HR, Finance.
- \*\*\*\* This supports projects that bring economic, social and environmental benefits in the AONB.

## The Unit staff structure for the year was as follows

- AONB Partnership Manager - Paul Esrich

AONB Partnership Assistant Managers (job share) - Karen Humphries and David Armitage
- Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer - Sash Warden

Planning Officer - Josh Bailey (part time)

The following bodies provide core grant support to the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership:



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