

Malvern Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Glenys Burrows

Annual Report 2005/06



The Malvern Hills AONB

Statistics

Size: 105 sq. kms
(Magic, 2003)

Administrative area:

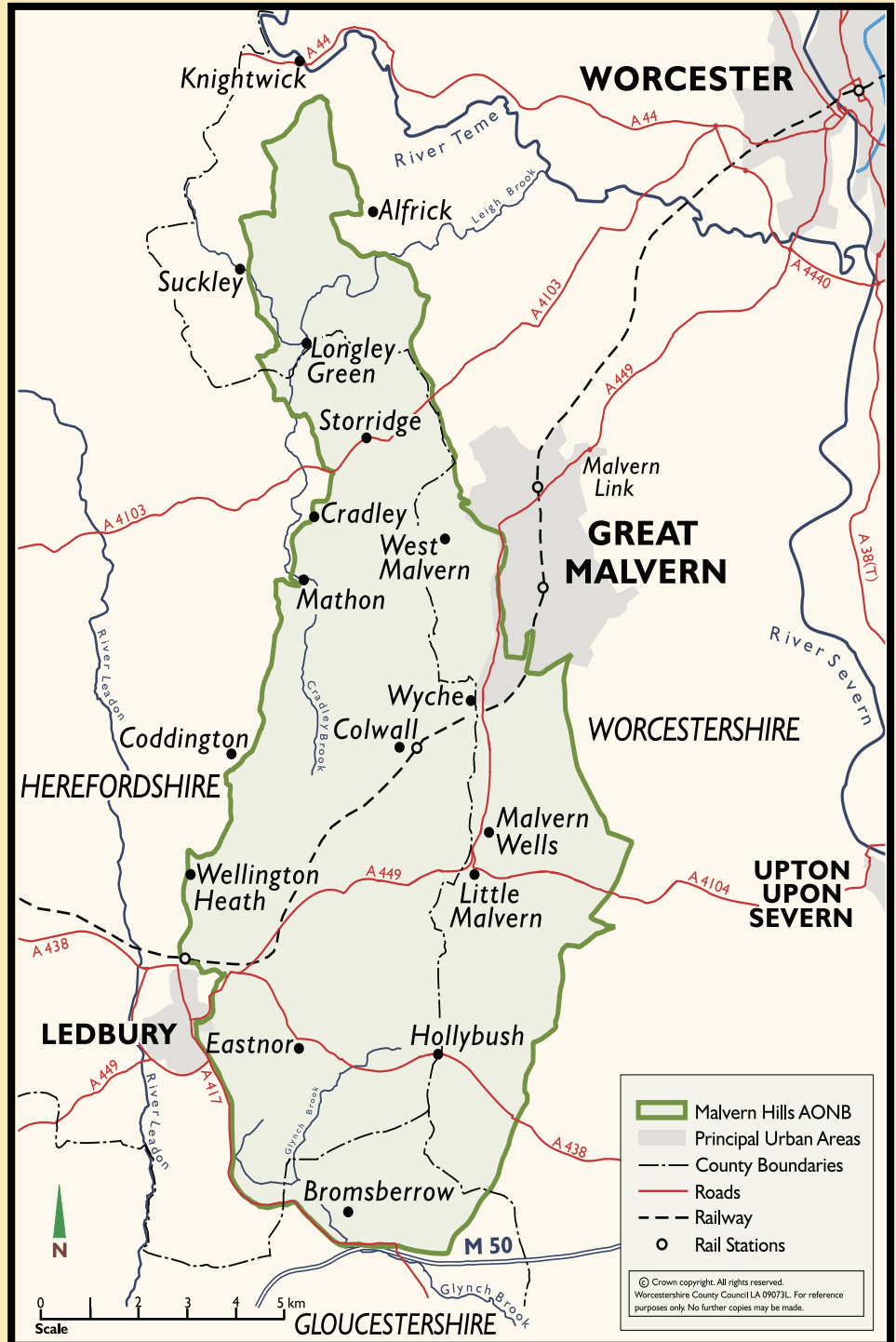
- % of AONB in Herefordshire Council: 58.52%
- % of AONB in Worcestershire County Council: 35.83%
- % of AONB in Gloucestershire County Council: 5.72%

(data derived from UK borders)

Population: 12,657
(Oxford mid-1998 estimates, ONS)
% of population over 59 yrs of age: 25.49%
(Oxford mid-1998 estimates, ONS)

Land cover and land use:

- % of AONB as Grade 1 Agricultural Land: 0.35% (Defra)
- % of AONB as Grade 3 Agricultural land: 64.65%
- % of AONB as urban land: 2.84%
- % of AONB as ancient semi-natural woodland: 6.19% (English Nature)
- % of farms classing sheep as the main agricultural enterprise: 40.7%



No. of SSSIs: 15 (English Nature)

All figures taken from 'The Malvern Hills Statistical Digest, 2003'

Chairman's Foreword

I have distinct pleasure in commending our report for 2005/06.

After three years of uncertainty, we are, at last, up to strength in our staffing structure. Paul Esrich has joined us from Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, as Malvern Hills AONB Manager. We also welcomed Rupert Johnson and Bridget Oleksy to the staff.

I must, once again, express our gratitude to David Armitage, now Assistant Manager in the AONB Unit, for holding things together in the interim (rather too long an interim, perhaps) and to our partners and the Countryside Agency for their unstinting support during this difficult time. Hopefully, our friends at the Countryside Agency will still be taking care of us under the banner of Natural England, come October 2006, and I look forward to our continuing to work with them.

Our Heritage Lottery Fund project continues, bringing in almost £800,000 to the area. We have laid the foundations of our Sustainable Development Fund and look forward to seeing the schemes that it brings forth.

In August, we were honoured by the visit of Jim Knight MP, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Biodiversity, eager to see the area and to learn how the constituent landowners are working with the AONB Partnership. We also welcomed James Hervey-Bathurst, of Eastnor Estate, as the newest member of the Joint Advisory Committee.



L-R Cllr Ted Roberts, Jim Knight MP, Cllr John Tretheway.

It gives me great satisfaction that we continued to work closely with the Malvern Hills Conservators, and we are grateful to them, to our funding partners and to James Bisset, who so ably Chairs the Steering Group.



Cllr Ted Roberts

Chairman of the
Malvern Hills AONB
Joint Advisory
Committee

About the Malvern Hills AONB

The purpose of AONB designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

In pursuing the primary purpose of AONB designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.

Recreation is not an objective of designation but the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other land uses.

The AONB Partnership

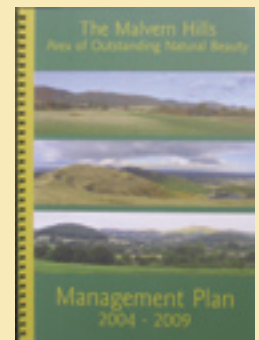
Local authorities, government bodies, parish councils, landowners, communities and voluntary groups are all involved in helping to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB. The governance structure of the AONB Partnership is as follows:

The AONB Management Plan

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 places a statutory duty on relevant local authorities to produce an AONB Management Plan. A five year Management Plan for the Malvern Hills AONB was produced in 2004. This plan provides the framework for maintaining the special character of the area and underpins the work described in this annual report.

The Management Plan describes the following vision for the AONB:

“The vision is one of a landscape in perfect balance with its communities, economies and visitors, where the special qualities – the landscape, wildlife, cultural heritage and tranquillity – are cherished, and conserved and which in return deliver a sustained high quality of life for its residents, wonderful opportunities for visitors to sample local food and picturesque scenery, a skilled labour market and diverse economy of agriculture and high tech industries.”



AONB Partnership Structure

Title	Purpose	Participants
Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)	To coordinate the management of the AONB and the implementation of the AONB Management Plan.	Representatives from a variety of public, private and voluntary sector bodies.
Steering Group	To provide guidance, advice and support to the Joint Advisory Committee and Staff Unit.	Officers from funding local authorities, the Countryside Agency and the Malvern Hills Conservators.
Staff Unit	To assist the Joint Advisory Committee in fulfilling its duties.	AONB Unit Manager and staff.
Working Groups	To support the work of the AONB Partnership by providing specialist expertise on a range of subjects.	Teams of specialists drawn from within and outside the Partnership.

Malverns Heritage Project

The Malverns Heritage Project focuses on two distinctive elements of Malvern's heritage: its ancient grazed hills and the water that flows from them. The project is largely funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, with cash contributions coming in from the Countryside Agency, English Nature, the Malvern Hills Conservators and Worcestershire County Council. The project has been successful in bringing national funds of just under £800,000 to bear on local priorities. The project began in earnest in June 2005 and will run for three years.

Hills and Commons



New cattle grid, British Camp.

The first element aims to help restore the grazing that has given the hills and commons south of British Camp their distinctive appearance. This year has seen the installation of two of the proposed five cattle grids - assisted by Worcestershire County Council's Highways Partnership Unit in Malvern - the funding of a shepherd for the Malvern Hills Conservators' flock, and the engagement of consultants to prepare a plan for Castlemorton Common. This plan involves all the stakeholders in the area and aims to agree a means of conserving the lower commons that is acceptable to all.

As part of the Castlemorton Plan, the flora of the area was surveyed in the summer using the National Vegetation Classification methodology. English Nature contributed to the cost of the survey and the results will inform the future management of the commons.

Wells and Spouts



The 'blessing' of St. Ann's Well.

Malvern's water is world famous and flows freely from a number of spouts and springs around the hills. The Malverns Heritage Project aims to restore fourteen of these distinctive features and to advertise the history of the 'water culture'. To date, the gardens and spouts of St Ann's Well have been restored and this has been done with the considerable assistance of the Malvern Spa Association and the help of the Malvern Hills Conservators' Gift Fund. A well blessing ceremony, complete with minstrels and a donkey marked the completion of the works and attracted much favourable public and press interest.

Geology

Historic Environment

The AONB forms a key part of the Abberley and Malvern Hills European Geopark. The Geopark is a non-statutory, European designation, which denotes that the geology of the area is of international importance.

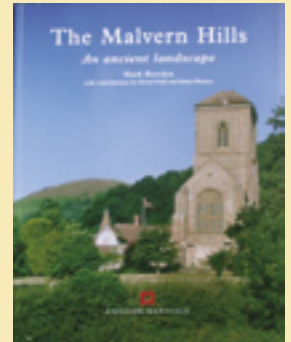


Launch of Whitman's Hill Geodiversity Venture, Abigail Brown and Bill Wiggin MP

A unique project taken forward in the AONB under the Geopark banner was the Whitman's Hill Geodiversity Venture. This aims to involve the local community in the interpretation of the fossils and geology of the Wenlock Limestones that are present in the quarry and in various aspects of the management of the site. The project was managed by the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust.

In order to improve understanding of the area the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust were commissioned to produce a Local Geodiversity Action Plan for Castlemorton, Hollybed and Coombe Green Commons. The plan identifies many important geological features and makes a suite of recommendations regarding their conservation.

This year saw the publication of 'The Malvern Hills, an Ancient Landscape'. This monograph on the archaeology and history to be found in the AONB was compiled and part funded by English Heritage. It drew upon comprehensive survey work that had been carried out in previous years by the archaeology departments of Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire local authorities with the cooperation of landowners. It is the first survey and publication of its kind for any AONB designation. Its purpose is to identify and contextualise the important sites of the area and the document has already led to further research and survey work.



Additional survey work carried out during the year included the completion of a woodland survey by Worcestershire County Council Archaeology Service, which added 315 new sites in the AONB to the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record.

The Shire Ditch is a Scheduled Ancient Monument that runs along the ridge of the Malvern Hills. The Malvern Hills Conservators - the statutory public body constituted by Act of Parliament to manage the Malvern Hills and



The Shire Ditch.

Commons - have a responsibility to conserve this ancient structure. Worcestershire County Council's Historic Environment and Archaeology Service were commissioned to assess the extent of the ditch; note pressure points; and provide recommendations for management. Match funding for the survey was provided by The Countryside Agency.

Landscape and Biodiversity

Advice

This year saw the continuation of successful partnership working with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG). FWAG advisors were paid to organise awareness raising events, to visit farms in the AONB and to produce farm Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs). These plans inform the landowner about management regimes which can benefit wildlife. Almost 100 people attended FWAG events dealing with biodiversity and environmental management and ten farm BAPs were drawn up in the AONB.



Management at St. Wulstans LNR.

Grants

Landowners in the area benefited from the availability of Landscape and Biodiversity Enhancement Grants, which were administered by Herefordshire Council. The grants come from the Countryside Agency with match-funding provided by the landowners themselves. These small grants enable managers to improve the landscape of the AONB and add to its local distinctiveness. As a result, orchards and spinnies were planted using traditional varieties and species, trees were coppiced and scrub on the commons was cleared. Thanks



Living willow, West Malvern School.

to additional project funding from the Countryside Agency, pollarding and pond clearance work was carried out at the Charlie Ballard Nature Reserve in partnership with Colwall Parish Council. Countryside Agency funding was also used to support the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's coppicing work at its Knapp and Papermill Reserve.

Management

Thanks to funding from the Liveability Fund, the management of St Wulstans Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in the east of the AONB received an enormous boost. A range of conservation work was undertaken, including:

- Pollarding of specimen trees and hedgerows;
- Management of semi-improved grassland, woodland areas and scrub;
- The creation of ponds and wetland areas; and
- Surveys of reptiles, slow worms and glow worms.

Worcestershire County Council orchestrated this new management work in association with Malvern Hills District Council and with valuable input and assistance from members of the local community.

The Hills Hopper

The long running and successful Hills Hopper bus continued this year. Funded by the Malvern Hills Rural Transport Partnership, the service aims to reduce the number of cars travelling around the AONB. In order to make the local tourism industry aware of the service, invitees from hotels, bed and breakfasts and Tourist Information Centres were taken for a trip on the bus to various points of interest, ending with a visit to Eastnor Castle. The service, which runs on weekends and Bank Holidays from Easter to October, carried 1,669 passengers. Gratitude needs to be expressed to enthusiastic volunteers who helped distribute timetables and run the service.



Transport Planning

Local Transport Plans (LTPs) are strategic documents that provide the framework for transport planning within local authorities over a 5-year period. All county and unitary Councils in the area consulted on new LTPs this year and the AONB Unit made comments to try to ensure that the interests of the protected area were well represented. Consequently, a new AONB policy was inserted into the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan.

Planning Applications

The AONB Unit is a consultee on planning applications within the designation and has formed a planning group in order to respond to relevant applications. This year, a more proactive approach has been fostered with guidelines on telecommunication masts, wind turbines and polytunnels being drawn up and approved by the AONB Joint Advisory Committee. These guidelines communicate clear messages and will now inform the AONB response to applications in these areas.

Planning Policy

The AONB Unit responded to the following consultations:

- Re-use of rural buildings
Supplementary Planning Document
- Malvern Hills District Council
- Core Strategy Issues and Options
Paper - Forest of Dean District
Council



Masts at Worcestershire Beacon.

Understanding & Enjoyment

Education & Awareness

Helping people to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the AONB designation can be achieved in many ways.

Walks

Following the success of earlier publications in the series, two new Discovery Walks were produced which recommend routes and explain features of interest along the way. One focuses on the scientific and railway history of the eastern side of the hills, whilst the other shows-off the rich literary connections of the area. Members of Malvern Wells and Colwall Parish Councils provided valuable assistance in developing these guides.



The AONB continued to contribute to the publication of a visitor newspaper entitled 'Explore the Malvern Hills and District'. This relays key messages about the AONB designation and the work of its constituent landowners. 80,000 copies were distributed locally.

For the first time, the AONB Unit contributed to the production of an audio walk for the Malverns area, which has been recorded onto a compact disc. This innovative product is now available commercially and allows visitors to learn about the special features of the area from local people whilst on the move or sitting at home.

The AONB Unit was pleased to be able to direct grant aid from the Countryside Agency towards the purchase of nest box cameras and microscopes at Ravenshill Nature Reserve. This equipment is being used to allow children who visit the reserve to learn about wildlife and the importance of good habitat management.

Staff in the AONB Unit gave informative talks to the following groups:

- Ledbury Probus Group
- Malvern Spa Association AGM
- Malvern Branch Worcestershire Campaign to Protect Rural England

Guided walks in the area were organised by a range of interests and groups including Worcestershire County Council archaeologists and Malvern Hills Conservators.



Archaeology walk, British Camp.

Monitoring

Providing advice and financial support to those managing land in the AONB is crucial. However, it is also important to know whether such management is having the desired effect on the special qualities of the AONB.

Species

- Volunteer bird survey work on Castlemorton Common continued with grant aid from the AONB Unit.
- National Vegetation Surveys were carried out on the lower commons and in woodland units at News Wood and Gullet Wood. Funding partners included Malvern Hills Conservators and English Nature.
- Herefordshire Action for Mammals began a survey of dormice in and around the hills.
- Butterfly Conservation received funding from bodies such as the Bromesberrow Estate and the Malvern Hills Conservators to survey Fritillary populations over the southern Malvern Hills.
- The Countryside Agency provided funding for a new booklet to encourage others to identify and record information on butterflies in the area.
- Bat survey work supported by English Nature showed positive signs for two of the area's most important species: the Lesser Horseshoe and Barbastrelle.

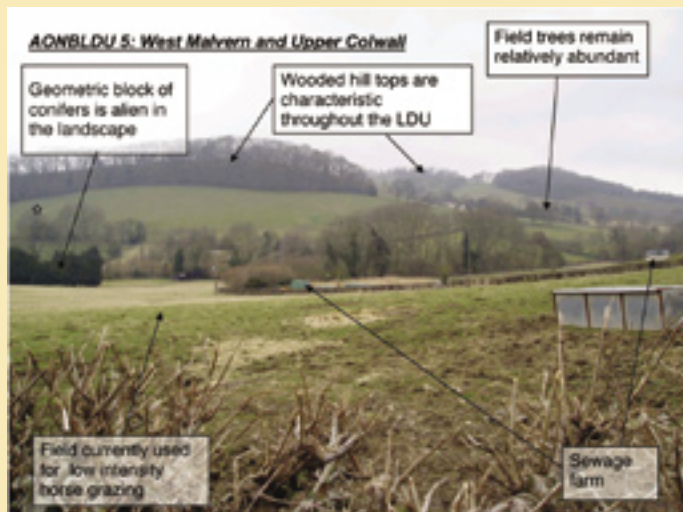


Habitats

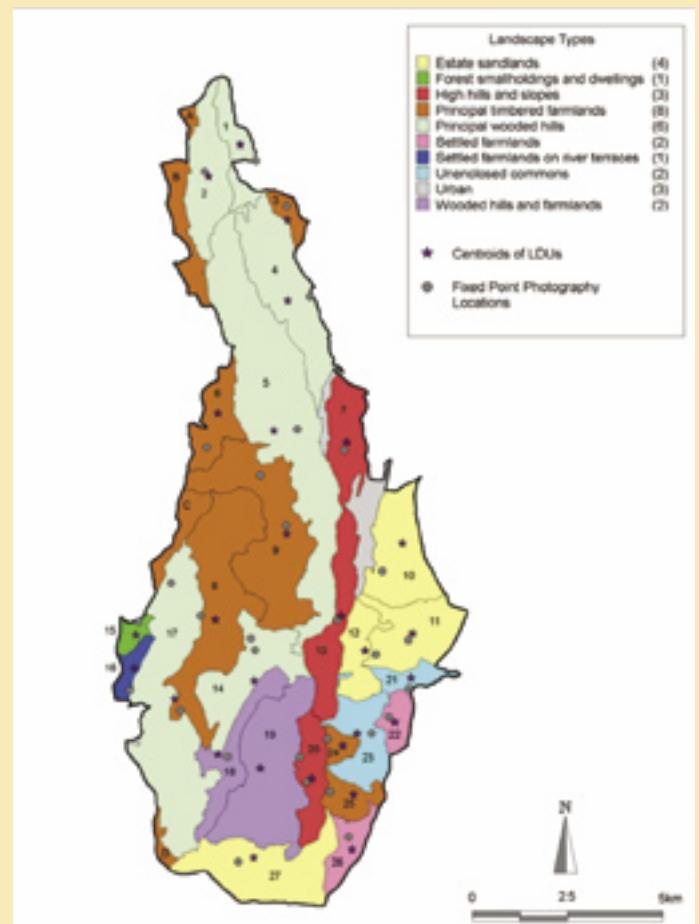
Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council both carried out biodiversity mapping work to pinpoint the distribution of different habitats within the AONB. This work will be used to identify opportunities for habitat improvement and for ensuring that grants are directed towards those areas of greatest need.

Landscapes

Monitoring landscape change can be difficult due to issues of scale and subjectivity. To help address these challenges the Centre for Rural Research was commissioned to produce a methodology for recording change in the condition of the AONB and its special features. The final report makes use of Landscape Character Assessment and recommends a programme of fixed-point photography based on the distinctive units of landscape that comprise the AONB. The methodology will enable 'State of the AONB' reports to be produced in the Malvern Hills for the first time and represents a novel approach to the subject of recording landscape change.



Character based fixed-point photography.



AONB Unit Report

Finances

Unit Income

Countryside Agency	£92,814
Herefordshire Council	£11,574
Worcestershire County Council	£7,000
Malvern Hills District Council	£14,000
Gloucestershire County Council	£825
Forest of Dean District Council	£667
Total	£126,880



	72%
	9%
	6%
	11%
	1%
	1%

Unit Expenditure

Staff costs (inc, travel and training)	£62,669
Accommodation and office costs	£16,029
Partnership Budget	£28,159
Partnership Running costs	£16,896
Total	£123,753



	50%
	13%
	23%
	14%

Projects income and expenditure

Countryside Agency contribution	£20,102.33
Partner Contributions ¹	£20,671.21
Total	£40,773.54



	49%
	51%

¹Malvern Hills Conservators, various landowners, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Colwall Parish Council, Ravenshill Woodland Reserve (various contributors), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group

Staff

2005/06 was a year of considerable change within the staff unit. David Armitage acted as AONB Officer for the first six months of the year. The year closed with the following structure in place:

AONB Manager	Paul Esrich
AONB Assistant Manager	David Armitage
Heritage Lottery Fund Project Officer	Rupert Johnson
Administration Assistant	Bridget Oleksy



L-R Paul Esrich, Rupert Johnson, Bridget Oleksy, David Armitage.

AONB Governance

Joint Advisory Committee 2005-06

Chairman	Councillor E. Roberts	Forest of Dean District Council (also representing Gloucestershire County Council)
Vice Chairman	Dr B. Smith Councillor R. Mills Councillor B. Ashton Councillor D. Rayner Councillor S. Young Councillor S. Try Mrs N. Carless and Ms J. Bowden Mr M. Allfrey Mr J. Hervey - Bathurst Mr F. Hill / Mr D. Ward Ms K. White Ms H. Stace Mr G. Jones Ms J. Leigh Mr N. King Mr N. Russell	Malvern Hills Conservators Herefordshire Council Herefordshire Council Worcestershire County Council Malvern Hills District Council Malvern Hills District Council Herefordshire Association of Local Councils Worcestershire Association of Local Councils (joint representative of the parishes within the AONB) National Farmers Union Country Land and Business Association Campaign for Protection of Rural England (representing voluntary organisations) Countryside Agency English Nature Forestry Commission English Heritage Rural Development Service Heart of England Tourist Board

Steering Group 2005-06

Chairman	James Bisset Kelda White Andy Maginnis David Piggott Angela Newey Bill Cronin Ian Rowat	Herefordshire Council Countryside Agency Worcestershire County Council Malvern Hills District Council Gloucestershire County Council Forest of Dean District Council Malvern Hills Conservators
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