

Environment Report July 2021

Cllr Roger Dollins

A major new fund to help farmers and land managers in the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) has been announced [24th June], called Farming in Protected Landscapes.

Through the programme, farmers and land managers can be supported to carry out projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and cultural heritage, or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. This is a programme of funding for one-off projects covering these areas of work, not an agri-environment scheme.

To help do this, Defra is introducing the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, which will run from July 2021 to March 2024. The programme will be open for applications from July 2021.

The fund will be available to help farmers in all our 'Protected Landscapes' - National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These unique and special places are living, working landscapes that also support a huge range of habitats and species, and they are enjoyed by millions of people every year. By supporting the farmers, land managers and people who live and work in these areas, we can help protect these exceptional places and support local communities.

In the Mendip Hills AONB, the AONB Unit will be awarding £450,000 between now and the end of March 2024.

Andy Wear, Vice-chair of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership and a local farmer said, 'This is a game-changing amount of money for the Mendip Hills AONB and has come along at just the right time. Farmers have shaped the way the hills look for generations and this funding will help them to alter their practices to let nature recover, adapt for climate change, improve access and adjust to the new farm payments system post-Brexit. By supporting the farmers, land managers and people who live and work in these areas, we can help protect these exceptional places and support local communities.'

The programme is part of Defra's Agricultural Transition Plan. It has been developed by Defra with the support of a group of AONB and National Park staff from across the country. The Mendip Hills AONB Unit will be appointing a Farm Engagement Officer to help farmers apply and a Local Assessment Panel to ensure awards are independently decided. For more information visit <https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>

Get close to our coast for National Marine Week



We're super excited to **explore the shore this National Marine Week**. Running for two weeks (24th July to 8th August) to account for variations in tide times across the country, it's a **celebration of all things marine!**

You can get involved by **connecting with the coastline this month**. Why not join us for one of our fantastic National Marine Week events along Somerset's coast, from **marine mammal surveys** and seashore intertidal surveys, to **walks and talks by experts** about honeycomb reef worms and the geology of Somerset's shores?!

We are delighted that **work is progressing at [Westhay Moor NNR](#)** to improve water management and habitats. Perhaps you've noticed this when you have visited recently?

We've now completed the hydrological piling along the edge of land we were able to buy to enlarge Westhay thanks to your generous support for our Westhay Appeal in 2019. The current work is being funded by a **£55,138 Biffa Biodiversity Award** which we received back in February 2021, just ahead of the first lockdown.

We are installing a steel piling dam alongside the wet woodland that borders the mire to **block old drainage ditches** installed decades ago to drain the area for peat extraction. Now we want to make it wetter again and this dam will hold water in the woodland so there is **less fluctuation in water levels onsite** and also increase standing water. This project is already having a really positive effect, **improving wetland habitat** and restoring an area of old peat workings at Westhay.

The Get Outside in Somerset campaign launched this week and is calling on the Somerset community to **get outdoors and move in more ways that suit them**.

There are so many ways you can take advantage of the **benefits of nature**, from spending time with family and having fun with friends, to enjoying the fresh air, scenery and embracing the weather. Find the time to venture outside and you will reap the **health benefits of the outdoors, alleviate stress and aid relaxation**.

Follow the campaign on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) to learn more and get involved.

Get Outside in Somerset this



Join our Somerset Nature Connections partnership project for **free nature and wellbeing courses with the Mendip Hills, Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills AONBs**.

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the partnership project is running free 6-week courses suitable for you if you are **feeling socially isolated and/or are experiencing mild to moderate depression, low mood, anxiety or stress**. The sessions will explore the 5 Pathways to Nature Connectedness; these are: contact, beauty, emotion, compassion and meaning.



Courses start in on 21st July in Mendip area and 22nd July in Blackdowns area. Email snc@somersetwildlife.org to book your spot.