



DEDHAM VALE

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
& STOUR VALLEY

Coast & Heaths



Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Volunteer Handbook

This handbook provides you with an introduction to the **Coast & Heaths (CH) and Dedham Vale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) & Stour Valley (DVSV)** and our Volunteer Scheme. We have tried to make it as complete as possible but if you have any other questions please do not hesitate to contact any member of the team. Both AONBs form a joint team so you can choose to volunteer for one or both areas.

Who we are?

AONB's are part of a network of high-quality landscapes that receive special protection from the UK Government and are protected by law. There are 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and, together with our National Parks; they include much of our finest countryside.

The Coast & Heaths AONB was designated in March 1970. The designated area covers 403 square kilometres from the Stour estuary in the south, to the eastern fringe of Ipswich, and to Kessingland in the north.

The Coast & Heaths AONB team was set up in the early 1990's to champion the AONB and provide a lead for the conservation of the protected landscape. It is funded by Defra, Suffolk and Essex County Councils, and East Suffolk, Waveney, Babergh and Tendring District Councils.

The Dedham Vale AONB was designated in 1970 is 90 square kilometres and the Project area is 302 square kilometres. The DVSV area runs from Great Bradley near the Cambridgeshire border eastwards to the Stour Estuary on the Suffolk/Essex border.

The DVSV is funded by Defra, Suffolk and Essex County Councils, Babergh District Council, Braintree District Council, Colchester Borough Council, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, and Tendring District Council.

These AONB teams are hosted by Suffolk County Council and based in Ipswich.

Map of the UK's protected landscapes

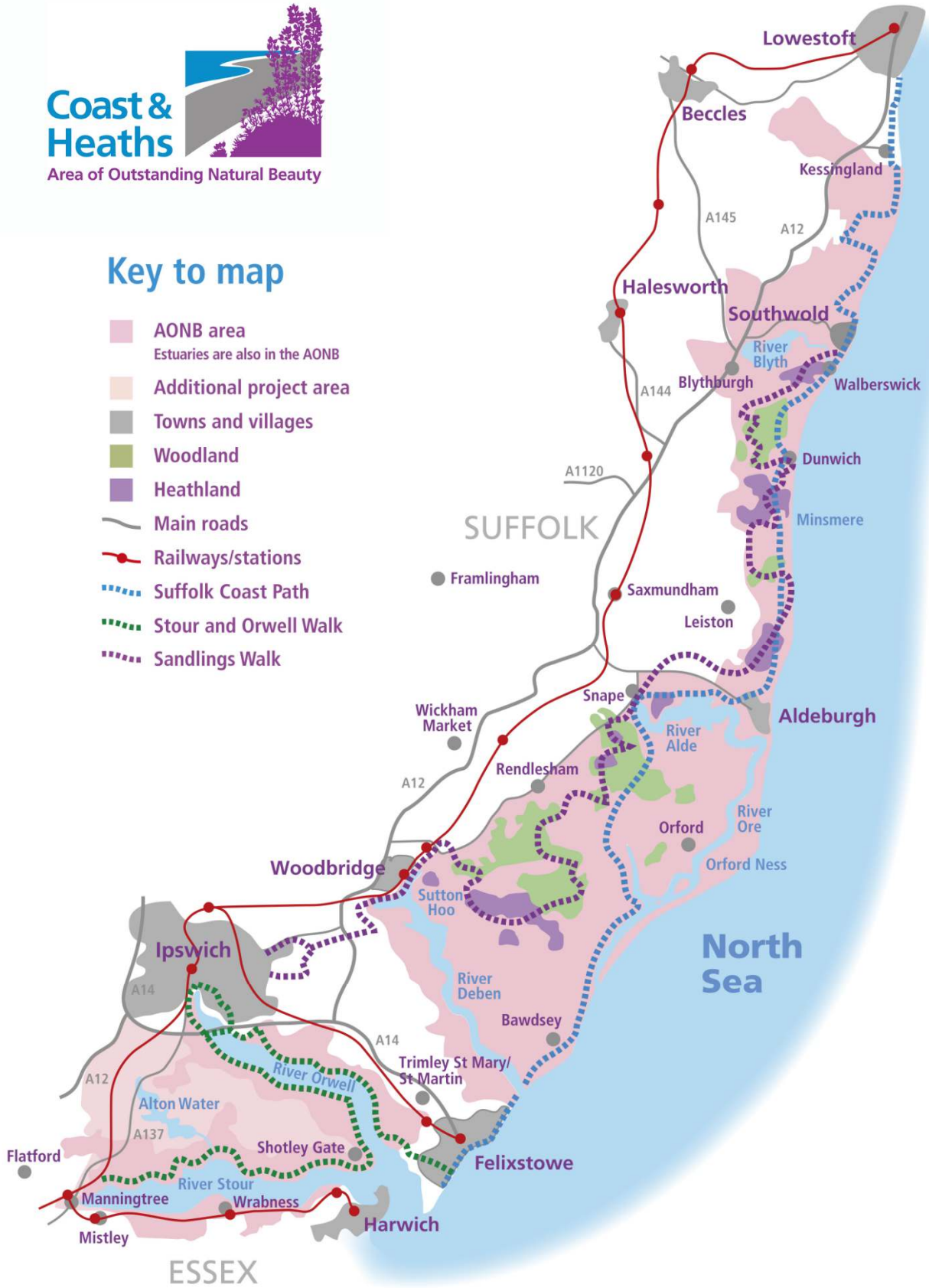


Map of the Coast & Heaths AONB

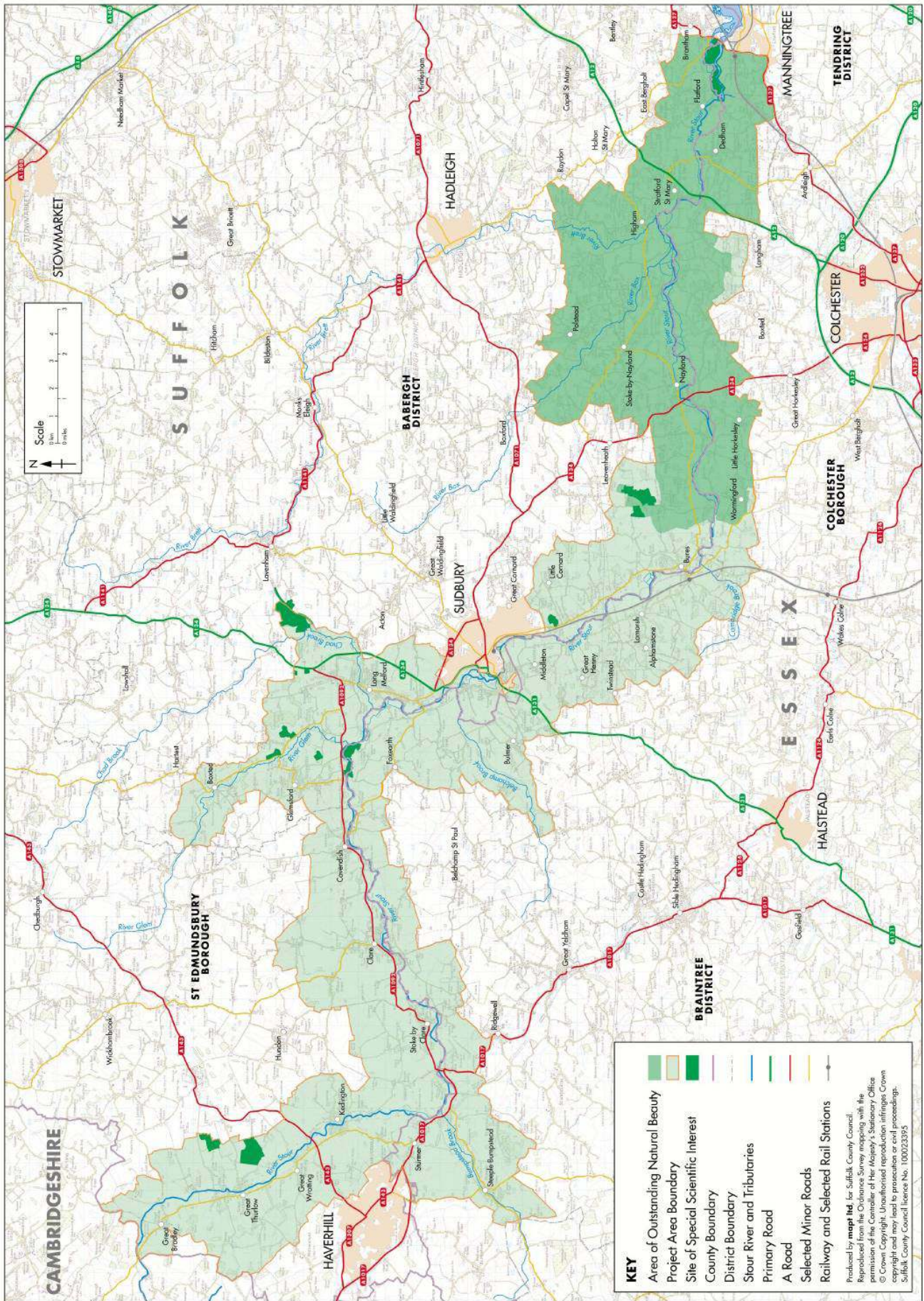


Key to map

- AONB area
Estuaries are also in the AONB
- Additional project area
- Towns and villages
- Woodland
- Heathland
- Main roads
- Railways/stations
- Suffolk Coast Path
- Stour and Orwell Walk
- Sandlings Walk



Map of the Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley



A Partnership of 26 organisations cares for the CH AONB and a partnership of 15 organisations cares for the DVSV working to deliver statutory management plans that it is committed to implement. The AONB Partnerships includes local authorities, government agencies, and national and local voluntary organisations, all of whom support the conservation of this unique landscape. The CH and DVSV team co-ordinate the work of the Partnerships and actively promote the conservation of the AONBs by:

- Acting as an advocate by commenting on and influencing the important plans, strategies and development proposals likely to affect the AONBs and Stour Valley.
- Supporting the work of both Partnerships to implement the Management Plan.
- Developing strategic approaches to the issues identified in the Management Plans.
- Stimulating, enabling and co-ordinating the activities of others to add value and minimise conflict.
- Where best placed to do so, taking the lead and demonstrating best practice in key projects which fulfil the Management Plans.
- Monitoring changes in key qualities so that the AONB Partnerships can be alerted to the consequences of those changes.
- Raising awareness of the area's importance and value and providing a focus for all organisations and individuals with an interest in the area.
- Enabling community involvement that helps implement the Management Plans objectives.
- Undertaking direct action to meet strategic objectives when others are unable to act.

Why have we set up a volunteering scheme?

The scheme has been established to involve and engage local people in the care and interpretation of the AONBs and the Stour Valley. We want to:

- Invest in the community by creating a skilled team of volunteers, through formal and informal training and support.
- Invest in the individual by developing skills that can be applied to voluntary and paid situations.
- Provide an additional resource to help with the care of the AONBs and Stour Valley, especially with:
 - wildlife and landscape management
 - interpretation/education about the AONBs and Stour Valley.
 - management of access opportunities
 - information exchange between Partners and communities
 - research and data collection.

- Provide a focal point for voluntary activity that supports the countryside and/or rural communities within the AONBs and Stour Valley.
- Assist in the recruitment of voluntary help for specific Partners' needs.
- Strengthen the engagement of all parts of the community in the care of the AONB.

When you become a volunteer, you can expect:

- Training for, and a clear understanding of, any task we ask you to do as a volunteer.
- An introduction to your role, the standards we expect and the support you will receive.
- The support of a team member who will be responsible for you as a volunteer. This is the person to speak to if you are unclear about anything to do with the AONBs or the work you are asked to do.
- To be valued and treated fairly.
- To be safe and secure while volunteering.
- To meet people and have an enjoyable experience.
- To be provided with insurance cover for any task in which you may be involved.

The AONB team will expect you, as a volunteer, to:

- Act responsibly and safely as an ambassador for the AONB.
- Inform the team member who is responsible for you as soon as possible if you are not able to attend as agreed or complete a task assigned to you.
- Give us feedback on working with the team, within the AONB and with our Partners.
- Respect the confidentiality of information as appropriate.
- Abide by our policies and risk assessments and those of our Partner organisations.

Your role as an ambassador for the AONB and Stour Valley

As a volunteer you are an ambassador for the AONBs and Stour Valley. We ask all our volunteers to act responsibly and to abide by the policies we promote. This includes being courteous to visitors, team members and to other volunteers, being helpful in answering questions, and referring questions you are unable to answer to an AONB member of staff. Formal enquiries should always be referred to the AONB Office, Saxon House, Hadleigh Road Industrial Estate, Ipswich, IP2 0UH. Telephone 01394 445225.

Registration, training, induction, and support

When you enroll as a volunteer, you will complete and sign a Registration Form, to record your personal details and contact information (including your emergency contacts). Please be

assured that we will keep this information confidential in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

The AONB should be kept up to date with all changes to personal details and any medical conditions etc. that will affect your volunteering duties.

Each volunteer will have an induction to the volunteer role and relevant on-the-job training and guidance from a member of staff or an experienced volunteer. Additional training such as first aid and manual handling may also be given.

I accept that I will no longer be registered as an AONB Volunteer if I have not actively volunteered and/or submitted any volunteer reports within a 6-month period.

Team member

Every task undertaken by volunteers is the responsibility of an individual team member, or an experienced volunteer. This person will:

- Organise the induction of new volunteers.
- Plan and supervise the work undertaken by volunteers.
- Ensure volunteers are clear about the expectations of the AONB, and any relevant policies and procedures.
- Seek and receive feedback from volunteers.

Feedback

Feedback is a vital part of our volunteer scheme. We want to find out what's good about being one of our volunteers and where we could make improvements. Please give the team member responsible for your task any comments you may have about volunteering with us. Your confidentiality will always be respected. If it is not possible to discuss an issue with the team member responsible for you, or if you are not satisfied with an outcome, then the matter can be raised with the AONB Manager.

If you have any concerns, especially about something which may be illegal or contrary to the aims or policies of the AONB it is vital that you let us know.

Range of activities

Volunteer opportunities exist in the following areas:

- Coast & Estuary Wardens
 - Beachwatch / Great British Beach Clean
 - Practical Conservation
 - Promoted Routes
 - Constable Country Volunteer Ranger
- Find role profiles at the back of this handbook or visit our websites.

<https://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/volunteering/>

Safe Working

We take your safety, and that of other members of the public, very seriously. Consequently, please pay particular attention to this section.

Risk Assessments and Health and Safety

Prior to undertaking any volunteer activity, the team member responsible for you will provide you with and go through the relevant and necessary risk assessment and safety procedures. It is your responsibility to make sure that you read and understand the Risk Assessment (and any additional information provided with it) and adhere to the instructions and safe working practices detailed. If you have any concerns about the content of the Risk Assessment, or the task you are being asked to undertake, please discuss them with the team member responsible, or another member of staff.

When you sign your registration form you are agreeing to follow policies and risk assessments and, on some activities, you will be asked to sign to say that you have read and understood specific Risk Assessments.

Lone working

As a volunteer, if you are working on your own, it is vital that you adhere to our “Lone Working” policy.

Working with children and vulnerable adults

We will carry out the usual safety checks for volunteers whose work brings them into regular contact with children and vulnerable adults. These records will again be kept strictly confidential.

Insurance

As a registered AONB volunteer you are covered by Suffolk County Council’s insurance policy with Zurich provided:

- you are carrying out AONB business
- you are supervised, or your work is regularly monitored via you sending in reports
- that you adhere to all necessary risk assessments and policies
- and all necessary training is attended, and equipment provided is used

Further details are available on request.

Vehicles

You may use your own vehicle for volunteering. Prior to using your vehicle for volunteering with the AONB team, it is your responsibility to make sure you have adequate insurance e.g., for business use and are suitably covered in case of an accident. Please ensure that you have informed your insurer that you are using your vehicle for your volunteering role(s).

Expenses

The AONB can reimburse travel expenses for registered volunteers. Expenses can be claimed for:

- Vehicle mileage - at 45p per mile (50p per mile if carrying other volunteers) to a maximum of 30 miles per day.
- Train and bus fares (provide ticket as a receipt); to a maximum of £13.50
- Car parking (provide ticket as a receipt).

If you intend to claim on a regular basis, please ensure that you submit your forms monthly.

For Stour Valley Volunteer drivers who are transporting other volunteers from Sudbury (because the minibus is full) the total journey mileage can be claimed even if this is more than 30 miles a day.

Volunteer days - a reward for your hard work!

From time to time, we will organise events as a way of saying 'thank you' for your help and involvement with our work. These days will also provide the opportunity for you to meet other volunteers.

Policies

Like most responsible organisations, the AONB works to a set of policies to ensure that the interests of the organisations and individuals who are involved with them are safeguarded. As we are hosted by Suffolk County Council, the working policies we have adopted are those of the Council. Please ask your team member for printed copies of any policies if required, and if anything is unclear please ask for clarification.

If you decide to stop being a Volunteer

Individuals' circumstances and interests change, and the time may come when you decide to stop volunteering for the AONB. We would ask you to tell the team member who has been responsible for you that you are stopping, and why. This may help us to improve things or to find another volunteering role that is better suited to your circumstances.

We hope you will enjoy your time as an AONB Volunteer.

The Coast & Heaths AONB and Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley:

Saxon House, Whittle Road, Hadleigh Road Industrial Estate, Ipswich, IP2 0UH

Tel: 01394 445225

Website: suffolkcoastandheaths.org
dedhamvalestourvalley.org

Emails: Schaonb@suffolk.gov.uk
DedhamVale.Project@suffolk.gov.uk

Joint Team: (as at 03/02/2023)

Simon Amstutz	AONB Manager
Paula Bartholomew	AONB Landscape Enhancement Officer
Claire Cadman	AONB Officer
Beverley McClean	Planning Officer
Oka Last	Grants Officer (part-time)
Lucy Oldham	AONB Partnership Officer
Alex Moore da Luz	Nature Recovery Officer
Emma Black	Countryside Projects Officer (part-time)
Neil Lister	Countryside Projects Officer
James skipper	AONB Natural Heritage Officer (part-time)
Alex Dinsdale	AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme Manager
Lynn Eldrett	AONB Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme Support Officer
Jenny Moss	Landscapes for All Officer
Tom Fairbrother	AONB Communications Officer
Volunteer Placements	Vacant

We reserve the right to amend the Volunteer Handbook content and the volunteer process at any time, as deemed necessary and appropriate.

Volunteer Role Profiles

1. Coast & Estuary Wardens - Coast & Heaths AONB

Role description

To help look after the coast and estuaries by being the eyes and ears on the ground to ensure visitors to the area have a good visitor experience and the landscape of the CH AONB is protected for future generations to enjoy.

Key Responsibilities and Attitudes

- Adopt a section(s) of coastline or estuary, preferably local to you.
- Record pre-identified areas of concern i.e. erosion, bird disturbance, throughout the year and record this information on Smart Survey.
- Pick up litter.
- Encourage responsible dog ownership.
- Be a positive ambassador for the Coast & Heaths.
- Be responsible for own health and safety whilst out walking.
- Other opportunities may arise under the supervision of Partner organisations such as the RSPB e.g., Helping to protect little tern nest sites.

Volunteer Requirements

- Wardens must attend a Coast & Estuary Wardens Induction Session before they can commence with this work.
- Ability to walk over rough ground.
- Ability to read and interpret OS Explorer and Landranger Maps and complete survey forms.
- Ability to provide own transport and work alone.
- Must submit at least one report per year.

2. Beachwatch Volunteer - Coast & Heaths AONB

Role description

To help survey and clean a stretch of coast or estuary. 3 options available:

1. Join the CH group which is led by an AONB Countryside Projects Officer and meets 4 times a year.
2. Become a Beachwatch Organiser and carry out 4 surveys/litter picks per year with your own volunteers.
3. Become a Great British Beach Clean Organiser and carry out a survey/litter pick once a year over the 3rd weekend of September.

If you want to become an organiser see <http://www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch/> for more details.

Key Responsibilities and Attitudes

- Either join CH group, OR
- Adopt a section of coastline or estuary, preferably local to you, and organise a Beachwatch/Great British Beach Clean event.

- Survey 100m and provide Marine Conservation Society (MCS) with the data.
- Be a positive ambassador for the Coast & Heaths.
- Be responsible for own health and safety whilst at Beachwatch/Great British Beach Clean events.
- Adhere to MCS, CH and SCC policies.

Volunteer Requirements

- Ability to walk over rough ground.
- Ability to complete survey forms.
- Ability to provide own transport.
- Ability to organise own event and volunteers, if registered as an Organiser.
- Ability to register with MCS.

CH AONB will provide advice and equipment to registered Organisers including litter picks, hoops, gloves and bags.

3. Conservation Volunteer – Both AONBs

Role description

The AONBs help landowners and partner organisations to look after the wildlife, recreation value, and landscape at various locations in the Coast & Heaths (CH), Dedham Vale (DV) and wider Stour Valley (SV). These locations include nature reserves, geological features, key landscapes etc. Conservation Volunteers undertake a variety of practical tasks. This work is vital as it helps the AONBs to fulfil their role to co-ordinate and support the management of the landscape and nature recovery. Conservation Volunteers can expect to assist with a range of tasks, such as:

- Heathland Management, such as clearing invasive trees and shrubs.
- Woodland Management including pruning, coppicing, and clearance as well as planting new woodland and hedgerow and making woodland products.
- Grassland Management cutting and raking valuable areas of grassland to benefit wildflowers and other wildlife.
- Maintaining Public Rights of Way by erecting waymark posts/discs/advisory signs.
- Promoting biodiversity by building homes and improving habitat for wildlife, including threatened species.
- Promoting biodiversity by managing invasive species.

People of all fitness levels are welcome, and previous experience isn't necessary.

Key Responsibilities and Attitudes

- Working positively with other volunteers, staff, and landowners to undertake practical conservation tasks.
- Undertaking manual work outdoors in all weathers.
- Using tools and equipment in a safe and appropriate way, with respect for others and the environment.
- Be aware of and responsible for own health and safety and that of others whilst working.

- Being aware of your own limitations when using tools or undertaking physical work. Being honest about your own capabilities.
- Undertake any reasonable tasks requested by the group leader.
- Be a positive ambassador for the Suffolk/Essex AONB's and wider Stour Valley.

Volunteer Requirements

- Ability to walk over rough ground and undertake manual work outside in all weathers.
- Ability to follow instructions.
- Ability to reach an agreed meeting point/start point of the allocated task.
- Wear appropriate clothing and footwear.
- Own transport to the meeting point. The DV team provide a minibus which collects people from the bus depot next to Waitrose car park in Sudbury at 9.30am.

Time Commitment and practical requirements

Because the nature of this work is dependent on the season, the amount and type of jobs that need to be done will vary greatly. These tasks take place mainly during the week but sometimes at weekends. Lunch is not usually provided, so a packed lunch is needed. Tasks start at 10am and finish at approximately 3pm.

4. Promoted Route Volunteer – Both AONBs

Role description

The **Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley (DVSV)** promote several circular walks in the Stour Valley as well as the 60-mile Stour Valley Path, a long-distance footpath which runs between Newmarket in the West and Cattawade (near Manningtree) in the East.

The **Coast & Heaths AONB (CH)** team promote and waymark several circular 'Explorer' walks as well as 3 long distance routes, The Suffolk Coast Path (Lowestoft to Felixstowe), The Stour and Orwell Walk (Felixstowe to Cattawade) and The Sandlings Walk (Ipswich to Southwold).

Promoted Route Volunteers check sections of the above walks/routes (twice a year in DVSV and annually in CH), looking out for obstructions, vandalism, erosion etc. They may undertake some simple maintenance, such as cutting back overhanging vegetation, replacing missing waymark discs etc. Depending on the nature of the problems found, these are reported by the volunteer to the relevant local authority or to colleagues within the AONBs, who will arrange for the problem to be sorted out or.

Key Responsibilities and Attitudes

- Walk a circular route or allocated section of the Stour Valley Path, Suffolk Coast Path, Stour & Orwell Walk or Sandlings Walk on a regular basis (at least twice a year for DVSV; annually for CH).
- Check the walk/route for obstructions, vandalism, erosion etc.
- Report problems to colleagues within the AONB's, who will arrange for the problem to be rectified **or** send to the relevant local authority via internet/e mail/phone.
- Photograph any problems and add to your report.

- Be willing to solve small problems there and then e.g., cutting back minimal amounts of vegetation from around signage and along the route. We expect volunteers to undertake maintenance, such as replacing missing waymark discs/posts etc.
- Be a positive ambassador for the Coast & Heaths AONB/Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley.
- Be aware of and responsible for own health and safety whilst out walking.
- Work constructively with other volunteers, staff, and landowners.

Volunteer Requirements

- Ability to walk up to 10 miles/16km over rough ground in all weathers.
- Ability to read and interpret OS Explorer and Landranger Maps and complete survey forms.
- Ability to reach the start and finish point of the allocated route.

Time Commitment and practical requirements

The requirement of this role is that the volunteer assigned to each circular route or section of a longer linear route checks that section at least 2 times per year (DVSV) or once a year (CH). It would also be beneficial if the volunteer took a reactive approach to their role – for example walking the path/route after a period of windy weather to check for fallen branches.

As circular routes and sections of the longer linear routes are approximately 4-7 miles it could take 4-5 hours to undertake the route check.

5. Constable Country Volunteer Ranger - Dedham Vale AONB

Role Description

To help look after Constable Country by being the eyes and ears on the ground to ensure visitors to Constable Country have a good visitor experience and the landscape of the Dedham Vale AONB is protected for future generations to enjoy.

This scheme is run by the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project on behalf of community stakeholders and organisations responsible for the conservation and maintenance of properties and countryside in the area. It's part of a range of projects to 'Help Keep Constable Country Special'.

Key Responsibilities and Attitudes

- Walk footpaths in Constable Country, particularly between Dedham and Flatford, and act as the eyes and ears on the ground for the Dedham Vale VMG.
- Engage with visitors informing them about the area, places to go, things to do, how to get there, etc.
- Pick up litter.
- Report walk /issues that need to be done on Smart Survey
- Be a positive ambassador for the Dedham Vale VMG.
- Promote Keep it Special messages.
- Encourage responsible dog ownership.
- Be responsible for own health and safety whilst out walking.

Volunteer Requirements

- Volunteer Rangers must attend an Induction Session before they start.
- Ability to walk up to 5 miles over rough ground in all weathers.
- Ability to read OS Explorer and Landranger Maps and complete survey forms.
- Ability to develop and maintain friendly conversation with visitors.
- Some interest in and knowledge of art, history, landscape, and wildlife.
- Ability to work in compliance with the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project's Health and Safety Policy at all times.

Time Commitment and Practical Requirements

Place of work	Constable Country particularly between Dedham and Flatford.
Facilities	Use of the facilities at National Trust Flatford and the RSPB Wildlife Garden.
Volunteer Manager	Emma Black, Countryside Projects Officer, Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project.
Time commitment	At least once a month
Training/resources	Induction and familiarisation of the area, training and relevant equipment will be provided.