



PRESS RELEASE 18/05/09

Launch of North Devon's AONB's Management Strategy and Action Plan 2009-14

Celebrating its' 50th anniversary this year with an impressive list of successes, the North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have just launched their next ambitious five year Management Strategy Plan.

Despite the North Devon Coast being recognised as a national treasure for nearly 50 years it is only in the last five years that there has been a staff team and Partnership looking after the area and their achievements have been as outstanding as the landscape they care for.

Highlights over the last few years have included a comprehensive community profile of the area's wildlife, landscape and other distinctive features; the launch of the interactive Explore Braunton project, Discovery Days, Library Nature Courses, Poetry and Photograph competitions inspired by our stunning local landscape and a distribution of £280,000 amongst over 70 local projects supporting initiatives such as beach cleaning, local food and produce, art, tourism, health and environmental events from the Sustainable Development Fund. Plus the team have raised a similar amount from European Funds, the National Lottery and other sources, culminating in raising half a million pounds to the coastal community and economy over the last five years.

Additionally the introduction of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF*) has been a huge boost to supporting a fantastic range of individuals, communities and conservation organisations with funds for local projects. Projects encouraging raising awareness of the special qualities and issues of our coastal areas amongst local children and communities remain key objectives of the AONB. Inspiring examples of this include, the interactive 'Explore Braunton' schools' project, 'Pasture to Plate' and the Northam Youth Group Potwallopers and Ponies project which explored the heritage coastline of Bideford Bay, particularly Northam Burrows through visits and film.

Other grant awards have included funding the start up a local farm butchers' shop near Combe Martin, a Foresters Market at the Big Sheep, training and equipping volunteers to tackle Japanese knotweed, supporting local sustainable energy initiatives, planting schemes, developing a series of walking trails and supporting educational, art, environmental and health related projects.

*** The Sustainable Development Fund is awarded to the North Devon Coast AONB Partnership by Natural England from Government sources to grant aid local community projects.**

The team also have the on-going responsibilities of routine monitoring, raising awareness and providing advice etc to ensure as many people as possible help to care for the Coast. They have used some innovative ways to do this, eg. 'Discovery' and 'Fun' days which over 7,000 people have supported held at Clovelly, Watermouth Castle and the Milky Way. Thanks to the help of the venue owners the local community were invited to enjoy the venue free of charge and also take part in a wide range of learning activities.

The Community Profiling project not only provided an invaluable record of the area's natural environment but also inspired fantastic local community support and dedication to achieve it with over 80 volunteers taking part over a two and a half year period.

The outstanding community endeavour trained volunteers to record features such as the iconic Devon hedgerows, to help ensure that future restoration, steeping as it is known locally and protecting the history and wildlife of the Coastal area as well as providing stock proof barriers. The Volunteer team also helped to identify and map archaeological and county wildlife sites. Indigenous wildlife including butterflies, dolphins, porpoises and bird populations were also surveyed to further their preservation in North Devon.

This survey is an ongoing AONB initiative, undertaking training local people to continue the research, providing vital information for future landscape management.

Richard Butler, North Devon AONB Chairman comments that, "The continuing high level of community support and our holistic management approach has been essential for achieving the environmental conservation and local sustainable development success we have enjoyed. The past five years have been a very successful period for our AONB"

The North Devon's AONB objectives for the next five years, laid out in their Management Strategy Plan 2009-14 include continued community research, local landscape management training, environmental stewardship and support for North Devon's Biosphere Reserve, local producers and farmers, carbon reduction, sustainable tourism, developing the environmental economy and specialist advice for County Wildlife sites.

Most importantly, increasing local community involvement, enthusiasm, pride and increasing the volunteer base for our stunning coastal environment benefit our 50th anniversary celebrations this autumn.

On this note, Richard Butler adds, "Just as the last five years have been a great success, the new Management Plan looks forward to even greater achievements in the next five years. We are confident this will be the case as we have such good on-going community support for this outstandingly special area."

North Devon's AONB stretches from the Marsland Mouth near Welcombe on the Cornish border to Combe Martin and the boundary with Exmoor National Park.

The AONB designation has the same recognition as National Parks; with North Devon's AONB is one of the oldest in the UK with Braunton Burrows dune system being one of the core areas attributing to North Devon's UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status.

North Devon's AONB has about 80% of its' land in agricultural use. This is jam packed with environmental designation and hosting the core of the only Biosphere Reserve in the UK. It also boasts 29 nationally important archaeological sites such as ancient hillforts and burial mounds, 409 nationally important buildings, a further 3,000 historic sites, 2 internationally protected conservation areas, 16 nationally important conservation sites, 12 regional geological sites and more than 50 county Wildlife sites. Additionally there are at least 10 animal and plant species of national or European importance, 7 nationally important habitats, 92 kms of SW Coastal path and 284 public rights of way. The majority of these sites are in private or National Trust ownership and it is a massive task to make sure the stunning landscape remains that way for future generations.

Linda Blanchard AONB manager said, "Caring for the landscape is done primarily by farmers and landowners. Our job is to help support them in their efforts and make sure that landscape is valued by all."

North Devon's AONB and Biosphere Reserve status is undoubtedly a strong draw for the 2.5m visitors each year to the region, bringing upwards of £80m to North Devon's local economy.

Notes for Editors

1. The North Devon Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a stunning coastal area which is nationally protected for the beauty of its landscape. It is made up of several distinct landscapes, each with their own special habitats and geology with many of them receiving extra protection in their own right. The AONB contains many Sites of Special Scientific Interest including Braunton Burrows, which is the core of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

<http://www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/>

2. The North Devon AONB Partnership - The work of the AONB staff Unit is guided by the AONB Partnership, which includes representatives from: Natural England, Devon County Council, Torridge District Council, North Devon Council, Environment Agency, National Farmers Union, Tarka Country Trust, North Devon Biosphere Foundation, Country Landowners and Business Association, National Trust, Taw Torridge Estuary Forum, Forestry Commission, South West Forest, North Devon Plus and North Devon Biosphere Reserve Partnership

Contacts:

Linda Blanchard, AONB Manager 01237 423655 / Linda.blanchard@devon.gov.uk

Richard Butler, AONB Partnership Chairman 01272 861622 / richard@crawfordton.net

For more information about the North Devon AONB visit:

www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk and www.northdevoncoast.org.uk