

# North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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## 2017 Review



**NORTH DEVON  
COAST**  
Areas of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty

# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome to the AONB's Review of the Year for 2017. We hope that you find the contents inspiring and useful in understanding some of the behind-the-scenes work and context for our important and stunningly beautiful part of the Devon coast.

With a hard-working and energetic team, a great deal has been achieved and even more facilitated during this last year. We would like to say a big thank you and good luck to Gigha Klinkenborg who has left the AONB after nine years as our administrator. It would be impossible to commend all that has happened here but several projects stand out. The successes of the Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project and our Coastal Creatures initiative have really inspired many people to be engaged with our communal work.

Supporting the AONB team is a vibrant Partnership and, in particular, we should thank the two District Councils and the County Council for their support and funding; theirs is an essential contribution to match Defra funds that enables a huge amount to be done, much of which you will read about here.

As we go into the challenges of a new year, it is pleasing to note the Government's strong and public national support of AONBs through their 2018 document, 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment'. This gives us a very positive platform on which to build.



Steve Mulberry  
North Devon Coast AONB Partnership Chairman

## Facts & Figures

Our AONB was designated in 1959 and is one of 40 AONBs in England and Wales. It covers an area of 171km<sup>2</sup> (66m<sup>2</sup>) and the coastline itself is 81km long.

We have:

- 10 species of international importance
- Over 400 listed buildings
- 32 Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- 207 km of Public Rights of Way
- 9 beaches reaching the best water quality standard

# HIGHLIGHTS 2017

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We engaged with

**7,491**

people through  
events and  
activities



There were **12**  
bat walks/talks and  
**46** bat surveys  
completed



We commented on  
**87** planning  
applications



We completed **21**  
beach wildlife surveys  
with the help of

**140**  
volunteers



We gave out **13**  
small grants in  
2017/18, with a  
total value of

**£24,102**



We supported  
**28** beach cleans,  
involving

**1,300**  
volunteers



# THANK YOU TO PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

**Thank you to all the members of the AONB Partnership:** We rely on the commitment, enthusiasm, knowledge and hard work of all the Partnership members to deliver our core purpose of conserving and enhancing the AONB. Whether a community representative, a statutory agency or a local voluntary group, everyone contributes to implementing the actions in our Delivery Plan. We appreciate and celebrate their contribution.

**Thank you to Project Funders in 2017: Coastal Creatures** – Heritage Lottery Fund, Tesco Bags of Help, Torridge District Council and Coastwise ND; **Combe Martin Bioblitz** – North Devon Councillors; **Lee Bay Bioblitz** – Fullabrook CIC and Marine Biological Association.

## North Devon Coast AONB Partnership 2017/18

Alison Boyle (Community)  
Andrea Davis (Exmoor National Park)  
Barbara Fryer (Community)  
Brett Grosvenor (Environment Agency)  
Caroline Leaver (Voluntary Sector)  
Charlotte Russell (Historic England)  
Christine Goodall (Natural England)  
Cllr Linda Hellyer (Devon County Council)  
Cllr Pat Barker (North Devon+)  
Cllr Rodney Cann (North Devon Council)

Cllr Ken James and the late Cllr Alan Whittle (Torridge District Council)  
John Rous (Country Landowners & Business Association)  
Kate Tobin (Forestry Commission)  
Michael Winter (Biosphere Reserve)  
Paul Green (Community)  
Paula Ferris (Coastwise North Devon)  
Peter Burgess (Devon Wildlife Trust)  
Richard Butler (Community)

Richard Dyer (National Farmers Union)  
Richard Prowse (Tarka Country Trust)  
Rob Joules (National Trust)  
Rose Day (Community)  
Steve Mulberry (Chairman, Community)  
Steve Pitcher (Vice-Chairman, Community)  
Terry Green (Community)  
Tony Pratt (Taw Torridge Estuary Forum)  
Trevor Stanbury (North Devon Marketing Bureau)

# PLANNING ACTIVITY

There was a significant increase in 2017 in planning work for the AONB Partnership, reflecting the development pressure on the coast and the take-up of pre-application advice. The approach taken by the Partnership is to balance sustainable development with landscape and heritage priorities, working closely with the three local planning authorities. A measure of success is the high number of final decisions matching our recommendation, when we commented on applications and appeals.

- A total of 87 planning responses were given by the Partnership in 2017
- Two-thirds of the planning responses given were in North Devon and one-third were in Torridge
- One-fifth of planning responses were for pre-application advice
- 97% of final decisions matched the recommendations of the Partnership

Thank you to our Planning Panel members and contractors for their help and expertise.

## Successes

**Croyde** – 8 houses refused due to landscape impact and being outside the development boundary

**Saunton** – Extension to Saunton Sands Hotel; conditions applied that external materials match those of the Art Deco building

**Welcombe** – single dwelling outside settlement and visible from coast path refused; dismissed at Appeal

**Combe Martin** – temporary agricultural dwelling and barns refused due to impact on medieval strip field system and landscape

**Hartland** – caravan and barn refused due to impact on AONB landscape and historic terraces

**Abbotsham** – 28 new houses refused due to impact on AONB setting

**Bucks Cross** – Demolition of Brackenside House to build 22 lodges refused, building now Grade II listed and application withdrawn

**Morteheo** – redevelopment of redundant building for volunteer accommodation, working with National Trust and planners

**Saunton** – signage at Saunton Sands car park: helped applicant rationalise signage clutter; planning condition to remove redundant signs



## RAISING AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

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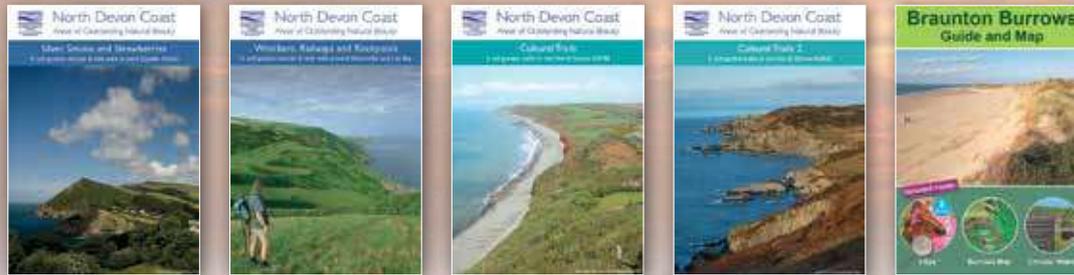
**Events:** With ambitions to engage a wider audience, we took our AONB display and activity stands to two new events in 2017 – Hartland Parish Open Day in May and the North Devon Diversity Festival in Barnstaple in July. Both events were very successful for us and have led to new contacts and project developments.

**Working Regionally and Nationally:** At the **Landscapes for Life (NAAONB) 2017** conference, we were shortlisted for the Bowland Award, with Cat Oliver showcasing the achievements of our Coastal Creatures project in its first year to a national audience. We continue to work closely with the other four **Devon AONBs** and participate in the **South West Protected Landscapes Forum**, sharing experiences and information, as well as joint work on a range of activities. We have contributed to a number of initiatives from the **Devon Local Nature Partnership**, ranging from promoting Naturally Healthy May activities, contributing to a Natural Capital report for the Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership's 'Productivity Plan' and engaging with their Naturally Healthy Working Group.

**Social Media** continues to play a key role in our communications. We have engaged the local marine, schools and scientific communities through our #WhatsThatWednesday posts, and have worked with other AONBs and national partners through the #OutstandingHour posts from 1-2pm on Wednesdays.

**Engaging Children and Young People:** The two wildlife projects on coastal species and bats have provided us with fantastic opportunities to engage with local schools and colleges. These have ranged from fun activities on the beach, to scientific surveys, guided walks and formal scientific training. Both projects will leave a legacy through new knowledge and skills among teaching staff and local volunteers, so that this work can be continued.

# STEP OUT AND ENJOY THE AONB: NEW WALKS LEAFLETS



Five new walks leaflets covering the AONB are now available from us and local TICs. Two are Heritage Walks – ‘Silver, Smoke and Strawberries’ (Combe Martin) and ‘Wreckers, Railways and Rockpools’ (Ilfracombe and Lee Bay). ‘Cultural Trails’ has 4 walks in Torridge and ‘Cultural Trails 2’ contains 3 walks in North Devon. ‘Braunton Burrows Guide and Map’ is a project supported by the AONB’s small grants scheme.

Braunton Burrows (by Andrew Wheatley)

## PROJECT UPDATES



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

### **Coastal Creatures – Work Placement**

This project has provided eight work placement opportunities for local students. Myles Howard from Woolacombe, studying Environmental Sciences at Bournemouth University, spent seven weeks in the summer with AONB Officer Cat Oliver. He said:

“The AONB has provided me with a more detailed knowledge of the coast and the many organisms which live on and around it. Thanks to the project equipment, I was able to record and look at GIS data, something I will be studying next year. I had amazing experiences, ranging from the boat trip along the whole coast to carry out a

national seabird survey with officers from the National Trust, RSPB and Natural England, to attending the SW Protected Landscapes Forum, which gave me a regional perspective with expert speakers.

“The opportunity to work with groups of all ages has helped develop my teaching skills through beach cleans, strandline surveys, rockpooling and mud-dipping. I also wrote the #WhatsThatWednesday social media posts, which required detailed research on a different coastal species each week. I want to say thank you to the whole AONB team and their partner organisations.”

## Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project

2017 saw a wide range of surveys to understand more about the location and movements of bats in summer and winter. The Braunton area continues to be the main focus due to the nearby maternal roost. Devon Wildlife Trust is working closely with local farmers to improve habitats and food sources for bats, through help with countryside stewardship applications.

Local volunteers have borrowed survey equipment to monitor areas across the whole of North Devon and Torridge providing data about all bat species. 2018 will focus on developing Braunton as a 'bat-friendly community' and starting more work in the Combe Martin area. The AONB worked with the local community to deliver the Bat Viewing Area on West Hill and the Bat Audio Trails around Braunton.

## Health and Wellbeing

As a nationally protected landscape, the AONB is for everyone and has an important role to play in contributing to the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors. Research has demonstrated that contact with nature, particularly in coastal locations and doing worthwhile activities, can provide some of the greatest benefits for physical and mental health. So what is the AONB doing?

Through our Coastal Creatures project we are offering training, volunteering and activities on our beaches for all ages and interests. These range from wildlife surveys and beach cleans to creative and sporting activities.

We commissioned local research on 'Naturally Healthy Activities' in the AONB to understand more about the opportunities and barriers. This showed that access to the coast and countryside is not easy, with barriers including transport, challenging terrain, cost and confidence. We will be taking forward the report's recommendations in 2018.

We are promoting our Sustainable Development Fund's small grants to help local groups to try new activities in the AONB.

## Understanding Coastal Change

The AONB Projects Officer, Dave Edgcombe, delivered ten talks on the theme of Coastal Change during 2017 to a wide range of audiences across North Devon and Torridge. The aim was to increase understanding of the coastal landscape and the impacts of development, land use and climate change on its natural beauty.

# SDF SMALL GRANTS

The Sustainable Development Fund provides small grants for community, agency or business projects that contribute to the AONB socially, economically or environmentally. In 2017/18 we offered grants to 13 projects. Here are 10 examples:



TorrAGE visit to Northam Burrows

**Amble and Art** walking project, with TorrAGE Ageing Well Group (*above*), focussed on Northam Burrows Country Park and Westward Ho!

**Brownsham Car Park** expansion to accommodate small coaches; disabled parking added to increase access

**Nesting Boxes for Choughs** installed on Hartland and Baggy Point cliffs

New **Braunton Burrows Leaflet** with information, walks and a spotter guide

Black and white **Wooden Signposts Restoration** on the Hartland peninsula

**Clovelly Dykes Hillfort** geophysical survey of the non-scheduled section

**2 Minute Beach Clean** boards and equipment for Wildersmouth and Ilfracombe Harbour beaches

Installation of two **Electric Vehicle Charging Points** at Baggy Point car park

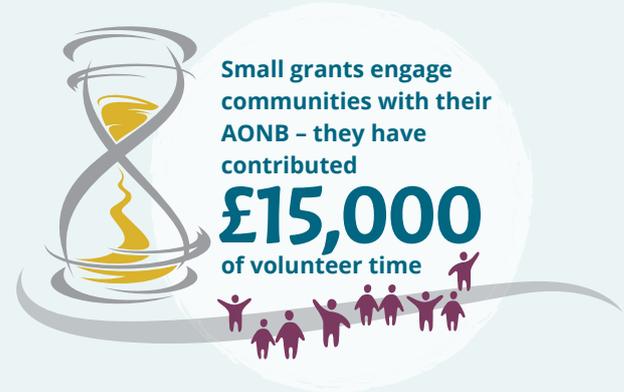
Installation of **Berrynarbor Village Signs** on the three road entrances

Equipment and fixtures for **Woolacombe School Community Room**



Chough by Andy Hay (rsrb-images.com)

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND GRANTS IN 2017/18



\*SDF grants are 100% funded by Defra to help deliver actions in the North Devon Coast AONB Management Plan

## PERSONAL STORIES: A FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE



We always spend a lot of our time in, next to, on top of and by the sea in North Devon, and our absolute favourite person to do any activities with last year was Cat Oliver as she always made everything SO much fun.

Our first activity was extreme beach cleaning at Hartland Quay. We wore hard hats and harnesses to abseil down to the inaccessible beach and collect as much litter as we could. It was far easier going down than climbing back up!

We collected bags and bags of marine litter – the more you looked the more you found – and afterwards we all went to the pub for hot chocolate. Awesome!!

Another time, at a Coastal Creatures event, we made sand sculptures of real marine creatures – no mermaids allowed. We made a pipefish, which involved lots of discussions about where exactly to place its fins and explaining what exactly a pipefish is – a straightened-out seahorse.

At a 'rockpool detective' quiz at Westwood Ho!, you had to work out which creature was being referred to, then find and photograph that animal – we got absolutely soaked looking for shore crabs and turning over rocks for elusive chitons.

We went to a workshop about how to take photos of marine creatures led by Maya Plass. We loved pressing seaweed and have now framed some, so you can see the exquisite wonders in their full beauty!

On the bat walk at the Lee Bay BioBlitz they had a sensor which, when it heard the bats using echo location, identified what bat it was!!!!!! We'd never seen or heard any bats before and suddenly we heard nearly every native bat there is and saw quite a few as well – there was an amazing long-eared bat in a garage that flew right over our heads and its ears really were ENORMOUS; it looked a bit rabbit-like.

*All-in-all a wonderful year by the sea – thank you Cat!*

## PERSONAL STORIES: FARMING IN THE AONB

For the thousands of visitors to the AONB over the summer months, the romantic ruggedness of the National Trust's Morte Point peninsula provides memories that last long after returning from holiday. But for farmers, the spectacular beauty of this coastline is part of a living and working countryside. I've been the tenant farmer here for over 20 years, and the place has never lost its magical appeal. It's a place that I love to be a part of and the hours spent checking on grazing sheep are a highlight of the week; as the farming saying goes, 'If you could live on the view you'd be rich!'

But farming an area like Morte Point can be a challenge; winter wind and rain are a strain on livestock, grazing is of poor quality, lambs grow slowly and ewes are slow to gain reserves to carry them through the winter. Gathering for shearing takes many hours over such a wide area, compared with a few minutes for animals in enclosed fields.

Regular checking of the flock is vital to protect them from the common blow-fly.

In summer, the daily rounds continue amongst the many walkers on the South West Coast Path. They often stop to chat and find out about the role of grazing to manage the unique landscape. But there can be down-sides to farming in such a public place. Every year I have several sheep killed, chased over the cliffs by dogs following their ancient instinct to hunt. It causes suffering to the sheep and financial and personal stress to us, but it's a problem that seems to be getting worse, so please keep your dogs on leads around livestock.

Farming has to face many challenges over the coming years, combining public access, caring for nature and producing food. But it's a hope of mine that I'll be grazing my sheep in this rather wonderful corner of the country for many years to come.

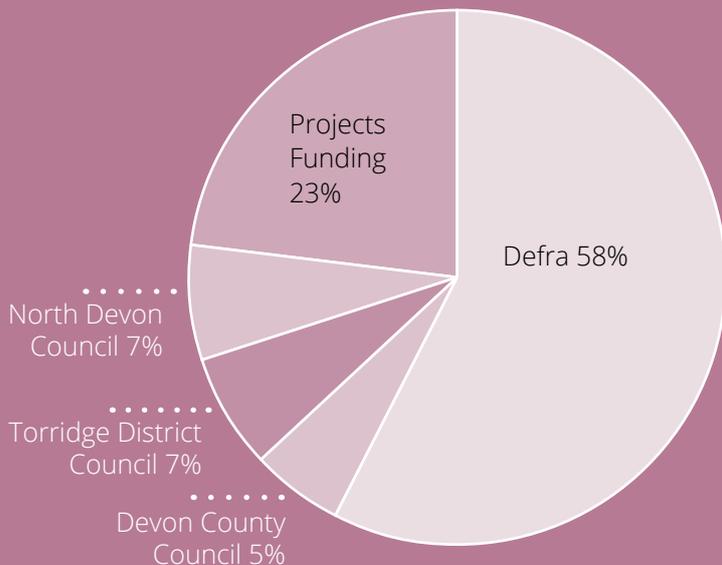
*David Kennard*



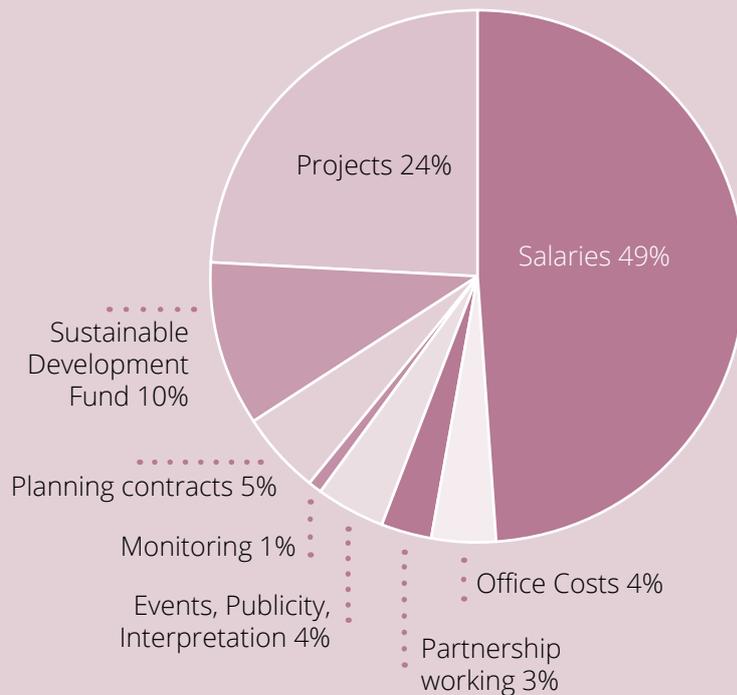
(Photo courtesy of David Kennard)

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2017/18 \*

Income – total £240,055



Expenditure – total £229,633



\* Indicative data as at January 2018 for income and expenditure

# LOOKING FORWARD

**'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment'**: This government policy paper published in January 2018 could have significant impacts on our AONB. These include a review of protected landscapes, both AONBs and National Parks, and changes to policies on managing land sustainably, connecting people with the environment, resource efficiency and securing clean seas. Part of the Plan involves testing new approaches and innovation to policy, funding and practice. Four areas have been selected to 'pioneer' a Natural Capital approach to environmental enhancement – the North Devon Biosphere Reserve area is both a **Landscape Pioneer** and **Marine Pioneer** (alongside Cumbria, Manchester and Suffolk). We are already involved in the discussions and development work led by Natural England and the Marine Management Organisation, because the AONB is at the core of the Biosphere area.

**Coastal Heritage – Hillforts and WW2 Sites**: AONB partners have been working together to address some of the 'historic environment' policies and actions in the AONB Management Plan relating to hillforts, WW2 sites and heritage on the Hartland peninsula. This has been brought together in a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund with match funding and delivery commitments from North Devon Archaeological Society, Devon County Historic Environment team, the National Trust, North Devon Museum, Hartland Parish Council and North Devon+. Work is planned from spring 2018 depending on funding bids.

**Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat project**: The Devon Wildlife Trust team will be focussing on the Combe Martin area to engage the community in understanding and finding out more about their bat populations following the local survey work.

**Management Plan Review and Consultations**: The five-yearly review of the AONB Management Plan will be taking place in 2018/19. This important process is to ensure that the Plan's objectives and policies are fit for purpose to accommodate new challenges and opportunities for the designated AONB area and its communities. All views are welcome, please subscribe to our e-news to keep informed. Contact us: [aonb@devon.gov.uk](mailto:aonb@devon.gov.uk)



North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty  
Taw View, North Walk, Barnstaple, North Devon EX31 1EE

T: 01271 388758 ● E: [aonb@devon.gov.uk](mailto:aonb@devon.gov.uk) ● W: [www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk](http://www.northdevon-aonb.org.uk)

Twitter: [@explorethecoast](https://twitter.com/explorethecoast) ● Facebook: North Devon Coast AONB



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Design & sub-editing by Naomi Cudmore ([www.lighthousecommunications.co.uk](http://www.lighthousecommunications.co.uk)) ● Infographics by Natasha Acres ([wowcreative.co.uk](http://wowcreative.co.uk))

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