



Annual Review 2005/06

AONB FACTS & FIGURES

- The AONB covers 603 km² of land in the foothills of the Pennines in North Yorkshire;
 - Nidderdale AONB shares its western boundary with the Yorkshire Dales National Park;
 - 95% of the AONB falls within Harrogate District with a smaller share in Richmondshire and Hambleton Districts. The AONB is wholly within the County of North Yorkshire;
 - The AONB is administered by Harrogate Borough Council in conjunction with North Yorkshire. It is overseen by a Joint Advisory Committee that comprises 28 members of the local authorities, Parishes, landowning bodies, community groups, business interests and Government Agencies;
 - The 6 members AONB Team is based in Pateley Bridge, the largest town in the AONB;
 - 20,534 hectares (34%) of the AONB is moorland dominated by heather;
 - There are 5,946 hectares of upland heath and blanket bog;
 - 16,612 hectares of the AONB's moorlands are of international importance and designated as a Special Protection Area and candidate Special Area of Conservation;
 - The Fountains Abbey World Heritage Site is within the AONB's boundary;
 - There are 14 Conservation Areas, 126 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 545 Listed Buildings in the AONB;
 - An estimated 1,329 people are employed on 840 farms covering 75% of the AONB;
 - There were 200,000 sheep on farms in the AONB in 2003;
 - 7% of the AONB is woodland including 1,200 hectares of Ancient Woodland, 2,450 is planted conifer woodland and 1,400 is broadleaved;
 - The population of the AONB is 15,671. 68% is in employment, 12% is aged between 16-29 and 15% is retired;
 - 20% of the households in Pateley Bridge do not have access to private transport; there has been a 13% increase in traffic flow on 'C' roads in the AONB since 2001;
 - 30% of towns and villages have access to a bus service providing 4 journeys per day;
 - There are 820 kms of public rights of way in the AONB;
 - An estimated 35% of the AONB is subject to the new right of access to open country;
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foreword

Looking back over 2005-2006, I realise how much time we devoted to climate change issues. For example, we played an active role in the debate about renewable energy generation targets for Yorkshire and the Humber initiated by the Regional Assembly, where we explained that, although we remain opposed to developments that risk harming the AONB's special qualities, we are nonetheless keen to "do our bit" to help meet regional climate change targets.

We supported a planning application for a domestic-scale wind turbine in the AONB because it did not, in our view, cause harm to the AONB. And, in February this year, we sponsored a seminar on forestry and the potential for generating energy from biomass including timber. We also awarded grant-aid during 2005 to facilitate research into the feasibility of hydropower.

However, we were very critical of a study commissioned by North Yorkshire County Council that appeared to suggest that parts of the AONB are only moderately sensitive to large-scale wind energy developments, and in August we presented our case against the Knabs Ridge Wind Farm on the AONB's southern boundary to the Inspector appointed by Government to consider the arguments.

Nonetheless, we recognise our wider responsibility to help combat climate change and our work on this issue will continue to be a priority for us as it is for the AONB's partners.

Mention of partners reminds me that during 2005, DEFRA published guidance for public bodies who now have a statutory obligation under S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'. I can say with confidence that the thrust of the guidance is well understood by our partners whose work in support of the AONB is summarised for the first time in this Annual Review. In future, we will develop this feature of the Review to give *all* our partners an opportunity to record their contribution in more detail.

In the meantime, I would like to pay a special tribute to the Countryside Agency, whose contribution to the AONB's work is not specifically referred to in the review. The Agency supplies the lifeblood which keeps the AONB moving forward, both by providing the lions share of our funding (see Part 3 of the Review) and by helping to define a strategic direction for our work. The Agency's staff based in the region and nationally continues to promote the cause of AONBs with national Government and its regional outposts, very clearly to good effect. Such progress as we have been able to make here would be impossible without the Countryside Agency and it is worth remembering that during 2005 – 2006, their staff faced huge uncertainty and upheaval during the process of transition to Natural England. I can only hope that they will be able to carry through their enthusiasm and commitment to AONBs into the new organization.

A handwritten signature in red ink, consisting of several large, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Councillor Les Ellington

Chair, AONB Joint Advisory Committee

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preface

The production and distribution of the Annual Review is part of an ongoing process of monitoring and reflects the responsibility shared by the Joint Advisory Committee and the AONB Team to account for their work.

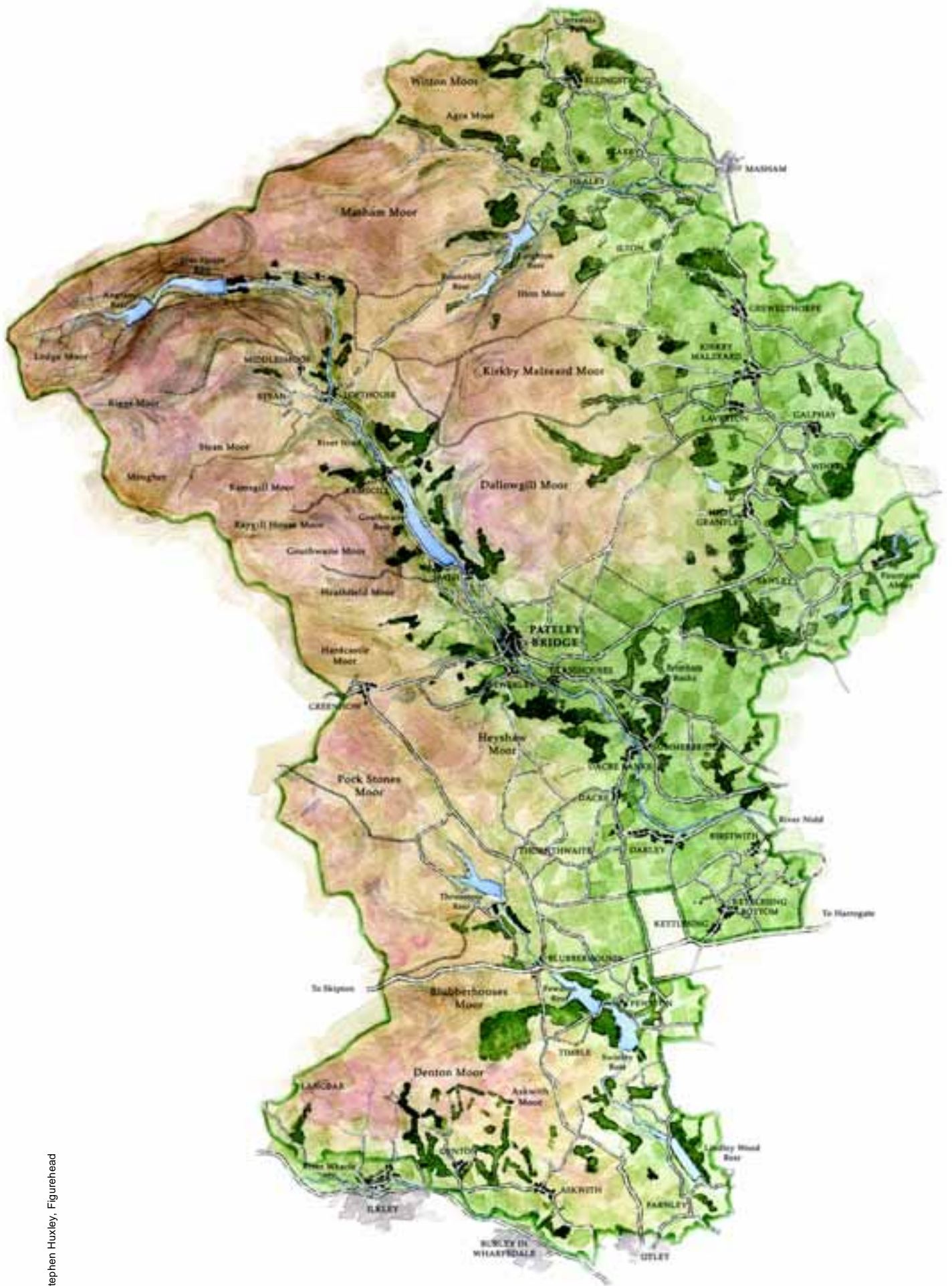
The Review contains a summary of work carried out by the organisation in accordance with priorities set out in the AONB Management Plan 2004-2009. The detailed targets which underpin this work form part of a Service Delivery Plan for the organisation that was approved by the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee in March 2005. A progress report on targets was received by the Committee in March 2006.

This Review also contains information about the work of partners who have a specific duty under S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

The Annual Review does not contain an analysis of how the work is affecting the AONB's special qualities. This task will be undertaken when data being collected against Performance Indicators contained in the AONB's Management Plan 2004-2009 are analysed. The Indicators are designed to detect progress towards conserving natural beauty which is the overriding aim of AONB Designation.

They are intended to measure the quality of the following attributes of natural beauty:

- Farmed landscape
- Biodiversity
- Historic environment
- Opportunities for enjoying the countryside



PART 1 - *Setting the Scene*

Introduction

The primary purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty - its flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features. The mechanism for achieving this goal is sustainable development. The Countryside Agency's 2001 Policy Statement about AONBs states that 'In pursuing the primary purpose account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.'

Although the AONB has a particular interest in promoting sustainable tourism, the Agency's Policy Statement is clear that 'Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.'



E Moss

A gritstone outcrop at Brimham Rocks.

Special qualities

Landscape Character is a distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in the landscape that makes one landscape different from another, rather than better or worse. It gives rise to a 'sense of place' which defines people's understanding and appreciation of these elements in the landscape.

Several studies contain accounts of the AONBs landscape character including the Joint Countryside Character Assessments produced by English Nature and the Countryside Agency. Harrogate Borough Council produced a detailed landscape character assessment in 2004.

The Countryside Commission examined the AONBs landscape in detail in 1991 before the designation process got underway. The Commission's report called 'The Nidderdale Landscape' identified eight landscape character types within the boundary of the designated area: moorland plateau, grassland plateau, upper, middle and lower valleys, vale and upland fringes and Wharfedaleside. The report is an evaluation of elements of landscape character and cultural associations that colour people's understanding of the Nidderdale landscape which together comprise Special Qualities. It confirmed that the Special Qualities of the landscape enclosed by the boundary of the designation originally drawn in 1949 remains of national importance.

The Special Qualities of the Nidderdale AONB comprise:

- Contrasting scenery with dramatic views across remote moorlands to distant horizons together with sheltered valleys and rolling farmland;
- Sandstone tors like those at Brimham together with steep crags that mark the edge of many river valleys in the AONB;
- Internationally important wildlife habitats characterised by birds such as red grouse, golden plover and merlin;

- A rich and diverse historic environment including a World Heritage Site at Fountains Abbey, over a hundred sites contained in the Historic Environment Record and more than five hundred listed buildings;
- Extensive woodland including commercial plantations and ancient broadleaved woods with a network of species-rich hedgerows on the eastern edge of the designated area;
- Wetlands ranging from the eleven water supply reservoirs with their associated dams, weirs and sluices to the three river catchments plus numerous lakes and water features associated with the numerous AONBs designed landscapes;
- An extensive network of public rights of way with regional walking trails such as the Nidderdale Way and the 'Ripon Rowel' plus 'Easy Going' routes for people of all abilities;
- Over 125 square miles of open access land where walkers can explore the AONB on foot.

The JAC & the AONB Team

The Joint Advisory Committee's terms of reference are:

- To promote awareness and understanding of the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the purposes for which it was designated;
- To advise the local authorities and other bodies on countryside conservation, informal recreation and environmental management issues affecting the AONB;
- To advise on the preparation and implementation of a Management Plan for the AONB;
- To consider and offer advice on development plan policies, proposals and reviews insofar as they relate to the AONB;
- To act as a forum for the discussion of major issues affecting the character of the AONB and, where appropriate, make recommendations;



- To act as a forum where the local authorities can discuss and coordinate their activities in the area;
- To agree and monitor an annual programme of work, within resources made available by the constituent bodies and others.

The Committee consists of 29 Members drawn from local authorities, landowning organisations, community groups, Government agencies and business. A full list of JAC Members is available from our website at: www.nidderdaleaonb.org.uk. Meetings are held in village halls and other venues across the AONB. The Committee met three times during 2005/06:

16 March 2005 (Pateley Bridge)

Members agreed to support the work of the North Yorkshire Green Lanes Liaison Group, a consultative body set up by North Yorkshire County Council to advise on management of recreational vehicle use on unsurfaced tracks in the County including the AONB. The meeting also agreed a work programme for the forthcoming year and voted to create a small sub committee, called the Planning Panel, to advise on the JACs response to consultations about planning issues.

15 July 2005 (Thruscross)

The meeting debated the way forward for the AONBs education project, and the contents of the annual report for 2004/05. The meeting also received a report on DEFRA guidance to public bodies given a statutory obligation in respect of AONBs by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

10 October 2006 (Kirkby Malzeard)

Members approved an outline budget for 2005/06 financial year and noted progress made with projects supported by the AONB's new Sustainable Development Fund. A report on a renewable energy study commissioned by North Yorkshire County Council with support from the Regional Assembly was also considered by the meeting and Members approved a recommendation that a representative of the Friends of the AONB organisation be invited to send a representative to meetings of the JAC.

Personnel changes involving the AONB Team during the year included the arrival of two part-time contract staff: Isobel Hall joined the AONB team on a part-time one day per week contract to develop and administer the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund and

Rachel Earnshaw of BTCV was contracted to deliver the AONB's education project. Further details about the Team can be found at: www.nidderdaleaonb.org.uk

The JAC'S vision for the AONB

A detailed statement by Members of the Joint Advisory Committee about its ambition for the future of the AONB to 2024 is contained in the Management Plan for 2004-2009 (www.nidderdaleaonb.org.uk). The Joint Advisory Committee's goal is to ensure that:

- Stewardship of natural beauty is a priority for everyone;
- Tranquillity and opportunities for quiet enjoyment of nature are protected;
- Biodiversity is valued for its own sake;
- The legacy of the historic environment is celebrated;
- Local distinctiveness is maintained;
- The livelihoods of local communities are protected.

Business Plan for the AONB

The Joint Advisory Committee's work is guided by a Business Plan first produced in 2001 and amended in 2004. It covers the period to the end of the current Management Plan in 2009.

The purpose of the Business Plan is to describe the way forward for the AONB Team and the JAC in response to the goals set by the Management Plan. It contains a Service Delivery Plan with detailed targets designed to achieve the actions identified in the Management Plan. The Service Delivery Plan is reviewed and amended as necessary on an annual basis.



View from Scar Dale Edge in the NW of the AONB

PART 2 - Performance

Introduction

- The AONB Management Plan is a spatial strategy which is about managing change to maintain and enhance natural beauty across a wide range of issues. It is not solely an action plan for the AONB Team nor is its scope constrained by the roles and responsibilities of individual organisations;
- The Committee's vision for the future of the AONB was the subject of formal consultation during the Management Plan preparation process and is shared by the wider community and in particular by public bodies which have a specific duty under S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

This Annual Review therefore features a selected account of work undertaken by organisations that are covered by S85. Their work complements AONB objectives and continues to play a vital part in our collective efforts to meet the targets identified in the Management Plan. However, it was organised, funded and implemented independently of the Joint Advisory Committee.

This is a review of performance during 2005-2006 in relation to the policies, actions and targets set out in the AONB's Management Plan. The structure of the Review therefore reflects the structure of the Plan.

Maintaining landscape character

Equine Development Design Guide

Figures supplied by DEFRA show that the number of horses in the Nidderdale AONB doubled between 1998 and 2005 and data from Harrogate Borough Council shows that the high level of planning applications for equestrian development continues. Horses are a perfect form of sustainable transport, enabling people to enjoy the countryside without relying on cars. Horse ownership also makes a significant contribution to the rural economy.

However, equestrian development can be damaging to landscape character and the aim of new guidelines produced by the AONB and destined to be adopted by Harrogate Borough Council as a Special Planning Document, is to provide advice so that horse owners and equestrian businesses who may be planning new development have the information they need to ensure that their projects complement the AONB.

Environmental Stewardship

The AONB Team worked closely with the Rural Development Service (RDS) to promote the new Scheme which is one of the most important mechanisms for achieving landscape conservation objectives. An article was included in the autumn 2005 AONB Residents Newsletter, distributed to every household in the AONB, and three farm walks were organised by RDS in the AONB. Interest in the new Scheme grew significantly in 2005/06 (see RDS inset article on page 12).



A walk in Timble.

Biodiversity

Washburn Group

The Washburn Wildlife Advisory Group was convened by the AONB, the Wharfedale Naturalist's Society and the Bradford Ornithology Group in 2004 to act as a biodiversity forum for the Washburn Valley. In 2005/06 the Group devised and helped to implement a conservation plan for Timble Plantation in conjunction with Yorkshire Water. The Plan involved a combination of ride management and creation of new wetland features.

The Group was also instrumental in advising the Forestry Commission about plans to create new mountain bike trails in Stainburn Plantation.

Greenhow Conservation Group

The Greenhow Group completed survey work funded by a grant from the Local Heritage Initiative and published its Ecology Report on its new website (http://www.greenhowconservation.org.uk/html/ecology_report.html). The Group also supported publication of 'The Butterflies of Nidderdale' by Dr Mike Barham, the product of 30 years of painstaking record-keeping and data gathering.

Hanson Fund

Hanson Plc, owners of a large limestone quarry in Greenhow, obtained planning consent for an extension to the earth bund on the perimeter of the quarry in 2005. Hanson was obliged to create an environmental fund to mitigate the impact of the extension on the landscape and biodiversity and the AONB was invited, alongside North Yorkshire County Council, to guide the development and administration of the Fund.



Hansons employees at the public viewing platform at Coldstones quarry.

Environment Agency

Nidderdale AONB is represented on the steering group of the Strategic Partnership for the River Ouse and Tributaries (SPROUT), a partnership aiming to improve the environment of North Yorkshire's rivers in the Ouse system.

An Opportunity Plan is being produced to take a strategic look at the features across the river catchments, including the Nidd, and see where we can identify environmental improvements that will bring many benefits for people and wildlife.

The plan will benefit Nidderdale AONB by helping to:

- target where to make land management changes to make the landscape more 'climate proof' and wildlife rich, by reducing water and sediment run off. This may include woodland planting, moorland grip blocking and restoration of wetland habitats;
- support access to leisure activities, for example by developing routes which link the cultural and historic environment of the River Nidd and its connections with the Ouse system. This will help to link riverside market towns, such as Pateley Bridge and Knaresborough and villages, and so support tourism;
- identify any further riverside enhancements in the market towns;
- identify potential locations for small scale renewable energy schemes, such as hydro-power, and investigate the potential for increasing and using habitat such as wet woodlands and reed beds for this purpose;
- improve people's awareness of the role which the River Nidd has played in peoples lives over the centuries and the environmental value of the river and how it works.

The next step will be to carry out demonstration environmental improvement projects, which will point the way for those to be achieved in the longer term. Detailed land and water management studies being carried out through the Ripon Multi-Objective Pilot Project, related to reducing flood risk, will also be used to inform land management in part of the Nidderdale AONB.



T Bunney

Curlew eggs.

Dales Wader Forum

The Forum was established in 2004 by RSPB and English Nature to coordinate work on wader conservation across the Yorkshire Dales including the AONB. The Forum includes representatives from the National Park and the AONB. It met in April to consider a proposal by RSPB to establish a network of demonstration farms in the Dales.

In November, AONB Ranger Colin Slator and Access Officer Chris Jones attended a British Ornithological Union Conference to review research data on the impact of open access on birds including upland breeding waders.

English Nature

Large tracts of the upland parts of the AONB are designated as nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (they are also internationally important for the same moorland habitats and birds). We therefore spend much of our time talking to owners, graziers and sporting rights owners about management and encouraging best practice. English Nature in partnership with the Moorland Association have developed a management plan template on burning and grip blocking that is now being rolled out nationally. This is now being taken up by estates and one of the first to do so was one of the largest estates in the AONB.

Access - *We have worked with the AONB team on CROW Access issues and our Access Officer, David Slater, has been hard at work, here in the AONB and elsewhere assessing the risks and helping the Countryside Agency to review where signage and other information should be located.*

Brimham Rocks - *English Nature assessed this well known area and found that bracken was becoming an increasing problem (it invades into the dry heather) so we have helped the National Trust fund a programme of bracken treatment to address this problem.*

Gouthwaite Reservoir is an SSSI for its breeding birds and over the last two years a bird survey has been carried out to check if the fluctuating spring water levels are adversely affecting the birds breeding success. High levels in the Spring due to the flashy nature of the catchment and the desire to retain water in the reservoir to see water supply retained over the summer does wash out nests of birds such as little ringed plover which breed on the margins. But the good news this year is that the birds tried again and successfully fledged some young - the first confirmed success for this species for some years. Overall the reservoir had 16+ breeding species, including little grebe, redshank, teal and oystercatcher.

Hackfall Woods is both a wonderful woodland SSSI sloping down to the Ure River near Grewelthorpe and a derelict historic garden. Plans to restore the remaining historic features and views have therefore had to be balanced with the protection of the SSSI. To this end several meetings have been held to ensure that the nature conservation value, integrity and natural character of this diverse wood is retained while allowing majority of historic works to be undertaken.

Historic environment

Historic Parks & Gardens Project

A new project was established in February 2006 focusing on historic parks and gardens in Nidderdale AONB. Launched at an evening presentation a group of volunteers led by a community archaeologist is using old maps and other data to identify lost and forgotten designed landscapes. A small grant awarded through the AONB Enhancement Scheme provided the group with initial funding and allowed it to access a £25,000 grant through the Local Heritage Initiative.

The research generated by the group will help to provide a better understanding of designed landscapes - an important part of our cultural heritage. The data gathered will be fed into a national research project investigating historic parks and gardens being led by York University. The information will also be used to help landowners obtain funding to protect the historic features on their land.

Providence Smelt Mill

The remains of this C18 lead smelting mill feature on English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register. A grant of £35 000 to facilitate consolidation and repair was awarded to the owner in 2006 following an application submitted on the owner's behalf by the AONB.



Interpretation Board at Providence Mill, Greenhow.

English Heritage

Following discussions during 2005-06, English Heritage has agreed in principle to part-fund a new post within the AONB. Over two years, the postholder will develop a historic environment conservation strategy for the AONB in consultation with key stakeholders and local communities.

English Heritage is currently funding a programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation in North Yorkshire, and this has been completed in the AONB. Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) moves beyond individual buildings and archaeological sites to establish an over-arching view of the whole historic landscape. Using existing maps, photographs and other records, HLC studies key elements in the landscape such as field patterns, woodland, downland, heathland and settlement. The resulting data can be used to produce maps covering many aspects of the historic landscape both at the present day and in the past. HLC can be used for many purposes, but is a particularly useful tool in informing the management and development of particular areas.

Work by English Heritage is underway to design and install interpretation at John of Gaunt's Castle, the remains of a medieval hunting lodge in Haverah Park. Recently, the surviving masonry of John of Gaunt's Castle was repaired with a grant from English Heritage. The adjacent drystone wall was also repaired with funding from the AONB Built Environment Initiative, with the assistance of volunteers. It is hoped that interpretation will help to make the remains more accessible to the many walkers and visitors to the area.



The River Washburn between Thruscross and Fewston reservoirs.

Built Environment

£40,000 of Built Environment Initiative funding was awarded in 2005/06 to nine projects in the AONB.

Projects included:

- The restoration of the road edges through the village of Healey near Masham;
- Consolidation of an old moor wash fold on a farm near Gouthwaite;
- Community area outside the Crown Hotel at Middlesmoor restored;
- Consolidation of Providence Smelt Mill near Greenhow;
- Works to restore the Deer House at Swinton Park.

The Viewing Rock

With funding from the Environmental Enhancement Scheme an historic feature has been restored to its former glory and its fascinating history researched. 'The Rock', which lies above Pateley Bridge is an impressive millstone grit outcrop that was used as a viewing platform in C19. In 1887, Queen Victoria's

Yorkshire Water

Yorkshire Water is the largest single landowner in the AONB and, as one of Britain's leading water companies, we take our environmental obligations very seriously indeed. Our customers depend on us for a safe and reliable water supply as well as for disposal of their waste water. However, they have also come to rely on us to provide high-quality recreational opportunities on the land we own, especially in the Washburn valley.

We are represented on the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee and the company is involved in numerous joint activities with the AONB, from woodland management projects to events for visitors.

During 2005/06, the company carried out an extensive programme of improvements to its recreational infrastructure in the AONB, including improvements to car parks, new paths for people of all abilities and the creation of opportunities for cyclists, horse riders and walkers. We also published a new book, guiding long-distance walkers along a route linking the company's reservoirs from Kettlewell, through the heart of Nidderdale and on to Ilkley.

Golden Jubilee year, the rock was surfaced, railed and a seat installed so that visitors could pause to better appreciate the view.

In 2005 the AONB provided funding to allow the railings around the Rock to be replaced. To celebrate their installation, a town picnic was held in the fields below owned by John Hickton and Annette Jeffery. From the Rock, members of the Summerbridge and Dacre Silver Prize Band played a specially composed 'Fanfare for the Rock'.

Following these events AONB resident and poet, Mary Sara began to research 'The Rock' and the fields below. The material, writing and artwork relating to the site and route was displayed in an exhibition in Harrogate's Mercer Galley.

Agriculture & forestry

Friends Farming Award

Committee members of Nidderdale AONB Friends developed and launched a new annual competition called the 'Enterprising Farm Awards' sponsored by land agents Carter Jonas. The award aims to give recognition to farmers operating in the AONB who

have made a special effort to conserve the landscape and/or promote understanding of the AONB's countryside. Examples of eligible activities include improving wildlife habitats, creating hay meadows, promoting understanding of farming by hosting guided walks or having developed an innovative agricultural business using sustainable farming techniques.

Rural Development Service

Over this past year, the Rural Development Service has continued to work closely with the AONB to achieve not only our own objectives but also AONB Management Plan outcomes through agri-environment schemes and grants for socio-economic activities.

For example, within the AONB there are 250 hectares of upland hay meadows, 6,500 metres of access footpaths, 2,500 hectares of heather moorland enhancement and 45,000 metres of 6 metre-wide arable margins managed through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Not to mention the continued restoration and management of key landscape features such as hedgerows and dry stone walls.

In addition, uptake for the Entry Level and Organic Entry Level elements of the Environmental Stewardship agri-environment scheme in Nidderdale has been high with over 5,500 hectares of land already under agreement. We continue to work with the AONB to promote the Higher Level Stewardship element and are currently processing a number of applications which we hope will progress into agreements from this November.

Environmental Stewardship will be all the more attractive to land managers now that four new options have come on stream:

ELS, OELS and HLS

Maintenance of weatherproof traditional farm buildings

Mixed stocking (extended to Less Favoured Areas (LFAs))

HLS

Cattle grazing supplement

Native breeds at risk grazing supplement

The RDS-managed socio-economic grant schemes (Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing Grant, Vocational Training and Energy Crops schemes) closed to new applicants on 30 June 2006. Some of the final projects to receive funding were in the AONB, including church hall restoration at Darley, ecological site classification training at Swinton and woodland harvesting at Dallowgill. The Rural Development Programme for England that will run from 2007 to 2013 will continue to provide funding for social and economic development in rural areas, but responsibility for delivery will transfer from RDS to Regional Development Agencies such as Yorkshire Forward.

No review of RDS and AONB partnership working would be complete without a look ahead to this October when Natural England will formally come into being. This new independent agency will comprise English Nature, RDS and the Landscape, Access and Recreation Division of the Countryside Agency. It has been charged with the responsibility to ensure that England's unique natural environment is protected while also improving enjoyment, understanding and access. Creation of Natural England is a landmark and one in which efficient working with partners such as the AONB will be critical to its success.

The awards which range from £300 to £100 will be presented at the Nidderdale Agricultural Show in September 2006.

New Native Woodland Plan

Yorwoods, a Ripon-based woodland management group working with owners and managers to improve economic prospects for forestry, was commissioned by the AONB to produce a plan for the expansion of native woodland.

Woodlands dominated by oak in drier areas and by alder where drainage is impeded, are a mainstay of the AONB's landscape. They provide habitats for wildlife, recreational opportunities and several, like Hackfall, harbour features of the historic environment. The plan identifies areas for new planting (and land where trees can regenerate naturally) based on an assessment of ecology and landscape character. Looking forwards, the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust has offered to help fund implementation using £270,000 of grant aid for native woodland in the Dales and the AONB provided by English Nature.



New broadleaf tree planting.



A veteran tree in a parkland setting.

Timber Processing

Following the award of a Sustainable Development Fund Grant of £17,350 a new service enabling on site utilisation of a waste product will be provided by a local forestry contractor. The service consists of a Wood-Mizer saw bench and firewood processor that enables access to individual windblown trees that would normally be burnt due to excessive haulage costs. A mobile saw bench converts the timber on-site into saleable utilisable dimensions and the waste wood from this process is then logged with the firewood processor. Although there are a number of static sawmills within the AONB the mobile sawmill is more versatile and can adapt to the needs of a larger range of customers.



Tree felling.

Rural economy & community life

AONB Affordable Housing Seminar

HRH the Princes Royal gave the keynote address to a packed conference on 6th December sponsored by the AONB together with Harrogate Borough and Richmondshire District Councils. The event was organised by the Rural Housing Trust, a national charity specialising in low cost accommodation for people in the countryside, and was attended by over 100 delegates from Parish Councils.

The effort that went in to organising the day has resulted in several AONB Parishes developing proposals for new affordable homes with Khyati Prajapati, Harrogate Borough Council 's newly-appointed Rural Housing Enabler.

Environmental Enhancement Scheme

Since it was established four years ago, the Environmental Enhancement Grant Scheme has distributed £160,000 to over 80 projects. It provides financial support to projects that help to conserve or enhance the AONB by improving the landscape, creating new habitats for wildlife, preserving rural character as well as for projects that raise awareness of the special features of this nationally important landscape.

Every year we receive applications for an exciting range of projects. This year is no exception and we have given £40,000 to 24 projects across the AONB. These include:

- 200 trees planted in school grounds by students from Nidderdale High School;
- An interpretation board at 'The Rock', a famous viewpoint overlooking Nidderdale;
- Improvements to Picking Gill, land owned by Grantley, Sawley, Skelding and Eavestone Parish Council Parish Council, to create a nature reserve including ponds, new hedgerows and wetlands;
- Production of a 'Breakfree Pack' of walks and cycle rides in the AONB for people with mobility problems;
- The development of a new website for Mashamshire including information about local events, businesses and walks;
- A pond dipping platform on a farm with education access through countryside stewardship.

Mashamshire Community Office

The Mashamshire Community Office is a small independent community organisation run by local volunteer trustees and managed by 2 part-time paid staff. Its purpose is to further the interests of residents, businesses and visitors to Mashamshire and provide information and develop services for them. Our Office in central Masham houses a Police Office, a Community Playgroup and a Learning Centre managed by NYCC. We therefore work in partnership with various other organisations, as well as the AONB.

Work with their team this year has focused on 2 particular areas. Firstly, we have established an AONB visitor information point within our Community Office in Masham on the north-eastern edge of the AONB area. This is accessible to both locals and visitors in a well-used tourist information point. It publicises the ethos and scope of the AONB and advertises the work carried out by Volunteers, Friends, Young Rangers as well as the programme of activities and events.

Secondly, we have developed the website: www.visitmasham.com within the Environmental Enhancement Scheme. This brings Mashamshire to a wider audience and emphasises the unique aspects of the town, the value of the local landscape and heritage, the wealth of locally sourced produce as well as the economic activity of the surrounding area. This directly benefits local businesses and services. It also promotes the area as a base to explore the countryside by identifying walk and cycle routes, gardens, historic buildings and traditions, sporting activities and a wide range of visitor attractions.

We are grateful for the enthusiasm of the AONB team for their help and financial support in making these projects possible. We hope to build on this work in future and look forward to a continuing relationship with them.

Sustainable Development Fund Projects

Confirmation was received from Defra in May 2005 that all English AONB's were to be awarded Sustainable Development Funds previously available only in

National Parks and the Welsh AONBs. £90,000 was allocated to Nidderdale AONB. To enable the funding to be distributed effectively the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust acted as broker and project managed the fund on the AONB's behalf.

The full allocation was spent on nine schemes which range from a project to provide self-guided educational resources in the AONB, to a capital project providing an educational classroom on a farm under Countryside Stewardship, to a feasibility into the reinstatement of a hydropower scheme, to a project for equipment to assist in the long term sustainable management of the woodlands of the AONB.

The maximum grant given was £21,976 and the minimum £780. The total value of all of the projects was £140,820 with £55,161 of external funding secured from a range of statutory, voluntary and private sector funding bodies. £3,964 of in kind contributions were also part of the total project costs.

The fund has been invaluable in helping to deliver real sustainable development within the AONB and also in raising awareness of sustainable development and sustainability issues.

Parish Caretakers

Increased funding from the Countryside Agency enabled the AONB to respond positively to interest in the scheme shown by Thruscross Parish and Pateley Town Councils. They are to join Bewerley, Dacre and Upper Nidderdale where the Caretaker has proved a great success since the pilot started in October last year.



Parish Caretakers in action

Nidderdale Plus

The Nidderdale Plus Partnership (known as Nidderdale Plus) aims to foster a culture of co-operative working which will promote the economic, social and cultural wellbeing and sustainability of the area.

We are a voluntary organisation, based in Pateley Bridge and managed by eight Board members who all live locally. The Board is assisted by a team of three employed staff.

Much of our work complements the overall purpose of the AONB particularly in relation to sustainability. We hope that by bringing organisations and individuals together they become stronger, learn from each other and have a better chance of achieving long term success. An example of this is the No. 6 Studio Gallery. Nidderdale Plus worked with Nidderdale Community Arts (NCA), Leeds University Quarry Arts Project and Nidderdale High School and Community College. The partnership secured funding, the lease for the premises and in a short space of time turned a grubby disused workshop into a sparkling exhibition space and art studio. The project has recently won the social and community category in the annual Market Town Awards.

As part of our overall work programme we have worked with two groups which have received funding from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

The first project was to explore the options for making the King Street complex, which includes the AONB offices and Council Chamber into the Arts and Heritage quarter of Pateley Bridge. It seeks to capitalise on the existing qualities of the site in that it was the town's workhouse and currently houses the award winning Museum, a cluster of high quality artists designers and the No. 6 studio gallery.

The second, working with the Blubberhouses and Fewston Parochial Church Council looks to create a small-scale heritage centre at St Michaels and St Lawrence's Church in Fewston. This facility will promote the uniqueness of the Washburn valley to residents and visitors whilst increasing the scope of the church to expand the existing programme of heritage exhibitions and cultural events.



Searching geological clues on a walk round Timble.

Understanding & enjoyment

Open Access

Access on foot to the AONB's moorlands commenced officially on Saturday 28th May 2005. A launch event at Scar House Reservoir to mark the occasion was organised by the Ramblers Association and supported by the AONB, Yorkshire Water and the Moorland Association. The Countryside Agency awarded the AONB an Access Management Grant of £48,835 to support a range of works from the training of volunteers to information provision.

An Access Management Plan produced for the AONB by North Yorkshire County Council identified the need for the provision of clear information explaining the new responsibilities introduced with Open Access. The Plan was produced following extensive consultation with landowners, managers and their agents throughout the AONB.

To assist the general public in enjoying their new rights and responsibilities forty 'Open Access Volunteers' were recruited trained and equipped to act as guides and advisers at weekends and bank holidays. They operate in eight different locations around the AONB where members of the public are most likely to walk. Over a period of four months the volunteers undertook a number of classroom sessions as well as outdoor training days focusing on navigation, hill crafts and moorland ecology. Their main roles will be to assist people to enjoy their new rights responsibly and provide the North Yorkshire County Council Countryside Service with valuable feedback.

Eight interpretation boards have been produced and sited at popular locations where people are likely to enter Access Land. The boards provide vital information on where and when people can use their new rights and explains the rules people must adhere to when using Access Land.

A special Open Access edition of the AONB newsletter was produced containing information about new rights and responsibilities, the work of our open access volunteers, the rules relating to dogs and access land. North Yorkshire County Council Countryside Service's Open Access leaflet has been updated and distributed by NYCC and AONB staff at shows and events throughout the summer.

The AONB's Access Officer worked closely with the Fire Service and the Moorland Association on an AONB leaflet to highlight the devastation that moorland fires can raise awareness of how they can be prevented.

Recreational Vehicles

Illegal off road motorbike use over many years had caused extensive damage to Blubberhouses Moor, now part of the East Nidderdale Moors SSSI and designated as a Special Protection Area for Birds under European legislation. Damage to the habitat has also caused disturbance to birds including waders and birds of prey on the moor. Urgent action was required to stop this damaging recreational activity and start the process back to recovery.

A ground breaking agreement brokered by the AONB between English Nature and NYCC involving landowners, walkers, vehicle users and the police led to a Traffic Regulation Order on Blubberhouses Moor. Three bike barriers were also installed and an interpretation board at the six entry points to the moor erected to provide information about the Traffic Regulation Order and why it is necessary.

Funding has also been secured from the Countryside Agency and North Yorkshire County Council towards the contract of a contract to carry out an environmental survey of green lanes in the AONB. The proposal will result in a Green Lanes Officer who will be based at the AONB office next year.

Education

The AONB's Landscapes Inspiring New Knowledge (LINK) project was launched in June 2005 and hit the ground running. A part-time education officer was seconded from BTCV York who worked in the AONB office three days a week. An education pack featuring ten sites was produced highlighting the various special qualities of the AONB landscape.

The pack was launched through a roadshow that toured 20 schools in the area. Half day workshops introduced the children and teachers to the pack demonstrating the quality of the learning resource available in the AONB. An A1 poster and map of the AONB were also produced to support the pack. Two hundred copies of the pack were sent out to schools in and on the



Bewerley OC students abseiling at Slipstones.

periphery of the AONB as well as community and youth groups in the area. The pack is also available to download from the AONB website.

To encourage schools to use the education pack a travel grant was provided to subsidise bus travel to sites featured. £2500 was distributed around 16 schools in the area.

Exhibition panels providing information about the AONB for children were erected in the Bewerley Park Outdoor Centre and Nidderdale Museum.

Volunteers

Tree Wardens

The Tree Wardens are an enthusiastic group of volunteers who work with their local parishes throughout the AONB to promote trees and woodland, and, assist with tree related issues. The Tree Wardens established themselves as an independent group in May 2004 and subsequently secured a grant from the Local Heritage Initiative.

Now in the second year of funding the group are working hard to deliver a range of outputs. During 05/06 highlights in their programme included:

- production of a self guided woodland tree trail leaflet through Fishponds Wood focusing on history of the site, tree identification and woodland habitats;
- the veteran tree surveying is ongoing using GPS devices to locate and record veteran trees and ancient woodland in the AONB accurately;
- ongoing training programme throughout the year including workshops focusing on ancient woodlands, woodland management and tree identification;
- Tree Wardens planting projects at Lofthouse and near Clifton working with local communities and the AONB Young Rangers;
- seed collection day with the Young Rangers at an ancient woodland on Dallowgill Estate;
- woodland maintenance work in partnership with Yorkshire Water at Harden Gill replacing tree guards and stakes.

Harrogate Borough Council

Harrogate Borough Council has been the lead local authority on the AONB's Joint Advisory Committee since its inception in 1995. In this role, the Council is directly involved in the management and administration of the Committee and the AONB Team, providing core and project funding and essential support functions including accountancy and human resource services. It also supplies high quality graphic design and web management support as well as technical and professional expertise on a range of issues.

The Council also acts independently of the Committee in helping to secure Management Plan objectives. It has won national awards for its work on affordable housing and played an instrumental part in the AONB-based seminar in December 2005. Over the past year the Council has helped to secure 15 new affordable homes in the AONB. Its Economic Development team administers several rural regeneration partnerships including Nidderdale Plus and manages new rural workspace schemes in the AONB including the recently extended complex at Summerbridge.

As local planning authority for all but 5% of the designation, the Council is in the front line of defending the AONB's landscape from inappropriate development. The Council consults the Joint Advisory Committee on major development proposals in the area and over the last year has sought to resist a number of schemes that would have an adverse impact, including the Knab's Ridge Windfarm. Looking ahead, the Council has involved Members of the Committee in discussions to shape future planning policy for the area being determined through the emerging Local Development Framework.

Other initiatives have included the erection of a youth shelter in Pateley Bridge under the auspices of the Harrogate District Safer Communities Partnership, support for a town guide leaflet and assistance through grant-aid and technical advice in improving energy efficiency and bringing forward small-scale renewable energy installations in Nidderdale.



E Moss

Drystone walls below Dacre Banks.



E Moss

Swinsty reservoir

Dry Stone Walling Group

Meeting fortnightly the group repair walls in the AONB that are associated with conservation schemes, particularly Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and where the integrity of the wall boundary is an important element in preserving both the natural and cultural heritage.

Work to repair the perimeter wall at John of Gaunt's Castle at Haverah Park has now been completed and the group have made good progress at Thornthwaite Common and on a Countryside Stewardship Site in Greenhow.

Nidderdale Conservation Volunteers

The Nidderdale Countryside Volunteers meet fortnightly throughout the year doing practical conservation work in a variety of locations in the AONB. The main focus is the improvement of wildlife habitats and includes scrub clearance to protect grassland flora, the creation of forest rides to encourage invertebrates such as butterflies, control of ragwort and balsam, hedge-laying and the repair of dry stone walls.

The volunteers have worked in partnership with landowners on a number of sites around the AONB including Balsam pulling along the River Nidd, Bracken bashing in an ancient woodland near Summerbridge, Ragwort pulling on Greenhow Hill and Scrub Clearance at Cow Myers SSSI.

The volunteers developed their conservation skills through a pond training day with the Pond Conservation Trust and a hedge laying session at a site once part of the Studley Royal Estate.



Tree works.

The group continues to be very well attended and grows in numbers gradually each year. In total the volunteers have delivered in excess of 250 working days in 2005/06.

Promoting the designation

AONB Website

Work on the new website was completed by March 2005. Web designers Netconstruct completed a new structure and installed new software that allowed the AONB team to update and revise the site without commissioning further web design expertise. The website was comprehensively rewritten and the amount of information available expanded by the AONB team. A separate, although linked, Visitor Information Centre website contains information about the AONB for tourists. The websites went live in October 2005.



Drystone wall building at Greenhow.

Newsletters

Two editions of the AONB's newsletter, aimed specifically at residents, were produced in autumn 2005 and spring 2006 and delivered directly to 12,000 homes in the AONB by Royal Mail. The newsletters convey key messages to local people about the benefits of living in a nationally protected landscape and the role they can play to help protect it.

Approximately 35,000 copies of a summer 2005 tabloid style newsletter for visitors was produced and distributed to hotels, bed and breakfasts, campsites, visitor attractions, shops, pubs and tourist information centres. The newsletter contained lots of information for visitors to the AONB about places to visit, walks, and events.

Events

A summer 2005 events programme exclusive to the AONB featured activities specifically designed by the team and led by local experts and AONB staff. 31 events spread across the summer months attracted just under 450 people. Every event was attended by an AONB representative who welcomed the group and gave a brief overview of Nidderdale AONB and our aims and objectives.

A programme of evening slide shows were held during the Spring months. They covered a diverse range of subjects from geology to the birds of the Washburn Valley. All of the talks were very well attended by between 80-100 people.

Friends of the AONB

Friends of Nidderdale AONB was established as an independent organisation in March 2005. It has grown quickly and within the first year had attracted nearly 300 members who have pledged personal actions in support of conservation or donated money to help with conservation projects. In total nearly £3,500 has been raised and two projects have been supported - a nature reserve near Sawley and tree planting at Lofthouse.

Four social events were organised; a farm walk near Fellbeck, a Woodland Walk by the AONB Tree Wardens, an evening talk by the Patron of the Nidderdale AONB Friends, Matthew Wilson focusing on The Future of Sustainable Gardening and finally in December, 'The Great Environment Quiz'. All of the



events were a huge success and all were over-subscribed.

AONB Young Rangers

This scheme, for children aged between 7 and 13 and launched in 2004, continues to be well attended.

Twenty events were held in 2005/06 including:

- nature reserve visits
- seed collection days
- making bird feeders
- wool spinning workshop



A number of community events were organised and attended by the Young Rangers including a conservation family fun day, tree planting day and the AONB annual conference. The national profile of the scheme increased during 2005 with considerable interest from other AONB's in England and Wales and press coverage. Funding from the Countryside Agency Local Heritage Initiative ended in March 2006. A successful application to the Local Network Fund has secured funding for a further two years.

Annual Conference

The fourth annual conference was held on Saturday 12th November in the Mechanics Institute in Kirkby Malzeard. Attended by over 70 delegates from Parishes and community groups as well as interested individuals. An entertaining and informative range of presentations were made by AONB volunteers, community groups and the Young Rangers. The main speaker was author Richard Benson, whose first novel 'The Farm' has been rapturously received since publication in spring 2005.

National AONB Conference

The 2005 National AONB Conference was co hosted by Nidderdale AONB alongside Howardian Hills, North Pennines and Northumberland Coast AONB's. The Conference, which had biodiversity as its theme, took place in Durham University between 5th and 7th July. Delegates from the conference visited a number of sites in the AONB examining the impact of open access on biodiversity courtesy of Dallowgill Estate and at the relationship between mineral extraction and biodiversity around Greenhow.

PART 3 - Financial Summary

<i>Expenditure</i>	£	<i>Income</i>	£
<i>(2005/06 Financial Year)</i>		<i>(2005/06 Financial Year)</i>	
Salaries (+ National Insurance, Superannuation, Travel and Training)	129 163.69	North Yorkshire County Council	37 655.36
Accommodation and Equipment	31 060.45	Countryside Agency	265 777.36
Partnership Budget (Newsletters, Friends, Shows, Volunteers)	12 275.16	Harrogate Borough Council	41 816.07
Partnership Running Costs (JAC meetings, Annual Conference, GIS access)	4 406.64		
AONB Enhancement Scheme Grants...	40 058.11		
Sustainable Access including Summer Events Programme	11 837.70		
Education Project	12 150.00		
Parish Caretakers	14 297.04		
Sustainable Development Fund Grants	90 000.00		
TOTAL	345 248.79	345 248.79