

Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2018/19



Chair's Foreword

Welcome to the annual review for the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership, containing examples of just some of the Partnership's work in the period 1 April 2018 - 31 March 2019.

A key area of activity during the year was the drafting of a new, five year management plan for the AONB, the result of much consultation with many different groups and interests. We also published our latest State of the AONB report (2018) which summarises the condition of the area and which provided an invaluable steer to the content and direction of the new management plan.

At a national level, the Government initiated an independent review of National Parks and AONBs to assess whether these designations are fit for the 21st century. The Malvern Hills AONB Partnership played its part in this review by providing a formal response to the call for evidence and by hosting a visit from one of the review panel members. This review is enormously important and we await its recommendations (in Autumn 2019) with great interest.

Within the local area, the Partnership has, amongst other things, sought to better understand the value of the AONB to society (page 10) and to ensure that future development around Malvern does not negatively impact the setting of the AONB (page 8). It has also begun important work with a cluster of landowners to find opportunities to sustainably manage land for people and nature (page 9).

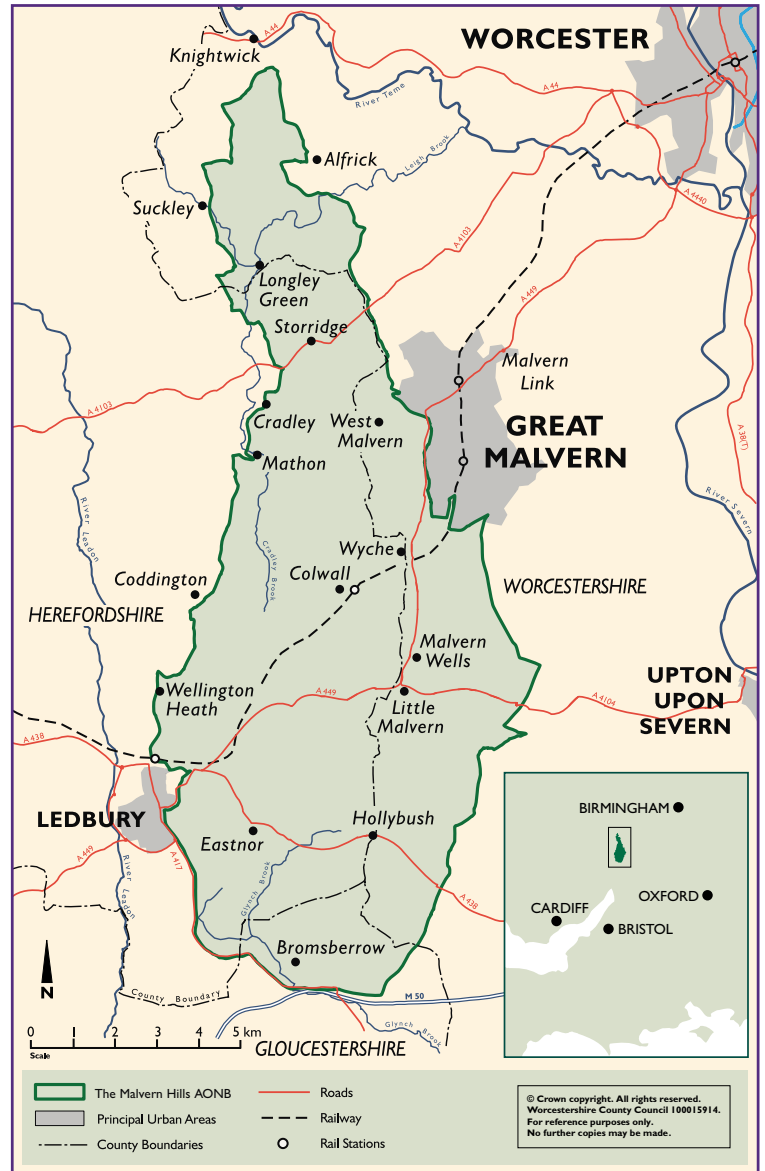
I hope you enjoy reading this review, including the infographic on page 3 that we are trialling in this report for the first time.

Yours



Cllr Gwyneth Rees
Chair,
Malvern Hills AONB
Joint Advisory Committee

Location of the Malvern Hills AONB



Some key facts and figures from 2018/19

over
£20,000

awarded to 16 projects through the AONB Sustainable Development Fund



7 Parish/Town Councils

made a voluntary financial contribution to the work of the AONB Partnership



8 owners of over **2000ha of land**

joined a new group to share knowledge and improve management for wildlife and landscape

3 Worcestershire 'Mother orchards' planted



5 Local Geological Sites improved thanks to

25 volunteers



1 Heritage Lottery Funded project completed worth

£396,000



247

planning applications made in the AONB, the AONB Unit commented on **49** of them



34

children took part in Cloud hedge poetry day



Malvern Hills AONB

featured in

3

national radio programmes

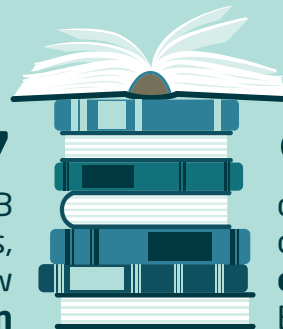


£5.8m

estimated value of physical and mental health benefits of the Malvern Hills and Commons

7

new AONB publications, including a new **Management Plan**



935

copies of the **Nature of the Malverns** Book sold

Eight oaks for Eight Oaks

Hedgerow trees are one of the key elements of many landscapes across the Malvern Hills AONB. Numerous mature or veteran trees bring great character to the area as well as providing vital shelter and food for many species of wildlife. However, survey data suggests that very few young trees are growing through the hedgerows, which means that our landscapes may look and function very differently in the future.

At Eight Oaks Farm near Castlemorton eight new 'standard' Oak trees and two Perry Pear trees have been planted, with financial support from the AONB Partnership. These trees stand proud of the hedgerow and so should not succumb to the flail next time they are trimmed. As a result, it is hoped that the majestic trees which bejewel the hedgerows in this part of the AONB will be a feature of the area for many centuries to come.

The AONB Partnership would like to hear from you if you have an interest in planting hedgerow trees in the area:
aonb@worcestershire.gov.uk

Poetry in the landscape

The magnificent landscapes and tranquillity of the Malvern Hills and surrounds have long been a driver of human creativity. Through the kindness of local landowners a number of hidden places in the AONB were opened up as part of the Ledbury Poetry Festival and duly provided inspiration to those who visited. This included a gaggle of local school children who came to explore a magnificent cloud hedge and local poet, Jean Atkin, who channelled their noisy enthusiasm into new poems. The BBC picked up on this initiative and the AONB Unit consequently participated in a poetry-fuelled walk for Radio 4's *Ramblings* programme with none other than Clare Balding.

To raise a poem about the hills, lifts the spirit better than pills. So the Rambling Balding came to see, the poems and poets of the AONB.



Hedgerow trees young and old, Castlemorton



Recording BBC Radio 4's *Ramblings* programme

A new management plan for the Malvern Hills AONB

The purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. This has been our focus throughout the last year as we have carried out the 5 year review of the AONB management plan. Against the back-drop of great political uncertainty it has felt good to sit down with partners and to listen to the many different voices that know and love the area and who have thoughts about how it should be cared for in the future. The result of these many discussions and consultations with the public is a new management plan for the AONB for the period 2019-24.

It can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/2TSRAKH>

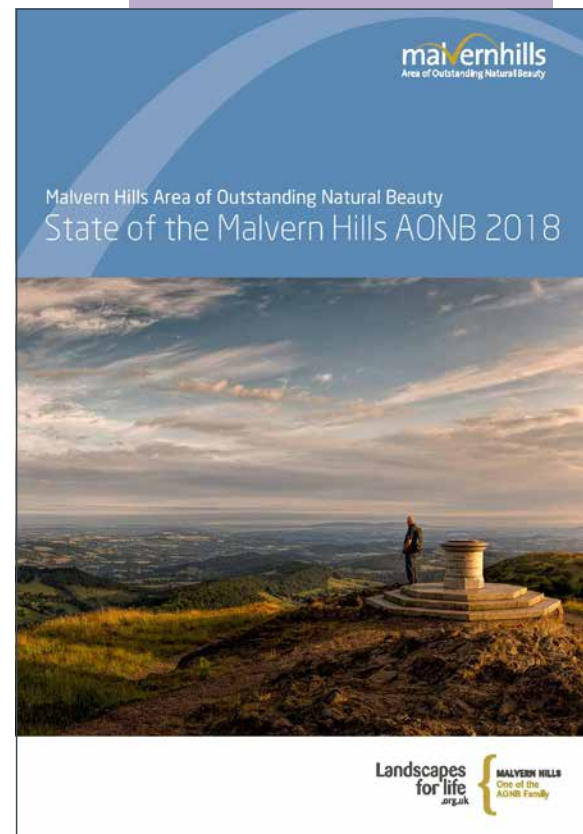
The State of the Malvern Hills AONB in 2018

Throughout the year the AONB Partnership collected and analysed a range of data from many different sources to help us understand how the AONB has changed in the last five years. For example, we learnt that there has been a reduction of almost 50% in the area of farmed land in the AONB being managed under some form of environmental land management scheme. All the data collected has been assembled into a single report known as the State of the Malvern Hills AONB. This can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/2vNuD2a>

The State of the AONB report is a sister publication to the AONB management plan. Data collected during the year and presented in the State report was used to inform the drafting of the new AONB management plan (see above) and to ensure that it contains policies and actions that will help to address the issues and challenges revealed by the monitoring work. For example, data collection showed that one of the Registered Parks in the AONB is currently in a vulnerable condition and so the new management plan contains an action which aims to improve it.



AONB management plan 2019-2024

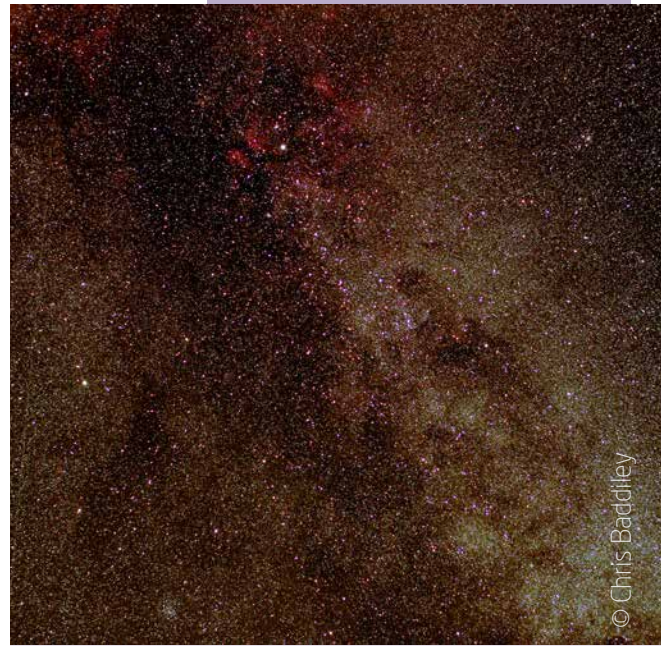


State of the AONB report, 2018

'Lighting down' the AONB

The Malvern Hills is renowned for its daytime views but the beauty of the night skies above the AONB are also an attraction and make an important contribution to the tranquillity of the area. Light-monitoring data collected by local astronomer Dr Chris Baddiley suggests that these skies currently meet International Dark Sky 'silver status' with the Milky Way being clearly visible at 20% contrast to background when overhead.

The AONB Partnership has recently consulted on new lighting guidance which aims to reduce light pollution, enabling people to see the stars more clearly whilst also saving energy and minimising the impact of lighting on wildlife, people and on our natural landscapes. The guidance applies to anyone who is using, replacing or installing new external lighting in the area. It will amplify the content of the AONB management plan so should be a material consideration in relation to planning. It will be available shortly on the AONB website: www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/publications



The Milky Way above the AONB

Finding rare species in the Malverns

'Finding Rare Species in the Malverns' is a two year project which aims to improve our knowledge of the wildlife of the northern part of the AONB, with a focus on that which is rare. During the year a suite of training workshops equipped local people with the skills necessary to survey for a range of important wildlife species including lesser horseshoe bats, noble chafer beetles, redstarts and dormice. A variety of traditional and pioneering survey methodologies such as dormouse nibbled nut hunts and trail camera tracking stations are being used. So far 15 records of rare species have been recorded in 4 historic and 8 new locations, along with hundreds of records of some of our commoner wildlife. Importantly, many of the records collected are outside of nature reserves and from sites which have not been surveyed before.

The project is being managed by the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership. For more information please contact the Project Officers Lucy Grove and Liz Etheridge at rare-species@wbrc.org.uk



Dormouse

Future-proofing our woodlands

With an ever growing list of pests and diseases affecting many of our native trees, the advice from those in the know is to ensure that woodlands contain a mixed range of species. This is especially important in woods dominated by our native ash, which are expected to be decimated by ash dieback disease in the years ahead. One such wood can be found in the parish of Mathon where the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership has supported the landowner to clear large 'racks' of open space using a 'minesweeper'. Areas cleared in this way will start to be replanted with a diverse range of broadleaved species from the autumn of 2019, creating a woodland which is more likely to thrive as a haven for wildlife far into the future.



'Minesweeper' in action, Mathon

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project

The past year has been a busy one for the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project (TCTOP) after the Heritage Lottery Fund agreed an extension to the original three year project. This allowed us to explore some new ideas and deliver some new work. Key outputs included:

- a series of master classes delivered to existing TCTOP volunteers, extending their orchard skills and knowledge;
- an orchard training course developed and delivered to Parish Tree Wardens in Worcestershire and Herefordshire;
- three 'mother orchards' planted at secure sites in Worcestershire. These contain two trees of all known Worcestershire apple cultivars and will act as a vital genetic data bank to prevent the total loss of our cultural and horticultural heritage;
- a study exploring what to do with fruit from traditional orchards, which is often difficult to pick and to process. Orchard fruit growers from within and beyond the project area were interviewed and information was compiled in a report detailing best practice. This has been shared with traditional orchard projects all over the UK; and
- completion of a TCTOP evaluation report which can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/304ui8W>



Project evaluation report

Understanding and protecting our cherished views

A 2018 survey of users of the Malvern Hills and Commons revealed that views are what people like most about this area, being mentioned by 48% of all respondents compared to the next most popular response which was mentioned by just 24% of respondents. Key activities this year that will help to protect our views were as follows:

- Malvern Town Council asked local people to identify their most cherished views and worked with a local Landscape Architect to help explain what makes them so special. Similar work to identify and justify ‘key views’ was completed for the village of Colwall on the western side of the Malvern Hills. In both cases the work carried out has been used as evidence to underpin policies in Neighbourhood Development Plans which will protect these views in the future.
- The AONB Partnership consulted on new guidance called ‘Respecting landscape in views’. This sets out a number of principles which should be considered by those involved in planning new developments. For example, how orientation of buildings and use of colours and materials can help to integrate new buildings into the landscape. The guidance places an understanding of landscape character and visual amenity at the heart of new development.
- Malvern Hills District Council commissioned a Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Assessment of land around the eastern environs of the AONB and the settlement of Malvern. The report provides an objective, evidence-based assessment to help determine the sensitivity and the capacity of different areas of land to accept new development. It will help inform the review of the South Worcestershire Development Plan and allocations of development land for the future.



Part of the setting of the Malvern Hills

Facilitating good land management

It is now well recognised that working collaboratively across large areas of landscape can benefit sustainable land management and nature conservation. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit has helped to establish a cluster of landowners in the west of the AONB and is supporting this group in sharing ideas, addressing management challenges and exploring new opportunities. Thus far the group has received training in tree disease and deer management. The Malvern Hills AONB Facilitation Fund is supported by funding from Defra and is one of 98 such groups of landowners and managers operating in England.

An early initiative to come from the Facilitation Fund relates to Hope End Park which is one of only two nationally registered parks and gardens in the AONB. Once the setting for a remarkable house built in 'Brighton Pavilion' style (now knocked down), the parkland currently has six different owners which has made management difficult. Progress is now being made in drawing the owners together with a view to agreeing a plan for the park and conserving its 'gardenesque' features.



The original house at Hope End

A visitor survey of the Malvern Hills and Commons

Survey work may sound rather dull but the results of surveys can be essential in helping to understand peoples' views and opinions, as well as for helping to ensure that resources are directed in the best possible way. A visitor survey carried out on the Malvern Hills and Commons during summer and autumn last year revealed many things including the following:

- 81% visitors to the area are on a day visit or part day/local visit;
- the average length of stay was 2 hours 23 minutes;
- 60% of visitors are aware of who is responsible for the management of the land but only 15% could name the AONB as a designation that applied to the area;
- 98% of visitors rated the management of the land as good/very good;
- 99% of visitors rated the level of enjoyment from their visit as high or very high;
- 87% stated that nothing had spoilt their visit;
- almost half of people (48%) would exercise between 10 and 20% less if the Malvern Hills and Commons were not there.

The full survey report can be found at: <https://bit.ly/2VZWszm>



Walkers at sunset, Malvern Hills

What is the true worth of the Malvern Hills and Commons?

Such a question is probably impossible to answer because areas of fantastic countryside provide benefits to individuals and to society in a myriad of ways, many of which are very difficult to quantify. However, the AONB Partnership has sought to better understand the value of the Malvern Hills and Commons by commissioning an economic assessment of the health benefits they provide. Using Natural Capital Accounting techniques the study calculated that the physical and mental health benefits provided by the area add up to just over £5.8 million each year¹. These are the costs related to health and social care cost savings, economic output gains and quality of life benefits. The full report sets out the methodology used to arrive at these results and the limitations of the study; it can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/2PGGoAx>



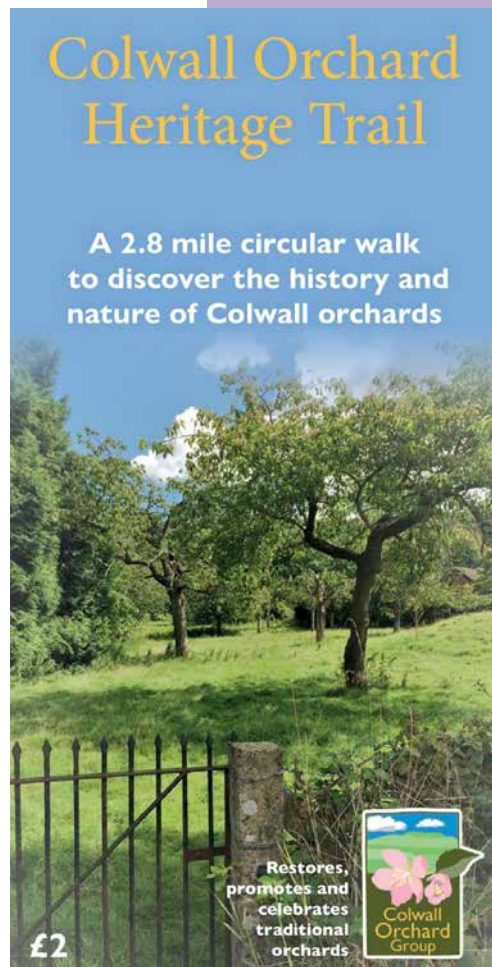
© Katie Powell

Kite flying, Malvern Common

The Colwall Orchard Heritage Trail

The village of Colwall owes much of its early prosperity to fruit growing. For many years during the Victorian era the village was a productive centre for the growing, harvesting and processing of fruit. The landscapes that remain today provide many clues to this history with fruit trees being found in many gardens and with a number of remaining traditional orchards providing fantastic places where nature thrives.

Traditional orchards are also great places for people to enjoy and explore. The Colwall Orchard Group has researched the history of orchards in Colwall and brought this together in the form of a self-guided trail leaflet. A 2.8 mile route starts and ends at Colwall Railway Station and includes a visit to Colwall Village Garden. The leaflet – part funded by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund - tells the story of how orchards became important to Colwall and why they are still relevant today.

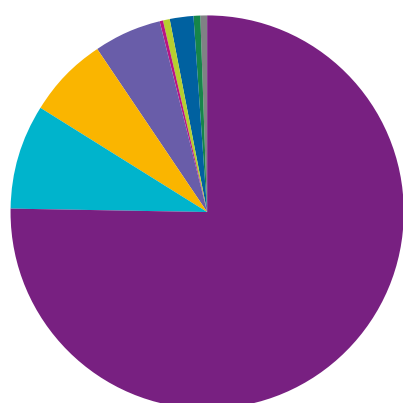


Colwall orchard heritage trail leaflet

¹ This estimate is indicative of the real physical and mental health value of the area.

AONB Unit Financial Structure

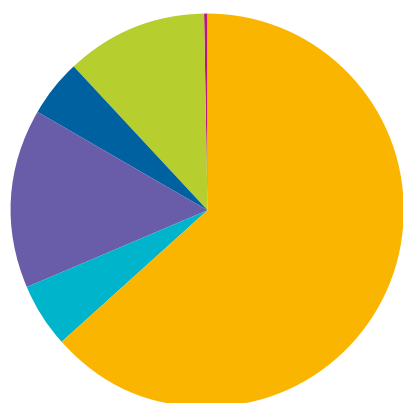
'Core' income



Defra (75.4%)	£146,700
Herefordshire Council (8.4%)	£16,334
Worcestershire County Council (6.8%)	£13,268
Malvern Hills District Council (5.7%)	£11,000
Gloucestershire County Council (0.3%)	£600
Forest of Dean District Council (0.5%)	£872
Parish Council voluntary contributions (1.8%)*	£3,550
Natural England ² (0.7%)	£1,418
Earned income (0.4%)	£850

Total **£194,592**

'Core' expenditure



Staff cost (including travel and training) (63.6%)	£123,834
Accommodation cost (5.2%)	£10,081
Partnership budget (14.7%)	£28,572
Partnership running costs (4.7%)	£9,237
Sustainable Development Fund (11.6%)	£22,499
Transfer to project reserve (0.2%)	£369

Total **£194,592**

Additional project income (and expenditure)

Heritage Lottery Fund (Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project)

Total **£38,305**

* Warm thanks are due to Berrow, Colwall, Cradley, Ledbury, Little Malvern and Welland, Malvern Wells and West Malvern Parish/Town Councils for their contributions

² Facilitation Fund staff costs

The Unit staff structure for the year was as follows

AONB Partnership Manager: Paul Esrich

AONB Partnership Assistant Manager: David Armitage/Karen Humphries

AONB Partnership Support Officer: Sarah Jones

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project Officer: Karen Humphries (P/T)

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



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