



Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
Working together to support the rural economy

**Submission in support of Defra input to the Rural Economy Growth
Review by the National Association for Areas of Outstanding
Natural Beauty**

July 2011

Executive Summary

Introduction

There are forty six Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covering a total of nearly eight thousand square miles of the UK's rural landscape. Thirty three are wholly in England, with one, the Wye Valley, straddling the border between England and Wales. About 14% of England is covered and this includes about 2% of the population. In addition, the relative close proximity of AONBs to centres of population means that AONBs have a special meaning to many more than those that live within them.

AONBs are not wilderness areas or even, paradoxically, areas whose beauty derives from purely natural processes, but a group of distinct and recognisable areas arising from a long history of human occupation and sustainable exploitation of their natural resources.

The AONB designation, through legislation and guidance, requires the conservation and enhancement of these nationally cherished areas, recognising their inherent value as both strategic national assets as providers of public goods, both potential and realised, and highly valued local places that provide a basis for the generation, marketing and sale of private goods.

AONB partnerships work to support the activity of local landowners, farmers, businesses, visitors, community groups, and individuals in their conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. This activity is defined and integrated in a sustainable way through the AONB management plans which are devised and agreed through local consensus.

The interdependent relationship between land stewardship, natural beauty, community and the economy is clear and well-understood. A resurgence in land-based economic activity is essential to the long term future of AONBs but, for this growth to be truly sustainable and meet wider government objectives, economic growth and land stewardship within or affecting AONBs must be based on the principles of both sound land stewardship and careful planning.

AONB partnerships continue to play a clear role in facilitating and enabling the wealth of innovation and energy latent in individuals, businesses, communities and local groups. They also have the important task of not only facilitating and adding to local decision-making but bringing a national perspective to local thinking generating better outcomes.

AONB Partnerships, however, vary considerably in their ability to deliver. What is delivered in one AONB may be aspirational in another. The ability of AONB Partnerships to deliver a consistent level of service across the country is dependent on continued support and investment and a continued recognition that the AONB designation adds significant value to the local economy.

The AONBs of England, Wales and Northern Ireland



How can AONBs contribute to growth?

- **By continuing to add value**

The AONB designation has helped to conserve and enhance some of England's finest landscapes. These landscapes are highly valued by wealth creating businesses as economic assets in their own right and as valuable settings which add value to business.

- **By providing a wealth of natural assets**

Well managed landscapes offer a wealth of natural assets that serve as the foundations of rural business, including agricultural land and woodland. Many of these, however, are currently underutilised. A programme of well-focused business support for low income land based businesses harvesting and utilising raw materials from the landscape including access to research and development funding; shared and low cost workspace; opportunities to forge business to business networks will help support innovation and growth in products and services which, whilst currently limited, has the potential to grow significantly and support many high value micro-businesses.

- **By remaining big business for tourism**

High quality landscapes offer a wealth of opportunities for tourism related businesses

- **By accommodating sensitive growth**

AONBs have a varying capacity for new built development dependant on their character. Understanding landscape character and capacity for change can help guide the location and design of growth related development so that it contributes positively to character.

How can AONB partnerships contribute to growth?

- **By continuing to support rural businesses**

AONB partnerships provide an established and tested mechanism to support rural businesses through small grant schemes. Start-up and development funding for small and micro rural businesses could be channelled through established AONB Sustainable Development Funds and opened up to businesses in the wider countryside around the AONB to achieve national coverage

- **By building on our successful track record**

AONB partnerships have a successful track record of providing specialist land owner advisory services and business support such as assistance with LEADER applications and planning. AONB Partnerships would welcome financial support for new rural business advisors which could be delivered in collaboration with local authorities and others.

- **By working in partnership**

AONB partnerships are experts in collaboration and co-operation across disciplines, geographic areas and between different audiences. Encouraging economic development partnerships to work with landscape specialists through challenge funds and initiatives such as green business parks may facilitate new solutions to growth in AONBs.

- **By providing specialist guidance**

AONB partnerships already produce locally tailored AONB Management Plans to guide actions which affect the landscape together with supporting information for landowners and communities. AONBs would welcome being charged with producing guidance to assist businesses in harnessing the opportunities provided by our unique landscapes.

- **By providing specialist services**

AONB partnerships would like to make better available the expertise within AONB partnerships to advise local businesses and the planning authorities on the kind of development that is appropriate and sustainable within a particular AONB.

What assistance do rural businesses need to harness growth opportunities provided by our AONBs?

- **Better guidance on sustainability**

A clear and consistent framework and criteria to assess business contribution to landscape character and natural beauty through a higher profile for AONB Management Plans and a workable framework for sustainable development which includes consideration of place;

- **Affordable places to live and work**

Affordable housing and workspace suitable for rural workers

- **Better business support**

A package of business support for primary producers and processors including reliable information on landscape resources; support for skills training in traditional and modern low carbon technologies and support for product research and development.

- **Favourable EU support**

A favourable CAP regime that supports sustainable farm businesses, provides adequate funding for agri-environment schemes, and has an element of farm business support/diversification funding.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – working together to support the rural economy

1.0 Introduction to AONBs

- 1.1 There are forty six Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covering a total of nearly eight thousand square miles of the UK's rural landscape. Thirty three are wholly in England, with one, the Wye Valley, straddling the border between England and Wales. About 14% of England is covered and this includes about 2% of the population. In addition, the relative close proximity of AONBs to centres of population means that AONBs have a special meaning to many more than those that live within them.
- 1.2 AONBs are not wilderness areas or even, paradoxically, areas whose beauty derives from purely natural processes, but a group of distinct and recognisable areas arising from a long history of human occupation and sustainable exploitation of their natural resources.
- 1.3 The AONB designation, through legislation and guidance, requires the conservation and enhancement of these nationally cherished areas, recognising their inherent value as both strategic national assets as providers of public goods, both potential and realised, and highly valued local places that provide a basis for the generation, marketing and sale of private goods.
- 1.4 AONB partnerships work to support the activity of local landowners, farmers, businesses, visitors, community groups, and individuals in their conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. This activity is defined and integrated in a sustainable way through the AONB management plans which are devised and agreed through local consensus.
- 1.5 The interdependent relationship between land stewardship, natural beauty, community and the economy is clear and well-understood. A resurgence in land-based economic activity is essential to the long term future of AONBs but, for this growth to be truly sustainable and meet wider government objectives, economic growth and land stewardship within or affecting AONBs must be based on the principles of both sound land stewardship and careful planning.
- 1.6 AONB partnerships continue to play a clear role in facilitating and enabling the wealth of innovation and energy latent in individuals, businesses, communities and local groups. They also have the important task of not only facilitating and adding to local decision-making but bringing a national perspective to local thinking generating better outcomes.

2.0 The AONB designation, the Partnership and the local economy

- 2.1 The statutory purpose of designating a tract of countryside as an AONB is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. The concept of 'natural beauty' includes the protection of flora, fauna and geological as well as landscape features. However, the cultural dimension of the landscape, including the historical, intellectual and spiritual elements, as well as the physical human shaping of the land is also fully recognised.
- 2.2 In contrast to National Parks, AONBs have never been given a statutory recreation purpose. However, as scenically attractive areas close to centres of population, they have always been popular with visitors, and it has long been recognised that this demand should be met so long as it is consistent with the conservation of the area and with the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.
- 2.3 In pursuing the purpose of designation account is taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities and particular regard is paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment. This requires an integrated approach to the management of AONBs and the achievement of conservation through appropriate social and economic development.
- 2.4 AONBs are protected landscapes, but protection does not preclude change and development. AONB partnerships, which include Conservation Boards, Joint Advisory Committees, and Joint Committees, are a locally formed, locally accountable mechanism to help guide change and development in a positive way.

It is the role of the AONB partnership to

- bring all stakeholders and a wide range of expertise together
 - secure co-ordination of the management of the AONB
 - promote the special qualities and importance of the AONB
 - advise on decisions that will impact on the purpose of designation
 - create a sense of ownership of the need to manage the area in a manner that will conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB
- 2.5 The composition of the partnership reflects the interests of, amongst others, local land owners and managers, local business, commerce and industry
- 2.6 AONB partnerships do not have planning powers, these rest with the constituent local authorities. However, because the purpose of designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty and this is, to a large extent, dependent upon sound planning and sustainable development, the AONB partnership works closely with local authority planning departments.

2.7 AONB partnerships endeavour to create the conditions in which businesses can innovate, invest and grow; encourage businesses, people and communities to manage and use natural resources in a sustainable manner and to reduce waste; and work to ensure that the local economy is resilient to climate change. AONB partnerships support the notion of a green economy.

3.0 The economy of AONBs

3.1 The full suite of rural businesses commonly present within AONBs is mixed and varied. This suite however is not limited to AONBs and exists across most, if not all, rural areas of England. The high quality landscape within AONBs, however, provides increased opportunities for businesses centred on tourism, recreation, outdoor education, and creative activities when compared to other areas. AONB partnerships therefore work closely with those that have a direct influence on the resource (farmers, landowners, foresters, gamekeepers, the extractive industry, public utility companies etc.) and those whose business model depends upon the sustainable stewardship of the resource; in the case of AONBs a nationally important, high quality landscape.

3.2 Evidence suggests, and outlined later in this report, that AONB partnerships work closely with a section of the rural business community. This section and a breakdown of the sectors within it, according to the small businesses responding to the FSB infrastructure survey (Feb 2011), is outlined below

• Agriculture, forestry, fishing	2.9%
• Mining and quarrying	0.1%
• Education, health and social work	4.7%
• Transport and activities related to transport	4.1%
• Creative services	3.9%
• Leisure, sports entertainment	1.7%
• Electricity, gas and water supply	0.7%
• Hotels, restaurants, bars and catering	6.2%

Total 24.3%

3.3 Many rural businesses exist without a business link to the environment, except perhaps in the case of homeworking where the desirability of a location as a place to live is directly linked to the workplace. One challenge for AONB partnerships is to ascertain whether any of the remaining 75% of small businesses operating in rural areas have a direct or indirect link with the delivery of the AONB purpose and could therefore be supported in some way.

3.4 An increased focus on localis likely to be a significant driver of small rural business trends over the coming few years. Local foods of known provenance are becoming increasingly important in the marketplace and with this comes increased

opportunities for local producers and value-added processors. There is a direct link between engagement in this market and the delivery of the AONB purpose.

Likewise there is a growing market for more meaningful, engaging tourism, linked to positive environmental and social outcomes, particularly when this is defined to a particular location or place.

- 3.5 Anecdotal evidence suggests that counter-urbanisation remains an issue within AONBs. People from urban areas . often affluent move to the countryside attracted by the high quality environment and way of life. In some cases this has displaced less affluent groups in rural areas, often through competition for scarce housing. An important point to note however is that the primary driver for counter-urbanisation is the high quality environment not the AONB designation per se.

Case Study

Current socio-economic context of historic farmsteads in the High Weald AONB, Report by University of Sheffield, 2007

Historic farmsteads form a significant economic asset in many AONBs especially those in the South East and South West of England where dispersed settlement is the dominant settlement character.

This report, commissioned by the **High Weald AONB**, found that the AONB has over 3500 historic farmsteads at a high density of 2.4 per km sq. which historically served a predominantly mixed agricultural and craft based economy. Today over 50% are in residential use with less than 40% retaining some agricultural function. Historic farm property within a high quality landscape setting is highly prized as dwellings for an economic elite with 38 of every 100 households occupied by directors of companies with turnovers of more than £1.5 million. Non-residential use outside the agricultural sector is limited with less than 8% supporting mostly micro businesses. The ratio of micro-businesses to households and the proportion of people working at home is high in relation to the South East and England as a whole.

4.0 Barriers to growth in AONBs

- 4.1 It is essential that we differentiate between those barriers to economic growth within AONBs that are perceived and those that are real. Often views formed on the basis of a consensus of uninformed opinion themselves propagate barriers to economic growth. AONB partnerships work to break down these perceived and real barriers.
- 4.2 It is important to note that the perceived barriers relate to misconceptions relating to the AONB designation, whilst the real barriers are not AONB specific and relate to most, if not all, rural areas.

4.3 Perceived barriers

- Commonly held view that AONB designation means no to growth
- Misconception that protected landscapes are wild areas or parkland rather than the result of agricultural and often industrial activity
- Emphasis on visual impact and value of visual enjoyment to the detriment of landscape function and core components of character within current guidelines for landscape and visual assessment used for planning purposes
- Misconception that the AONB designation is an additional form of regulation supported by a bureaucracy rich processes rather than a mechanism for actively supporting positive action, land management and development.

4.4 Real barriers

Infrastructural

- Lack of affordable and suitable housing for key workers and land based workers
- Difficult financial climate for small business establishment and growth
- High cost of yard and workspace for low profit rural businesses
- Low broadband speeds in rural areas
- Loss of capacity in farmsteads for land based industry
- Limitations of public transport services
- Lack of markets for local land based products and services
- Decline in traditional agricultural skills, infrastructure and activity
- Loss of traditional craft skills
- Land based businesses seen as a low skill, low income option leading to lack of innovation and entrepreneurship
- Increase in non-farming land owners opting for non-productive land management
- Inability to retain young workers and secure opportunities for them
- Addressing transport issues linked to access to education and training
- Difficulties in accessing specialist health services
- Ageing population needing community transport
- Ageing population and pressure on services
- Impact of increasing fuel costs on business and leisure patterns
- Lack of facilities such as after-school clubs (which limits the time available for home-workers)

Institutional

- Planning restrictions for live work and home working
- Banks not lending . this year the AONB SDF fund has been approached by a number of businesses for loans, rather than grants

- Accountancy write down rules . landowners with successful businesses elsewhere can write off losses on landholdings so the landholdings become hobbylandholdings and add little to the local economy
- Divorce - after White v White, farmers are reluctant to hand assets down to younger (and perhaps more progressive) generations for fear that divorce settlements will take assets out of the family.
- Inappropriate regulations restricting use of local timber in construction
- Lack of good business advice and support for rural business
- Bureaucracy and 'red tape' surrounding RDPE funding for businesses
- Loss of Rural Business Link and Rural Enterprise Scheme funding
- Loss of the Tourist Board partnerships and their business development sections
- Compliance with the many regulations in respect of funding support to any agri business
- Less than optimum local sourcing and buy local initiatives
- Increasing proportion of inactive population
- Quality and added value required to maintain competitiveness
- Physical and social cost of maintaining social fabric
- A paucity of information and understanding on the interrelationship between economic, social and environmental connectivity
- local authority cuts to marketing/tourism budgets including closure of TICs

5.0 Theme A – Enabling Rural Business to Innovate and Thrive

Introduction

- 5.1 Support for rural businesses is not an objective for AONB partnerships per se. The relationship however between a healthy, functioning, sustainable rural economy and the delivery of the AONB purpose is however clearly recognised. AONB partnerships therefore support a multidisciplinary approach to landscape conservation and enhancement recognising that to understand landscape it is not enough to take account of solely the natural sciences. Ecological connectivity is important but so too is social and economic connectivity.
- 5.2 AONB partnerships are therefore actively involved in supporting rural business where there is a positive relationship between the business and the delivery of the AONB purpose. Support may come in many forms and includes, although is not restricted to
- Setting up and running resources such as the Kent Downs Rural Advisory service which provided independent advice to farmers considering diversifying their income including business planning and environmental advice pulled together to provide action plans for diversification proposals
 - Working to draw down LEADER and RDPE funding

- The draw-down of grants for the restoration of buildings and infrastructure
- Grants to farmers to help with product marketing and distribution
- Grants to set up and establish businesses
- Grants for machinery and processing equipment
- Advice to farmers on ELS and HLS and/or the drawing up of Farm Environment Plans for farmers and landowners
- The employment of local contractors and craftspeople
- The provision of guidance and advice documents for land owners and farmers
- Provision of marketing support and green tourism accreditation for rural sustainable tourism businesses
- Ground-breaking projects such as the Kent Downs wood fuel pathfinder project working to pull together businesses and individuals whose property have large heat loads with woodland managers and woodland owners from across the Kent Downs
- Feasibility studies on a wide range of business opportunities
- Development of on-line local food directories
- Support for micro-enterprises (e.g. Bowland Wool Project, micro-renewables projects for accommodation providers, 'Growing with Grace' local food project)
- Support for development of business 'clusters' working together to jointly develop and pay for promotional leaflets (e.g. teashops, fishing in Bowland)
- On-line arts, crafts and rural skills directory
- Support for FarmersqMarkets
- Sustainable business networking and training schemes

It should be noted, however, that there is a direct correlation between the availability of resources to undertake significant work to support rural businesses and development pressure, and/or access to Leader/European funding.

Case Study

The Shropshire Hills Farming Project is a two year project from 2011 to 2013 to support and promote hill farming in the Less Favoured Areas of the **Shropshire Hills AONB**. The project employs a dedicated Farming Officer to visit farms and have one-to-one discussions with farmers and their families about a wide range of issues from the farming business, environmental stewardship schemes, grants, renewable energy and concerns over succession to health concerns and stress.

Over the two years, the project aims to achieve

- One to one meetings with 250 farmers;
- 10 local farmer events . Farmers Dens, study tours or seminars;
- 3 annual public events about farming;
- 6 topic based farming workshops;
- 100 referrals for farm energy surveys;
- Working with 15 schools to include farming in the curriculum;
- 15 farm tours for school children;
- 5 farm tours for the wider community;
- 12 presentations about traditional hill farming to community groups;
- Support and advise 6 Farming Champions.

5.3 Broadband & Mobile

The importance of reliable, high-speed, and affordable broadband services within AONBs is well understood as is the need for high quality mobile communication. Many small rural businesses within AONBs are looking to diversify and increase their marketing abilities. This is reliant to some extent on the availability of good, future-proof internet connections. Broadband is also increasingly bound up in issues of social cohesion. A sustainable society and economy are fundamental to sustainable land management within AONBs.

It is clear that thriving communities require communications infrastructure that will be fit for purpose, in order to support diverse and balanced economic activity, attract investment, and provide high value, knowledge-intensive jobs.

AONB have very rarely objected to phone masts. Mobile phone networks have avoided rural areas and continue to do so. The sector is becoming increasingly homogeneous as companies combine and they are becoming ever more competitive in the urban areas, but equally averse to improving the rural network. In Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB the rural business managers regard the lack of 3G reception as one of the greatest barriers to economic growth. This view is likely to be held in AONBs elsewhere.

5.4 Opportunities

The NAAONB sees effective roll out of superfast broadband as key to the future prosperity of rural communities, and shared infrastructure has the potential to minimise adverse landscape impacts in AONBs. Where possible, we would hope to see broadband deployment achieved through the sharing of existing infrastructure such as BT ducts and poles; other telecommunications infrastructure; and other utilities infrastructure.

The NAAONB and Association of National Park Authorities hold a joint accord with the Mobile Operators Association. This seeks to protect the special qualities of the protected landscapes while making the best possible provision for telecommunication services. The principles of this accord are equally applicable to the provision of broadband infrastructure.

There are also opportunities in relation to planning. Operators acquisition agents/planning consultants could initiate pre-application discussions with AONB partnerships prior to the submission of any application for telecommunications development within or immediately adjacent to an AONB. This would enable positive discussions to take place to explore the optimum environmental and network solution. Discussions would seek to mitigate adverse landscape impacts, and include consideration of infrastructure sharing, technical solutions, landscaping and design issues. Broadband companies could enter into similar discussions with AONBs regarding broadband roll out plans in and adjacent to AONBs.

5.5 Efficient Use of Land & Buildings

AONB designation is not incompatible with environmentally responsible economic growth. However AONBs have differing capacities for change depending on their character and landscape history. In our finest landscapes we want the highest standards of economic growth. It is essential that a workable and effective sustainable development framework for spatial planning and rural growth is in place to help ensure these aspirations are met.

Within such a framework there are probably three kinds of sustainability criteria that need to be addressed in preparing and implementing both spatial planning and rural growth policies to ensure the conservation of the character of protected landscapes:

- generic sustainability criteria that should be addressed in *all* public policy,
- sustainability criteria that derive from a *type* of situation or setting and relate to the character of places,
- *local* sustainability criteria that are specific to an individual community or locality.

Spatial planning and rural growth policies need to combine the most appropriate mix of criteria from each of these three sets. In *special* or even unique settings such as protected landscapes it might well be appropriate for the criteria to be more weighted towards the *type* criteria than would be the case in most policy situations.

Settlement patterns and the built environment contribute significantly to the character of AONBs and to their capacity for change. For example dispersed settlement landscapes which characterise AONBs in the South East and West provide opportunities through their scattered historic farmsteads and hamlets for many people to live and work close to the land . they have inherent characteristics that may enable more sustainable behaviours. Economic development provides the opportunity to shape places and through the decisions we take to encourage more sustainable lifestyles.

AONB Teams, particularly those with Planning Officers and Landscape Architects on staff, have a unique expertise in advising local businesses and the planning authorities on the kind of development that is appropriate and sustainable within a protected landscape. There is a potential to develop this area of work in close partnership with planning authorities, business groups (such as Chambers of Commerce), and the fledgling Local Enterprise Partnerships.

5.6 Opportunities

- Recognise farmsteads as *green business parks* for land based businesses and reflect this in planning policy ensuring they retain capacity for mixed use and land based activity alongside residential conversions and high tech, creative and knowledge based enterprises;

- Promote the use of English Heritage's Farmstead Assessment Framework to ensure enabling development and re-use is carried out in a manner that enhances farmstead and landscape character;
- Promote the use of agricultural and local occupancy conditions to increase the stock of affordable homes for rural workers;
- Offer all villages and small settlements option of designating land as a green business park with a package of fiscal incentives where a mix of allotments, community agriculture, small holdings, live/ work craft units, creative fablabs and yard space for log wood and other land based enterprises could co-exist providing services determined and managed by the community.
- Consider whole farm multi-purpose management plans with agreed production targets for ecosystem services as a basis for securing public subsidy on private land;
- Provide targeted planning advice for rural and land based businesses on the planning portal . *complex rural land issues such as occupancy conditions, green tourism accommodation (yurts/ glamping); GDO's, timber yards, change of use, are not adequately covered on the planning portal and many small rural businesses cannot afford the services of a specialist rural planning consultant*
- Require rural housing providers to proactively consider the needs of land based workers in rural social housing schemes . *land based businesses have additional requirements such as space for 4WD trucks, trailers and tractors;*

Case Studies

Redevelopment of Historic Farmsteads

High Weald AONB have worked in collaboration with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and a local developer to utilise English Heritage's Historic Farmstead Assessment Framework to achieve a major redevelopment of a large historic farmstead including enabling new development which conserves and enhances the character of the farmstead and surrounding landscape

Redefinition of 'key worker'

High Weald AONB has also been working with Rother District Council to widen key worker definitions to include local land based workers

Case Study

Positive planning

Dorset AONB Partnership has worked with the developer and local authority to achieve a successful planning application for an anaerobic digester plant adjacent to Maiden Castle, one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hillforts in Europe; a Scheduled Ancient Monument maintained by English Heritage.

5.7 Addressing Skills Needs

Rural areas present particular challenges for employers, employees and people actively seeking employment. There is a greater emphasis placed on rural businesses to train their own staff in the absence of a local pool from which to buy in skills. There are also more limited options for employees in rural areas to progress their careers without leaving their work and moving to another area. There are also very real difficulties associated with providing training opportunities to relatively sparsely populated areas. None of these issues is, however, confined to AONBs.

The rural economy is characterised by a high proportion of small and micro-businesses, community enterprises, self-employment and home-based work. Consequently, there is a suite of generic skills required in order for these businesses to prosper. Those businesses that have a direct relationship with the management of the special qualities for which the AONB was designated however have a special skills need, some of which is met by the AONB partnership. Examples include traditional skills training such as drystone walling and hedgelaying, courses for farmers and landowners on habitat management, or more general awareness-raising carried out as part of the management planning process.

AONB partnerships have a vested interest in providing, or supporting, this skills training as it is only through informed, appropriate and sustainable management that the AONB purpose can be delivered in the longer term.

5.8 Opportunities

- Provide incentive for colleges to develop skills training for new entrants to farming and forestry focusing on climate resilient and low carbon land management with an award scheme for best practice;
- Continue grant support through RDPE for basic skills training in farming and forestry such as basic chainsaw, animal husbandry and agronomy;
- Provide targeted training and skills support for women in land based businesses;
- Provide financial support for expert traditional craft workers to share skills and take on apprentices; (re-open Heritage Lottery Funds traditional craft programme?);
- Pilot radical solutions to the provisions of affordable housing to allow skilled rural workers to invest in an area and build necessary networks and business

partnerships including zoning areas for self build; widening key worker criteria to include vital rural workers.

Case studies

Social networking, apprenticeships and skills training

High Weald AONB Partnership worked with forestry skills training providers to facilitate social networking between small dispersed land based businesses and skills exchange to strengthen the pool of traditional wood utilisation skills some of which are now limited to a single or only a handful of individuals across the country

High Weald AONB Partnership offered short term apprenticeships for young people in the coppice industry through the SDF

High Weald AONB Partnership worked with Plumpton agricultural college to offer livestock and horticulture skills training to small holders

Countryside Foundation for Education

Schools and colleges perceive land based enterprises as being a home for less able students. Attracting the brightest and the best means first over-coming the prejudices of the educational establishments. To overcome this, **Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB** assisted the Countryside Foundation for Education to run a series of "estate days" when children from areas surrounding the AONB get the opportunity to come to a large diversified rural estate and see a wide variety of modern rural jobs such as farriery, farming, horse livery, stock husbandry, fishery management and game shoot management. These events are now self-funding and attract approximately 500 children each year from 20 schools.

5.9 Access to Finance

Rural businesses are small, often being "one-man bands" or employing less than 10 people. These businesses have limited capacity to seek funding and many funding streams, such as Leader, are too onerous in terms of application and reporting to be attractive. AONB Sustainable Development Funds have been running for six years and are light-touch, easy to apply for funds in small amounts that are highly accessible. Start-up and Development Funding could easily be channelled through the SDF and opened up to businesses in the wider countryside around the AONB to achieve national coverage. The experience and expertise within the AONB units, gained from using the SDF, would make it possible for the funding to be more targeted at need and less risk-averse, thereby encouraging the innovation and access to opportunity that is so badly needed.

Stimulating land based businesses does not require substantial levels of funding but focused intervention with small amounts of funding targeted at design, research and development, prototyping and facilitating skills exchange and networking. Most small

land based businesses work cooperatively with others and rely on informal networks for sharing machinery, yards and skills. Many of these networks are hard to reach and effective support needs to reach out beyond traditional business support networks and build trust with the sector. AONBs have developed long term relationships with the land based sector.

5.10 Opportunities

- Provide small grants/ micro loans (perhaps through AONB SDF type programmes or challenge funds) to support land based businesses to adapt to low carbon operations
- Provide small grants/ micro loans (perhaps through AONB SDF type programmes targeted at reuse/ refurbishment/ adaptation of second hand agricultural machinery to serve new business functions . *will assist very small and low profit businesses such as coppice workers for whom the capital requirements of grants such as Leader are too onerous*
- Promote through reduced business rates and/or relaxation in change of use restrictions support for low cost units for land based crafts with access to shared machinery
- Financial support for small scale and adaptive local processing capabilities such as micro- dairies

Case study

High Weald Design - a public private partnership set up by the **High Weald AONB Partnership** in 1993 to foster innovative design using small dimension coppice wood. A small fund recruited 2 young designers to work with woodland workers over a season and develop new designs which would meet the needs of the outdoor furniture market.

The resulting business continues to thrive in the area employing 2 people, supplying public bodies throughout the South East with outdoor furniture and supporting coppice cutters and sawmill operators and owners through increased demand for material.

The project is now working on utilising small quantities of low value softwood for high value structures and building construction again supporting designers working with industry to match new products with skills and demand.

5.11 Access to Business Support

The link between the value of the natural capital present in AONBs and the development of existing and novel business opportunities is clear. The challenge inherent in effectively realising the value of this link requires both a strategic and

tactical approach. Whilst business support is more commonly targeted at the provision of advice in relation to management, operational, and supporting services, there is a clear need for specialist support in developing the strategic framework from within which tactical business support can be provided.

5.12 Opportunities

- An embedding of the landscape approach into the Green Economy Roadmap based on the better valuation of ecosystem services.
- Increased collaboration between the environmental and economic sectors utilising opportunities afforded by Defra's involvement in the Green Economy Council.
- A programme/ competitive grant award to pilot specialist business advice to encourage growth in climate resilient land based business activity such as soil carbon management, agro-forestry and polyculture, small dimension local timber in construction, management of local livestock breeds

Case studies

Kent Downs Rural Advice Service

The Kent Downs Rural Advice Service (KDRAS) is a pilot project initiated by the **Kent Downs AONB Unit** (KDAONB) and Kent County Council (KCC) Environment and Regeneration Directorate to deliver environmentally acceptable, financially viable and sustainable advice on diversification proposals for landholders.

It provides tailored advice to landholders through individual Action Plans which bring together three strands of professional advice and makes use of GIS

- Provides wide ranging training workshops
- Raises capacity across the full range of stakeholders in land management to
- improve competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors, enhance the environment and countryside, improve the quality of rural life and support diversification of the rural economy.
- Links delivery to the objectives of environmental stakeholders, such as SEEDA Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), GOSE, DEFRA, the Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE), English Heritage (EH), and National, Regional and Local Policies. (e.g. KCC's *Towards 2010* Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Acts, and Local Development Programmes (LDPs))

Dorset and East Devon Waterborne Transport Scoping Study

This report was commissioned by the **Dorset AONB Partnership** to investigate potential for waterborne transport along the Dorset and East Devon Coast which would offer an enhanced, reliable and realistic alternative transport opportunity for both functional and leisure journeys, and would enable integration between waterborne and surface transport.

- It provided an assessment of the market potential for water based passenger transport services.
- Investigated supply side issues . issues connected with the vessels and landing facilities that are needed to operate services, and the constraints that impact on these.
- It provided an assessment of the barriers to growth of water based passenger services, and provides recommendations and conclusions.

Making it Local

The **East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONB Partnerships** were instrumental in leading the successful £2.4m bid to the RDPE Local Action programme entitled [*Making it Local*](#) . This programme is using the outstanding natural environment of the joint area to act as a springboard to the rural economy. Encompassing a number of coastal and rural market towns, the programme has supported projects that have enabled rural businesses and communities to innovate and thrive:

6.0 Theme B: Realising the value of natural capital

Introduction

- 6.1 The services provided by functioning ecological systems and the natural capital that produce them are critical to the functioning of our habitat as a species. Our health and well-being is dependent upon them so they consequently have an economic value. This natural capital and its associated ecological systems therefore represent a strategic national resource.
- 6.2 We have yet to fully realise the value of our natural capital. Accurate valuation of ecosystem services is difficult as they are not easily framed within traditional markets or adequately quantified in terms that allow them to be compared with other traded services or goods; consequently their values are difficult to factor into policy development. Often it is the failure of an ecosystem service, or the disappearance of an environmental function that gives us an insight into its value. Whilst true valuations may be difficult it is additionally useful to determine what it would cost to replicate the service using technology. This value is often not only economic but social.
- 6.3 Most commentators agree that the current systems of national accounting for the degradation of natural resource systems substantially underestimate damage incurred and overestimate savings from environmental protection. For example, the economic activities that have the most significant effect on natural capital (such as energy generation, agriculture, fisheries, mining and transport) are subsidised by governments to an estimated one trillion dollars annually¹, but the cost of the damage incurred as a result of these subsidies is not reflected in national accounts². Ecosystem service valuation is therefore difficult but highly relevant to understanding the role of AONBs in the rural, and indeed national, economy.
- 6.4 The wealth of ecosystem services provided by the landscapes of our AONBs is significant. Current difficulties in realising the full social value of many of these services represent a significant market failure. This is compounded by the fact that many ecosystem services are public goods. Public goods are undervalued on the basis that they are non-excludable and non-rival.
- 6.5 The full suite of ecosystem services provided by AONBs falls into the accepted four categories . supporting, provisioning, regulating, and cultural services. Provisioning services such as the production of food and timber are predominantly valued through the private market. These services generate private goods and their values are largely defined by market forces. Supporting services such as nutrient cycling and soil formation are ultimately linked to provisioning services so can be valued in a

¹ TEEB, 2010, The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for National and international Policy Makers, European Commission, Brussels

² Living with Environmental Limits, 2011, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

similar way. Regulating services, however, provide both public and private goods, for example land can be managed to control water retention at the very local level in the same way it can be managed to provide public benefit at the catchment level. Cultural services such as aesthetic and inspirational value are largely public goods. The way we value these goods differs and a clear agreement on the respective roles of private business and public bodies in their management is essential.

6.6 In addition to use values such as food and timber production, many ecosystem services provided by AONBs have a high non-use value. People value the fact that the North Pennines or the Cotswolds exists, whether or not they use these areas for the provision of private or public goods. AONB partnerships recognise this complexity of natural capital.

6.7 AONB designation has successfully conserved a range of high quality natural assets and to a more limited extent human assets in terms of the buildings, craft skills, business and community infrastructure needed to manage them. These assets are currently under utilised and with incentives for proper management could provide the basis for renewed and sustainable economic growth. AONB partnerships are actively working to realise the value of natural capital. Activity comes in many forms and includes, although is not restricted to

- implementation of visitor pay-back schemes
- support for the development of outdoor recreation businesses such as mountain biking centres
- 'Sense of Place' training for tourism businesses on how best to market the added value of being within an AONB

6.8 Tourism

People choose to visit AONBs because of their fine landscapes, natural and cultural heritage, opportunities for outdoor recreation and peace and tranquillity. Often the very reasons why these areas were designated in the first place. These qualities should form the basis for the future development, management and marketing of tourism. The level and type of tourism activity should take account of the capacity of the protected area, environment and communities. It should be recognised that some places are valued for being wild and remote. Each AONB is different. Their individual distinctiveness is part of their appeal.

Tourism makes a positive contribution to a mixed economy, which utilises and develops local skills and resources. AONB partnerships aim to ensure that proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally is maximised. Greater use of local products and services by tourism enterprises, and their purchase by visitors, benefits the local economy and the distinctive appeal of the AONB. Coordinated marketing and information delivery reflects the special qualities and needs of the area, such as reducing seasonality where this is appropriate.

6.9 Opportunities

Further develop the concept of green tourism ensuring that sustainability underpins all tourism development and businesses are better supported to provide high-quality, enjoyable and fulfilling experiences linked more closely to people's values.

Develop the AONB brand both individually and nationally in relation to marketing opportunities for small tourism based businesses within AONBs.

Further develop the role of tourism in enhancing the quality of life for local people. AONBs have capacity to accommodate increased visitor stay (i.e. overnight rather than just day trips) in relation to tourism opportunities that capitalise on the special qualities of the area whilst helping to conserve and enhance them.

Improve the physical infrastructure required to support sustainable tourism activities such as public transport, and improve the use of technological infrastructure such as social networks to help people pass on valuable experiences

Improve the visitor welcome ensuring that visitor amenities, information and orientation services, rights of way and signage are fit for purpose.

Build on the growing trend of British people holidaying at home by developing a more value based tourism network linking a high quality environment with rich cultural experiences.

Case study

Balance Project

The **Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Unit** is co-ordinating the UK element of a project called BALANCE.

BALANCE is a cross-border cooperation Interreg 2-Seas project involving five organisations from the Netherlands, Flanders and the United Kingdom, all working in the field of integrated land development and management of rural and semi-urban green spaces within/near maritime areas or estuaries. The project is about balancing the needs of recreation and tourism in areas of green space.

It will help identify the economic value of tourism in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and give greater clarity on market conditions, motivations and attitudes, market size, share and forecast; information invaluable to local tourism based businesses. It will make recommendations on

- How tourism foot-fall and spend can be increased, especially in the winter months and shoulder seasons
- How tourism businesses can be effective stewards of the protected landscape
- Mechanisms to ensure sustainable management of tourism by the AONB Partnership through the statutory AONB Management Plan, and other mechanisms.

Case studies

Our Land

This collaborative project is developing and promoting sustainable, rural tourism in the **AONBs and National Parks of the South East**.

The aim of the project is to help tourism businesses offer activities and accommodation which celebrate these iconic landscapes. In addition, the project will

- Manage positive change within the tourism sector to the benefit of the environment, culture and heritage of the protected landscapes.
- Increase visitors enjoyment and understanding of the special character, quality and bio-diversity of the protected landscapes.
- Benefit the local rural economy and services by developing innovative, sustainable tourism businesses, increase occupancy levels and retain visitor spend in the local economy.
- Contribute to the growth in sustainable tourism by developing and promoting more sustainable tourism opportunities within the protected landscapes.

The project offers support for participating businesses, enabling them to realise their potential and increase their appreciation of working within a protected landscape. The project provides

- A well-resourced programme driving accommodation sales and development of activities in tune with visitor expectation across the South East's most iconic landscapes.
- A marketing strategy to establish Our Land as a nationally recognised brand.
- Optimised relationship management between project partners and tourism service providers, delivered in the field by a team of outreach mentors.
- Driving online enquiries and bookings for breaks and visitor experiences generated in partnership with responsibletravel.com.

Chilterns AONB cycle route

Chilterns Conservation Board launched a 173 mile circular on-road route for leisure cyclists in June 2010 supported by £48,000 grant from Chilterns LEADER programme. Its aim is to promote day rides and short cycling breaks and benefit local economy through increased spending by leisure cyclists. Over 400 local tourism businesses including B&Bs, pubs and cycle shops are promoted through the Cycleway website and Guidebook.

Sustainable Tourism Networks

The **Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership** has developed and continues to support an AONB Sustainable Tourism Network of 120 members, which has led to the formation of Bowland Experience Ltd which provides business-to-business support for tourism development within the AONB

6.10 Renewable Energy

Support for renewable energy developments by AONB partnerships is set against their statutory duty to have regard to the purpose of designation. In short, all applications are assessed for their potential impact on the special qualities of the AONB.

AONBs are nationally important landscapes and as such are sensitive to development. Good planning requires creativity to ensure renewable energy developments are of an appropriate scale, location and design in relation to the character of the landscape and its setting. It also requires innovation in the use of technology. AONB partnerships aim to not just conserve, but to enhance landscape quality. Appropriately scaled renewable energy developments already exist within many AONBs.

Only those developments that are likely to help conserve and enhance landscape quality are supported. Whilst the approach to assessing applications will vary the Management Plan is central to the articulation of natural beauty at the local level and will therefore provide the main source of evidence for consideration. Many AONBs have set out their stance on renewables in the form of AONB specific guidance and/or a local Position Statement.

AONB partnerships are actively involved in promoting renewables where they help conserve and enhance natural beauty. AONB partnerships, teams, and project officers are active on a number of fronts:

Research

- Supporting feasibility studies for individual projects,
- Wind energy assessments
- Climate change adaptation options
- Environmental Impact Assessment and flood risk modelling for hydro-electric
- Schemes

Advice and information

- Co-ordinating an approach to renewables through the convening of interested parties including planners, land owners, farmers, and householders.
- Production of Fact Sheets
- Providing interpretation on-site and on-line interpretation for renewable energy installations
- Providing advice on demand side management including energy conservation
- Organising and running seminars/ workshops/ training days to discuss options and promote good practice
- Evaluating the efficiency of renewable energy projects to demonstrate the impact they are having in terms of communities and businesses saving money and carbon

- Providing specific support to individuals and community groups with regards to planning applications for appropriately scaled and sited
 - wind energy generation projects
 - ground source heat pump schemes,
 - photovoltaic installations,
 - wood fuel heating boilers
 - hydro schemes
 - solar thermal installations
 - anaerobic digestion installations
 - air source heat pump schemes
 - biomass schemes

Direct support

- Direct financial support (through SDF or LEADER) has been provided across the
- spectrum of need associated with renewable energy development in AONBs including support for
 - timber harvesting operations, and the purchase of wood chipping and firewood processing equipment
 - woodfuel initiatives
 - sheep's wool insulation projects
 - rainwater harvesting
 - household and business energy use surveys
 - renewable energy co-operatives
 - the renovation of traditional buildings and associated technology such as mill wheels to generate electricity

6.11 Opportunities

In relation to renewables AONBs shouldn't just be looking at the big picture, we should be more closely looking at the small picture and approaching this on the community level, where project champions are so important . AONB partnerships themselves can be project champions

AONB partnerships excel at delivering community projects. We can move beyond initiatives and, through the management planning process, encourage individuals and communities to own projects and embrace change.

There is a huge emerging opportunity to link energy and biodiversity requirements, and to think within and beyond AONBs, even offering opportunities for new biomass.

AONB partnerships can help tackle issues of appropriate building design and quality in relation to demand side management, with AONB management plans providing the policy framework for getting the right technology in the right place

AONB partnerships support all forms of renewable energy, although not at any cost. If renewable energy is to be sustainable it must be achieved in the right form, the right scale and in the right place, and not displace something which is more important

or valued. AONB partnerships, through the management planning process, can help local communities articulate what they value and achieve consensus where values potentially conflict.

Specific opportunities include

- Refocusing the wood heat campaign to support log use for heating domestic, small business and farmsteads and support provision of improved information on using and burning logs including well-seasoned softwood.
- Providing support for community logging groups

Case studies

Woodfuel Pathfinder

An innovative project run by the **Kent Downs AONB Partnership** that provides a temporary support mechanism to help establish robust woodfuel industry in Kent via enhanced uptake of biomass energy

It offers

- technical advice on woodfuel
- guidance on finance and grants
- advice on the Renewable Heat Incentive
- one to one support from experienced foresters
- energy use assessments (heat demand, boiler sizing)
- access to our network of biomass / woodfuel consultants (including financial support to fast-track biomass feasibility assessments)

The AONB will engage with any component of the woodfuel supply chain and facilitate introductions from woodland manager to heat user to bring supply and demand together and ensure that suitable woodland is sustainably managed.

HG Matthews - traditional brickmakers

H G Matthews is a thriving brick making business in the **Chilterns AONB** which has been producing bricks made from local clay since the 1920s. Its products are used in the building and restoration of properties all over the Chilterns and beyond, and make a great contribution to maintaining the distinctive character and beauty of the area's vernacular architecture. Jim and Trafford Matthews, the third generation to run the business, are very keen to reduce its carbon footprint and became interested in the possibility of replacing 150,000 . 200,000 litres of diesel used to heat the kilns with more environmentally-friendly fuel.

A grant from the Chilterns AONB Sustainable Development Fund helped to pay for equipment and expert advice to test out using glycerol, a by-product from the manufacture of biodiesel, to heat the kilns. The experiments showed that glycerol could be used successfully in conjunction with biodiesel to get the kilns to the required temperature of 1250°C to fire the bricks. Following this pilot scheme the company is now considering whether to use glycerol and biodiesel in all their kilns.

Case studies

Woodland Wildlife

AONB partnerships across the south west of England are collaborating on a "woodland wildlife" initiative that will support communities in taking ownership of their heat energy requirements and meeting them through communal management of woodland resources. They will be supported in doing this in such a way that gains in wildlife habitat are optimised and species recovery prioritised.

Forest Apprenticeships

One of two national pilots for a new England-wide apprenticeship scheme is being trialled by **East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONB partnerships**. The scheme has been developed in partnership with LANTRA providing a new two year forest apprenticeship for five apprentices in the local area. Delivered by the Silvanus Trust and Bicton College and hosted by the Forestry Commission, Clinton Devon Estates, Forest Fuels Ltd and Kleen Kutt Ltd.

6.12 Agri-food

AONB partnerships have an obvious interest in understanding the often intricate links in the food chain. From the management of the supporting and provisioning ecosystem services that help generate food, and the relationship that these services have with landscape quality and character, to the socio-economic impact of processes that take these products through the market place to the consumer - essentially the journey from field to fork.

To feed a growing population from a reducing bank of available land will require increasing technological innovation and a better understanding and more appropriate management of land.

In part this will be achievable by allowing market forces to encourage investment, innovation and good management; and enabling price mechanisms to signal where business activity and trade can raise productivity most efficiently. This, however, is not the complete answer. The sustainable production of food is dependent upon the sustainable management of land and the ecosystem services that underpin it. With ecosystems providing a suite of interdependent services that are public and private goods, and the failure of the market to adequately value public goods, the production of food must be the product of a balanced public bodies/private business approach.

AONB partnerships, through an interdisciplinary landscape approach, can help add value at many stages in the process of food production, from the provision of primary or secondary advice on appropriate crops and livestock, through marketing and adding value, to networking and the sharing of good practice.

6.13 Opportunities

- As experts in collaboration and cooperation, AONB teams are perfectly placed to encourage cooperative marketing and resource-sharing between farmers. Working on the foundations built by organisations such as Eblex, taking learning from our existing European Union partners and promulgating a low-cost / added value model, AONB teams could help farmers on the ground start to improve their competitiveness.
- Launch a modern day Dig for victory campaign promoting productive land use
- Refocus farm support to productive low carbon small scale horticulture and polyculture . labour intensive forest gardening, small holding, allotments and community agriculture which is more productive per hectare and more flexible and resilient in the face of shock or threat such as climate change
- Public procurement . lead by example . lowest cost should not drive food purchasing by public bodies including NHS and schools. Best value judgements should take account of the wider economic benefits of local food purchasing. At the very least it should be a requirement for contracts to source a significant proportion of meat and fresh food from local food providers.

Case study

The Lovefood Project

The project aims to support and promote the production, use and appreciation of locally grown or reared food in the North Pennine Dales area (from the Allendale area in the north to Barnard Castle in the south and from the Cumbrian border in the west towards the limits of the dales area in the east). It is a three year project which has been awarded £299,600 from the Big Lottery Fund Local Food scheme. The project, which started in February 2010, has also been awarded £50,000 from the North Pennines Leader programme and £39,000 from the Barnard Castle Vision. The project is being delivered by Teesdale Marketing Limited (the Accountable Body), the South Durham Enterprise Agency and the **North Pennines AONB Partnership**. These three organisations are the project's Formal Partners.

The project aims to benefit

- Local farmers and producers
- Eating establishments and those who work in this sector (cafes, pubs, restaurants)
- Retail outlets selling local produce
- Residents and visitors, young and old.

There are five project objectives with each being led by one of the Formal Partners

- To establish new routes to market for local producers
- To encourage environmental best practice in the production and processing of local food, including the take up of nationally accredited schemes
- To devise and implement an educational and promotional campaign to raise consumer awareness of the merits of local food supply
- To create a virtual food academy
- To develop food tourism in the North Pennine Dales area

Equipment has been bought to enable the project to be delivered including

- Mobile classroom - for cookery demonstrations, training sessions, display of local products,
- Mobile demonstration kitchen which can be used in the mobile classroom, in school/community halls, at farmers markets, events etc.
- Kitchen equipment to fit out a production kitchen to help local producers expand from "kitchen table" ventures to commercial unit production. Refrigeration equipment to allow perishable products to be sold by local producers on a collaborative basis from new outlets at popular tourist spots
- Market equipment to improve the operation and appearance of the area's farmers'/local produce markets.
- Audio-visual, display and presentation equipment
- Small items of cookery and gardening equipment
- Project activities include:

Outputs

- Food academy website created
- 30 cookery/gardening sessions held
- 30 farm visits/field to fork itineraries
- Promotion at 7 events
- 6 food trails developed
- 450 businesses advised
- 30 jobs created
- 37 jobs safeguarded
- 280 individuals trained

Case studies

Local Food Directories

Finding places to buy locally-produced food in the High Wycombe area is now much easier thanks to the production of a local food directory. The community group Transition Town High Wycombe researched the area within a 10 mile radius of the town centre and compiled a list of the farmers, growers, retailers and caterers who produce or source food locally. The result is a listing of over 100 sources of local produce, from farm shops and farmersmarkets to vineyards, local retailers, pubs and at the farm gate. Helped by a £1000 grant from the **Chilterns AONB** Sustainable Development Fund, Transition Town High Wycombe have produced a booklet called *Food on Our Doorstep* containing full details of all these sources. They have also established a website www.food-on-our-doorstep.org.uk for those who want to access the information online.

An online local food directory has also been published in the Forest of Bowland with support from the **Forest of Bowland AONB Partnership**

Local Farmer Exemplars and Farm Shops

The small village of Combe Martin suffers from marginal bathing water quality and is likely in future years to fail new Bathing water standards resulting in a direct and adverse impact on small rural tourism businesses. A partnership project aimed to ensure that local farmers were exemplars in preventing run-off and sources of diffuse pollution into the local river and was funded by the **North Devon AONB** Sustainable Development Fund.

The project operated across the whole catchment delivering practical advice, training and support such as stock fencing and hedge-laying to prevent animals directly accessing water courses. In total 24 farm visits were made and 28 landowners attended training events. The project is being further developed by the Environment Agency in the current year.

The **North Devon AONB** Sustainable Development Fund also supported a project to install a butchery and improve a local farm shop at Indicknowle enabling the business to prepare locally reared pork, lamb and beef for sale alongside its home-made cider, apple juice and vegetables. The shop is now a thriving local business.

Wild Game Pasties, Rare Breeds and Butchers

Lincolnshire Wolds AONB Sustainable Development Fund has supported a range of local food and retail businesses including a local wild game pasty manufacturer, a rare breeds pig project, a rare breeds livestock project (Tetford Longhorns) and local butchers project, a local cake making business and a community village shop.

6.14 Forestry, timber and wood-using businesses

Not all AONBs are wooded but those that are have typically high densities of woodland cover and a significant proportion of the ancient woodland resource. Management of woodland as a resource for industry, building and fuel serving local communities is a feature of almost all woodland in England and AONB communities support residual woodland craft industries that can nurture traditional and modern low carbon technologies.

6.15 Opportunities

- Public procurement - lead by example . move away from FSC certified timber, which is usually imported and focus on local first, FSC next for all publicly commissioned buildings and structures;
- An intelligent use of regulations . maintenance of regulations such as timber treatment and stress grading for structural timber and a relaxation of regulations for components such as cladding to allow local sawmills using local timber to compete;
- A reduction in business rates for low income wood using businesses which need a lot of floor space
- A business incentive scheme to encourage European businesses that manufacture high performance environmental building components such as windows and doors to locate manufacturing capability in Britain and use local timber
- Research and development funding for new products and new technologies in wood
- Streamlining the RDPE so that grants for farmland and grants for woodland are not separately administered, separately delivered and do not inform each other. Land management businesses and their advisers would benefit greatly in reducing the red tape associated with these schemes and the tax payer would receive greater benefits from the environmental enhancements if the grants were in one coordinated scheme.

Case study

Carbon Accounts

The High Weald AONB has produced a carbon account for its woodlands - The estimate of potential annual sustainable production of timber in the High Weald AONB is 214,200 m³/ annum of which no more than 15% is currently utilised. If current production was increased to 50% of the potential sustainable level of production significant numbers of new jobs and businesses could be created and an additional 96, 290 tonnes of CO₂ emissions mitigated per annum.

7.0 Summary

7.1 How can AONBs contribute to growth?

- **By continuing to add value**

The AONB designation has helped to conserve and enhance some of England's finest landscapes. These landscapes are highly valued by wealth creating businesses as economic assets in their own right and as valuable settings which add value to business.

- **By providing a wealth of natural assets**

Well managed landscapes offer a wealth of natural assets that serve as the foundations of rural business, including agricultural land and woodland. Many of these, however, are currently underutilised. A programme of well-focused business support for low income land based businesses harvesting and utilising raw materials from the landscape including access to research and development funding; shared and low cost workspace; opportunities to forge business to business networks will help support innovation and growth in products and services which, whilst currently limited, has the potential to grow significantly and support many high value micro-businesses.

- **By remaining big business for tourism**

High quality landscapes offer a wealth of opportunities for tourism related businesses

- **By accommodating sensitive growth**

AONBs have a varying capacity for new built development dependant on their character. Understanding landscape character and capacity for change can help guide the location and design of growth related development so that it contributes positively to character.

7.2 How can AONB partnerships contribute to growth?

- **By continuing to support rural businesses**

AONB partnerships provide an established and tested mechanism to support rural businesses through small grant schemes. Start-up and development funding for small and micro rural businesses could be channelled through established AONB Sustainable Development Funds and opened up to businesses in the wider countryside around the AONB to achieve national coverage

- **By building on our successful track record**

AONB partnerships have a successful track record of providing specialist land owner advisory services and business support such as assistance with LEADER applications and planning. AONB Partnerships would welcome financial support for new rural business advisors which could be delivered in collaboration with local authorities and others.

- **By working in partnership**

AONB partnerships are experts in collaboration and co-operation across disciplines, geographic areas and between different audiences. Encouraging economic development partnerships to work with landscape specialists through challenge funds and initiatives such as green business parks may facilitate new solutions to growth in AONBs.

- **By providing specialist guidance**

AONB partnerships already produce locally tailored AONB Management Plans to guide actions which affect the landscape together with supporting information for landowners and communities. AONBs would welcome being charged with producing guidance to assist businesses in harnessing the opportunities provided by our unique landscapes.

- **By providing specialist services**

AONB partnerships would like to make better available the expertise within AONB partnerships to advise local businesses and the planning authorities on the kind of development that is appropriate and sustainable within a particular AONB.

7.3 What assistance do rural businesses need to harness growth opportunities provided by our AONBs?

- **Better guidance on sustainability**

A clear and consistent framework and criteria to assess business contribution to landscape character and natural beauty through a higher profile for AONB Management Plans and a workable framework for sustainable development which includes consideration of place;

- **Affordable places to live and work**

Affordable housing and workspace suitable for rural workers

- **Better business support**

A package of business support for primary producers and processors including reliable information on landscape resources; support for skills training in traditional and modern low carbon technologies and support for product research and development.

- **Favourable EU support**

A favourable CAP regime that supports sustainable farm businesses, provides adequate funding for agri-environment schemes, and has an element of farm business support/diversification funding.

ENDS