

**HOWARDIAN HILLS
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
30 MARCH 2006**

AONB ACTION PROGRAMME 2005/06

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To receive details of progress made on implementing the AONB Management Plan during 2005/06. The Action Programme for 2006/07, combined with a Business Plan, is covered under a separate report on this agenda.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The AONB Management Plan contains a detailed Action Programme that is intended to form the basis for a rolling annual programme of work. It lists each objective and action point and identifies a suggested lead agency and partner organisations for implementation.
- 2.2 At each Spring meeting the JAC considers a report detailing the progress achieved on the Management Plan objectives. The Action Programme contains details of the progress made against the previous year's targets and also proposes new targets for the following year.
- 2.3 The Action Programme covering progress against 2005/06 targets is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3.0 2005/06

- 3.1 Analysis of progress shows that 72% of the targets were either exceeded or fully/partly achieved. Progress was also achieved against a further 6 Objectives, for which no Targets had been set.
- 3.2 This is an increase on the performance of the previous year, when 64% of targets were achieved. Targets where no action was completed were largely those that were overtaken by events, relied heavily on action from partner organisations or were lower priorities for the AONB Unit. In contrast, more progress than initially envisaged was achieved in a number of new work areas, most notably Listed Buildings at Risk and undergrounding of overhead electricity cables.
- 3.3 A major new initiative this year was the introduction of a Sustainable Development Fund for the AONB. Announced by Defra in May, teething problems unfortunately prevented as quick a start being made as was hoped. A total fund of £80,000 was finally sought from the Countryside Agency. Projects assisted included the construction of a new waterwheel for Howsham Mill, as part of the restoration project; a hydro-power survey of the AONB, which may lead to the restoration of more historic mill sites; renovations to the Swinton Silver Band room; architect's fees for the new Welburn village hall; an organic garden and wildlife area at Welburn School; an eco-renovation survey of Bulmer Village Hall; waste farm plastics recycling advice to farmers; and an orchard restoration training event run by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

- 3.4 Countryside management work has been one of the strong points this year, with an increased budget being available and consequently twice as much being spent on this activity compared to 2004/05. Particular points to note are:
- A continued programme of replanting significant lengths of roadside hedge.
 - The restoration of highly visible stretches of drystone wall.
 - Structural Engineers reports on 3 Listed Buildings at Risk, in partnership with Ryedale District Council and North Yorkshire County Council. Repair work has been carried out on 3 buildings or structures.
 - SINC and road verge management, including scrub clearance and purchase of salt bins.
 - Works to clear scrub from lime kilns.
- 3.5 A feature of this year has been the attempt to tackle a number of larger projects. It has been recognised that, in parallel with the smaller hedge and wall restoration projects, the JAC could make a real difference by taking-on a number of ‘flagship’ projects. This year works to restore the dam at Dale Pond in Brandsby and the Listed Dove Cote at Oswaldkirk Hall have been funded.
- 3.6 2005/06 saw the successful continuation of our AONB Discovery Project with local schools. 135 children from 6 schools took part in the School Days in June/July, with a further 128 children and 27 parents attending the Ranger Club events in August. The Heritage Lottery Fund continues to be pleased with progress on this project.
- 3.7 The launch of Environmental Stewardship gave an opportunity to promote AONB Management Plan objectives to local farmers and landowners considering entering the Scheme. As well as attending Defra’s publicity events, we notified owners who had important archaeological sites on their land and who might consider using ES to revert them from arable to grassland. We also provided general advice on ELS and HLS and prepared 3 Farm Environment Plans, all of which now form part of successful HLS applications.
- 3.8 Following the allocation of resources by OFGEM for undergrounding electricity cables, all villages and some open-countryside sites in the AONB have been surveyed and assessed using a common scoring form. The locations with the most intrusive wirescapes have been passed to the Electricity Distribution Company covering this area and it is hoped that at least 2 schemes will be implemented next financial year.
- 3.9 After much negotiation with the County Council over such matters as insurance and Health and Safety, a procedure for recruiting volunteers has finally been put in place. An event for prospective volunteers was held in April and a practical task in March 2006. In addition to the Volunteers Group much use has been made of the Basics Plus project, which is a Special Needs group based in Scarborough. They have tackled projects including habitat management and litter picking and have proved to be excellent partners.
- 3.10 A circular walk leaflet based on Hovingham village has been prepared. This has taken slightly longer than anticipated, being the first hopefully of a series, but the leaflet will be printed and distributed in April 2006.

- 3.11 The National Association for AONBs annual Conference was held in Durham on 5th – 7th July. The Howardian Hills was one of the four hosting AONBs and the JAC Chairman gave a presentation on his view of the future of lowland farming under the new Single Payment Scheme. The site visits on the second day were well-received, despite the poor weather, and those who visited the Howardian Hills commented on the high quality of the landscape as well as the amount of practical work that the JAC achieves in enhancing the AONB's landscape and features. Favourable comments were also received on the organisation of the whole event, which reflects well on the staff from the National Association and hosting AONBs.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

- a) The progress made to date with implementing the Management Plan be noted;
- b) the achievements against Targets for 2005/06 be noted.