

Fyne Court
Broomfield
Bridgwater
TA5 2EQ

Quantock Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Friday 22nd July 2011

at

2.15pm

in the

Spaxton Village Hall, Spaxton

To: The Members of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Quantock Hills AONB Support Assistant, Katy Coate: tel 01823 451884, email klcoate@somerset.gov.uk.

Guidance about procedures at the meeting is given on the last page.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

AGENDA

Agenda Item No.

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest** – an opportunity for members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting.
3. **Accuracy of the Minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2011** (copy appended) **and to consider any matters arising.**
4. **Public Question Time** – The Chairman will allow members of the public to ask questions or make statements about any matter on the agenda for this meeting, or present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit.
5. **Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**
6. **Natural Environment White Paper (Paper A)**
7. **International Year of Biodiversity and Biological Monitoring Report (Paper B)**
8. **Report of the Acting AONB Manager on Service Activity (Paper C)**
9. **National Association of AONBs Briefing Paper (Paper D)**
10. **Rangers Report (Paper E)**
11. **Volunteer Report (Paper F)**
12. **Landscape Planning Officer Report (Paper G)**
13. **Any Other Business of Urgency**

Note : Further information about any of the reports for this meeting may be obtained from the report authors based at the Quantock Hills AONB Service, The Quantock Office, Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater, TA5 2EQ. Tel No 01823 451884 or e-mail : quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk

THE MEETING – GUIDANCE NOTES

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect Minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Quantock Hills AONB Support Assistant, Katy Coate: tel 01823 451884, email klcoate@somerset.gov.uk.

2. Notes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed and decisions taken at the meeting will be set out in the Minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. In the meantime, details of the decisions taken can be obtained from Quantock Hills AONB Support Assistant, Katy Coate: tel 01823 451884, email klcoate@somerset.gov.uk.

3. Public Question Time

At the Chairman's invitation you may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about **any matter on the Committee's agenda**. You may also present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit. **The length of public question time will be no more than 20 minutes in total.**

A slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been signed. If you wish to speak, please tell Norman Tottle, the Committee Administrator, **before the meeting**.

You must direct your questions and comments through the Chairman. You may not take direct part in the debate.

The Chairman will decide when public participation is to finish.

If there are many people present at the meeting for one particular item, the Chairman may adjourn the meeting to allow views to be expressed more freely.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

An issue will not be deferred just because you cannot be present for the meeting.

Remember that the amount of time you speak will be restricted, normally to two minutes only.

4. Substitutions

Committee members are able to appoint substitutes if they are unable to attend the meeting.

(4 February, 2011)

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held in the Crowcombe Hall, Crowcombe, on Friday 4 February 2011 at 2.15pm.

Present

Somerset County Council	Mr A H Trollope-Bellew (Chairman) Mr J Wilkins
Taunton Deane Borough Council	Dr C Guerrier Mr N Stuart-Thorn Ms L James
West Somerset Council	Mr S Dowding
Sedgemoor District Council	Mr D Joslin Mr A Bradford Mr J Swayne
Parish Representatives	Mr T Ayre Mr J Edwards Mr S Parkman
CLBA	Mr H Warmington
Natural England	Mr R Andrews
Friends of Quantock	Mrs L Kelly
Forestry Commission	Mr N Salter
SLAF	Mr R Conway
Quantock Commoners Association	Mrs D Salvidge

Also Present

Mr B James (SCC- Officer), Dr P Radford (Somerset Archaeological & Natural History Society) , Mr J Clarke (Kingston St Mary PC), Mrs J Sansom (West Quantoxhead PC), Mrs M White (Sedgemoor Bridleways), Mr K Rogers (Kilve PC), Mr T Rich (Nether Stowey PC), Mr D Venner (Bicknoller PC) and Ms J Lynch.

Apologies were received from Mr J Edney (SCC), Mr H Davies (WSC) and Mr C Morgan (WSC).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

57. The Chairman declared an interest in item 8 - the Rangers report -as some of the swaling mentioned will be taking place on his land.

MINUTES

58. (1) The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2010 were taken as read signed as a correct record subject to adding Mr Bradford to the list of apologies.

Matters arising

Minute 56 – Pathwatch

(2) Mr Swayne said that despite e-mailing PC Joliffe and Sgt Whysall the web –site had still not been changed – the reason being that SW One had responsibility for alterations to the web-site – enough said!!.

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

59. Mrs J Sansom (WQPC) asked questions concerning the state of Staple Hill and Staple Plain. Would the fir branches left on the ground for burning still contain the phytophthora pathogens and when were the paths to be reinstated following the felling of trees. Iain Porter undertook to obtain information from the landowner - the National Trust – and inform Mrs Sansom.

QUANTOCK HILLS AONB SERVICE ACTIVITY REPORT

60. (1) This report produced by the Acting AONB Manager was considered by the JAC, The report contained items on the 2010/11 Business Plan, the OWG meeting, the future of the AONB Service, Project Development, the SDF, Events, Communications and the Budget 2010- 11.

(2) Mr Salter updated the JAC on the position relating to the proposed sell- off of Forestry Commission land which had generated a lot of recent publicity in the news programmes. The AONB Service had been contacted by DEFRA and the FC with the consultation draft on the proposals to sell off the majority of the forest estate. Iain Porter undertook to pass the draft response to JAC members for comment.

(3) Membership of a temporary working group to be set up to develop options on future funding and delivery models was discussed. The Chairman and Mr Swayne volunteered to be the 2 LA members. Mr Ayre and Mr Conway volunteered to be the 2 non- LA members. The Acting AONB Manager would sort out the appointment of 2 OWG members.

(4) The remaining items in the report were noted and the JAC confirmed the setting up of the Future Funding and Delivery working group with the membership as agreed above.

QUANTOCK HILLS AONB BUSINESS PLAN 2011/12

61. (1) The JAC considered a report by the Acting AONB Manager on the Business Plan for 2011/12. The Plan had been produced later than usual due to future funding uncertainties. Chris Edwards secondment had been extended by another 12 months to April 2012 which meant that his salary was not part of the AONB budget – this was a blessing in disguise as that had eased the financial situation somewhat. The Chairman indicated that he felt that LA funding for the AONB could cease completely within 2 years as the financial situation was likely to get a lot worse. The JAC asked a number of questions concerning the detail of the Business Plan and Miss James declared an interest as she was employed by Viridor.

(2) After debate the JAC approved the Business Plan for 2011/12.

VOLUNTEERING ON THE QUANTOCK HILLS AONB

62. (1) The JAC considered a report by Owen Jones, Volunteer Coordinator, about Volunteer Involvement, Policy, and Volunteering Opportunities in the future. The report contained as an Appendix a copy of the proposed new Volunteering Policy. The JAC asked a number of questions about the policy and responses were given.

(2) The JAC agreed the adoption of the Quantock Hills AONB Volunteer Policy and noted the volunteer development options.

RANGERS REPORT

63. (1) The JAC considered the Rangers report for the six month period between July to December 2010. As is customary Tim Russell illustrated many aspects of the Rangers work in a slide show presentation. The report covered the following topics :-Practical and Commons Management, Amenity Land, Access and Visitor Management, Events and Events Management and the Rangers

(2) The following issues were discussed :- Car Parking at Holford Bowling Green, Fly- Tipping at the Castle of Comfort and the Exmoor Pony herd at Cothelstone Hill. The report was noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

64. (1) Tributes for their service on the JAC over many years were paid to David Joslin and Gerry Guerrier, who were standing down at the forthcoming District Council elections. Norman Tottle the current Clerk to the JAC, was also retiring as from the end of February and a gift of books was made to him to mark his retirement. He thanked the JAC for their support over the last 12 years.

(2) The next Planning report in July would contain items on wind and solar power policy.

(The meeting closed at 4.00pm)

CHAIRMAN

Qhjac.mins 4 Feb 2011

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

Author: Iain Porter, Acting AONB Manager

Date: 22 July 2011

Subject: Natural Environment White Paper, Government Response to Lawton Review and Think Big: ecological recovery in protected landscapes

Some sections in this report are summarised from papers produced by Sarah Jackson, Mendip Hills AONB Manager and Dave Dixon, SWPLF.

1. Introduction.

- a. The Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years is set out in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) published on 7th June 2011. The plans contained in 'The Natural Choice', the first White Paper on the natural environment in 20 years are directly linked to research in the National Ecosystem Assessment published a week before the White Paper. This research showed strong economic arguments for safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment.
- b. The White Paper also acts on the recommendations of 'Making Space for Nature', a report into the state of England's wildlife sites, led by Professor John Lawton and published in September 2010, which showed that England's wildlife sites are fragmented and not able to respond to the pressures of climate change and other pressures we put on our land.
- c. The Lawton report highlighted AONBs as an excellent base for delivering a more effective ecological network, not least because of their management plans provide a basis for coordinated action to integrate effective ecological networks with landscape and other uses including farming, education, tourism and recreation.

2. The Way Forward.

- a. Key measures in the White Paper, which also takes forward recommendations contained in 'Making Space for Nature', include: **Reconnecting nature**
 - i. **New Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)**, transforming rural and urban areas and providing bigger, connected sites for wildlife to live in and adapt to climate change. £7.5 million fund for 12 initial NIAs to demonstrate just what can be done.
 - ii. **Biodiversity offsetting** – new way for developers to ensure we don't lose wildlife sites and make them better by making and improving other sites.
 - iii. **New Local Nature Partnerships** to strengthen joined-up action across local agencies and organisations, with a £1 million available this year.
 - iv. **Phasing out peat** – working with the horticulture industry to phase out peat use, which will help to protect and restore our peatlands, which are valuable carbon sinks, habitats and part of our ecological network.
- b. **Connecting people and nature for better quality of life**
 - i. **Green Areas Designation** allowing local communities to give protection to areas that are important to them for recreation, the view or their importance for wildlife. Better urban **green spaces** for the benefit of cities and towns. Support for parks, gardens, and tree planting which benefit people and nature alike
 - ii. **More children experiencing nature by learning outdoors**, through practical support to schools and reducing red-tape for outdoor learning.
 - iii. **Strengthening local public health activities** which connect people with nature for better health
 - iv. **New environmental volunteering initiative "Muck in 4 Life"** to improve places in towns and countryside for people and nature to enjoy.

c. **Capturing and improving the value of nature**

- i. **Natural Capital Committee** – an independent body to report to the Government's economic affairs committee chaired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This body will put the value of nature at the heart of the Government's economic thinking, and advise Government about the best way of securing our natural assets for the future.
- ii. **An annual statement of green accounts for UK Plc** – showing where the economy has withdrawn from the value of nature's bank balance, and where we have invested in it. This will help measure green growth alongside GDP.
- iii. **A business-led Task Force** chaired by Kingfisher Group Chief Executive Officer Ian Cheshire, to expand the UK business opportunities from new products and services which are good for the economy and nature alike.

3. Response

- a. The actions contained in the Natural Environment White Paper are to create a radical shift on how we view our natural assets by incorporating the natural environment into economic planning and ensuring there are opportunities for businesses that are good for nature and a strong green economy.
- b. The National Association of AONBs has welcomed the publication of the NEWP and has signed a joint statement with the English National Park Authorities Association, RSPB and National Trust. Think Big: ecological recovery in protected landscapes - summarises the opportunities and challenges and lists initial actions to look at with partners at national and local level to make the aspirations of the White Paper a reality. These include:
 - i. Creatively engaging with farmers, land managers and local communities in discussions about how best to achieve ecological restoration and how this could benefit local people and businesses.
 - ii. Developing proposals for improved ecological networks – the Management Plan process could be catalyst for this.
 - iii. Identifying gaps between existing landscape scale initiatives and build on these
- c. The Government has recognised that AONB Partnerships with their unique governance, close engagement with local and visitor communities and their statutory purpose to conserve and enhance natural beauty and wildlife and cultural heritage – that they should be at the forefront of the recovery of England's biodiversity.

4. Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs)

- a. Local Nature Partnerships were one of the key proposals in the NEWP. Their overall purpose is to bring together a diverse range of individuals, businesses and organisations together at a local level to create a vision and a plan of action of how the natural environment can be taken into account in decision making.
- b. A fund of £1 million is available to support the creation of self sustaining Local nature Partnerships. Anyone can bid including existing partnerships and AONBs are specifically mentioned. They must demonstrate a need, give details of resourcing, show they can become self sustaining, and increase efficiency.
- c. Bids have to be submitted by midnight 31st July 2011 and will be notified in September 2011. Funding must be spend in 2011-12. There is no need to apply to this fund in order to bid to be a LNP.
- d. Government's vision for Local Nature Partnerships is that they will:
 - i. demonstrate local leadership, raising awareness about the vital services and benefits which a healthy natural environment brings for people, communities and the local economy;
 - ii. use their knowledge and expertise to develop a shared environmental vision and set of priorities for their area (this could highlight how protection and enhancement of the

- natural environment can bring economic and social benefits or could include measures to establish and improve local ecological networks at a landscape scale);
- iii. add value to a local area's development through contributing to local authority plans that affect the environment, as well as local plans and local development frameworks;
 - iv. help contribute to the Green Economy by, for example, providing relevant information for Local Enterprise Partnerships in development of their plans;
 - v. bring together a range of local stakeholders, which may include people from local authorities, businesses, statutory authorities, civil society organisations, land managers, local record centres, local enterprise partnerships and people from communities themselves who can align efforts and make best use of available resources;
 - vi. co-operate with other partnerships where this results in more efficient use of resources and better outcomes. Co-operation can also be with partnerships that share common interests;
 - vii. work at a landscape scale to improve the range of benefits and services we get from a healthy natural environment. They will aim to improve the multiple benefits we receive from good management of the land through, for example, constituent members supporting Nature Improvement Areas, biodiversity offsets pilots or similar schemes; and
 - viii. form at a level that can take a strategic-enough approach to deliver integrated outcomes with a wide range of benefits. We anticipate around 50 Partnerships across England. However, we will not prescribe that Partnerships should cover a particular spatial area or administrative boundary, as we want to encourage them to form around the places, areas and natural systems that work best locally.

5. Nature Improvement Area (NIAs)

- a. There might be a 'Big Chalk' proposal for area from Cranborne Chase across to Kent AONB and one in Pennines with North Pennines AONB taking a lead considering applying to become one of the 12 initial NIAs. Whilst it is not anticipated that the Mendip Hills AONB would be considered appropriate the issues to be addressed through new NIA would be addressed through the Management plan process.
- b. Co-operation between partnerships is encouraged where this would result in a more efficient use of resources and secures a better outcome than operating in isolation. This co-operation need not be restricted to neighbouring partnerships and will be particularly important where partnerships share a common interest, or need advice on particular themes.

6. The Quantock Hills AONB Response

- a. The AONB Futures Working Group is already looking at ways to build links with the business community to identify opportunities to improve nature and the economy. Together with the need to use existing Partnership resources more effectively and identify new sources of funding for its work, applying to become a Local Nature Partnership is an obvious consideration especially as AONB Partnerships are already recognised for fulfilling many of the aspects of a LNP. Discussion needs to include which neighbouring partnerships or geographical areas might we connect with and which bodies, businesses or individuals need to be part of it.
- b. A meeting between likely partners has been arranged by Somerset Wildlife Trust for 19th July. At this meeting approaches to LNPs will be discussed which will better inform the direction of the Quantock Hills AONB.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Agree to pursue LNP with relevant partners dependant upon verbal report of SWT meeting.
2. Dependant upon (1) agree basis of bid to become LNP and delegate to Futures Working Group to draft bid – seconding others as appropriate
3. Partners to inform AONB Unit if applying to become Nature Improvement Area adjacent to or part of AONB.

Notes

The Natural Environment White Paper, 'The Natural Choice' can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/.

The Government response to Professor Sir John Lawton's independent review of England's wildlife sites and ecological network, *Making Space for Nature*. This can also be found at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/.

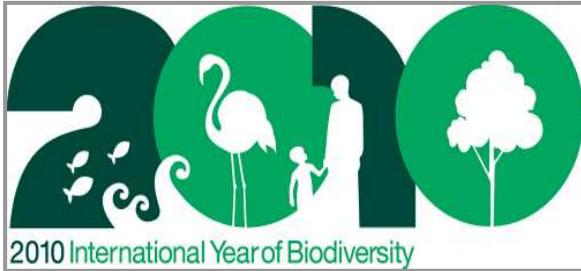
The National Ecosystems Assessment can be found at <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>.

Local Nature Partnerships information can be found at

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/local-nature-partnerships/>

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee
Author: Andy Harris, AONB Service and Forestry Commission Ranger
Date: 22nd July 2011
Subject: International Year of Biodiversity and Biological Monitoring Report

Introduction



1. The United Nations declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity (IYoB 2010). It was a celebration of life on earth. The world was invited to take action in 2010 to safeguard the variety of life on earth and recognise the importance of biodiversity for human well-being.
2. Celebrating IYoB 2010 closer to home, the Quantock Hills AONB Service put on a series of events to raise the awareness of how special the variety of habitats and the wildlife (found in and around the protected landscape) are. Guided walks and talks by AONB Staff and a variety of specialists conveyed the wonder of everything from the night sky and the universe, to amazing wildlife such as Red Deer and Nightjars, how habitats from heathland and woodland to farmland are managed, along with the telling of traditional folk stories of how the countryside and its wildlife was seen and valued in the past.
3. The AONB Service has a well proven dedication to managing and monitoring the diversity of wildlife and habitats found within the Quantock Hills and during IYoB 2010 many hours were spent collecting data that has contributed to a better understanding of our local environment. This could not have been achieved without the tremendous support and involvement of volunteers and during 2010 over 1020hrs (138 days) were given by the Quantock Conservation Volunteers alone. The range of tasks volunteers took part in are as diverse as the wildlife they so passionately take an interest in; with practical work (including swaling and beach cleaning), surveying wood warblers and nightjars and mapping habitats with GPS. Many other individuals, volunteers and groups gave up their time for surveys such as the deer count, bird ringing, adder monitoring, moth recording, a fungi survey and bat monitoring.
4. The data gathered is shared with partners such as the Forestry Commission, RSPB, Natural England, National Trust, Somerset Ornithological Society, SERC and it's difficult to place a value on it other than to recognise the influence it has on developing policy and attracting funds to help protect and manage the Hills.
5. Interpreting the data does present us with good and bad outcomes and whilst it's great to report so many good news stories, the Quantock Hills are not immune to some of the problems that face other wildlife populations in other areas of the UK. Below are a few of the outcomes of last years biological monitoring.

Woodland Birds

1. The UK Government's Wildbird Populations Framework Indicator for woodland birds fell by over 20% between 1976 and 2001. In addition, a number of woodland breeding species were added to the red and amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern including the lesser spotted woodpecker, song thrush, spotted flycatcher, tree pipit all of which declined by more than 50% during this period, whilst species such as pied flycatcher, mistle thrush, willow warbler and wood warbler all declining by more than 25%.
2. During Spring 2010 a woodland bird survey of the Sessile Oak Wood Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was undertaken by the National Trust's Nigel Garnsworthy, volunteer Keith Edwards and Andy Harris. The data built on previous smaller surveys completed in 1980's and 2003/4 with the results interpreted by RSPB's Helen Booker.
3. In addition to this survey, over 80 hours was spent by volunteers specifically recording in detail the wood warbler density of the SAC woods.
4. The results of the SAC woodland bird survey mirror the national trend of a decline in woodland bird species especially the woodland specialists such as wood warbler and lesser spotted woodpecker.
5. Currently a report into the condition of the SAC woodland is being funded by Natural England and the results of the woodland bird survey will provide excellent baseline data to monitor the impacts of any future management policy.
6. For over three decades the pied flycatcher, another woodland specialist, has been monitored with the young being ringed each spring not only in the SAC woods but also in Forestry Commission plantations. Pied flycatchers have also shown a decline in population over the past few years both locally and nationally. However in 2010 the number of young pied flycatchers ringed increased by a third on the average tally recorded since 2000.
7. This year the Quantock Hills AONB Service and Forestry Commission have joined up with Dr Malcolm Burgess of Exeter University and the SW Pied Flycatcher Monitoring Group, with the aim of specifically looking into the ecology of this unique species that so characterises our western sessile oak woods. By joining forces with other similar monitoring projects it will enable us to gain more insight into and understanding of the species and the factors which affect them such as woodland management and climate change.

Waxcap Fungi

1. The Ballerina Waxcap is a Quantock Hills Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species. However, waxcap fungi in general are an indicator of unimproved grassland and one of the criteria for Local Wildlife Designation. The Quantocks, West Somerset area and Exmoor are a bit of a hot spot for Waxcaps and in the autumn of 2010 the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership promoted a public waxcap survey producing a survey card and providing training for volunteers.
2. In total 25 species of waxcap were recorded with 12 of species being recorded at Fyne Court. The purpose of the survey was to raise public awareness concerning waxcaps

and to encourage more records to be sent into Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC).

Adder Survey

1. Another species highlight for particular attention in the Quantock Hills Biodiversity Action Plan is the Adder. Over the past few years Kevin Palmer has led the monitoring of Adders especially in the area between Great Hill / Fire Beacon to Halsway Hills and Crowcombe Park Gate.
2. Despite a reasonable extent of suitable habitat (lowland heathland) and the presence of potential prey, the population of Adders in the Quantocks Hills appears to be lower than might be expected. Since detailed research began (2008-2010) 103 sightings of Adders have been made within the study area, 40 of which have been individually identified by Kevin Palmer.
3. With the help of The Reptile and Amphibian Group for Somerset (RAGS) the survey expanded its' range in 2011. RAGS provided training for volunteers who took on survey areas earlier in Spring before the Adders dispersed too widely. The results of this latest survey will soon be available.

SSSI Condition

1. In 2000 the Government made a declaration to have 95% of the UK Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in "favourable" or "recovering" condition by 2010 (IYoB).
2. In 2002 landowners and the Commoners Association signed up to a 10 year Lowland Heath Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) for the northern common to safeguard traditional practices such as grazing and swaling as well as to enhance the heathland by removing invasive species such as rhododendron and control bracken.
3. Natural England regularly undertake condition assessments of the SSSI (and SAC Woodland) and these have shown some big gains in SSSI condition in terms of moving from unfavourable declining or unfavourable maintained condition to recovering.
4. The primary factors for this improvement being seen on the heath are due to increased winter destocking with very significant bracken and rhododendron control. A great deal of hard work has been achieved on the northern common and it is great to report that a similar environmental scheme is just beginning on the southern common / SSSI.
5. In the case of the SAC Oak woods a re-evaluation of the woodlands lead to a reclassification of large areas from "unfavourable maintained" to "recovering". The reasons for this reclassification included: a grazing impact assessment, the conclusion that a range of tree age classes (sapling, semi-mature, mature) and a more open canopy are likely to develop over time under current management, and that there are no significant threats to the key elements of interest by this approach.

Ongoing and future monitoring

1. Currently the AONB is also continuing to lead or support monitoring of species such as Nightjar, Dormouse and Bats with planning beginning for surveys such as the Heathland Bird Survey 2012 (repeated every 6yrs). It is work such as the Heathland Bird Survey 2006 that have helped enormously in understanding what is happening to some of the AONB's most sensitive habitats. One such recommendation of the last survey was the need to control bracken which had become wide spread threatening the heathland habitat; it will be interesting to see what the results of the next survey will show.
2. In September 2011 a detailed report into the condition of the SAC woods and possible management options along with a broad deer management plan will be made to the Commoners Association. These two reports are being funded by Natural England via the Quantock Common CSS and will play a vital role in the transition from the successful CSS to a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS).
3. AONB Service will continue to undertake ongoing and new biodiversity monitoring and staff will continue to report to the JAC on the findings of these wildlife surveys.

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

Author: Iain Porter, Acting AONB Manager

Date: 22 July 2011

Subject: Quantock Hills AONB Service Activity Report

7. JAC Membership & Constitution

- a. With the recent local authority elections in May there have been a number of changes to the JAC membership. A full list is attached. At the time of writing member representation from Taunton Deane Borough Council is not known.
- b. An introductory session will soon be organised for new members to the JAC to introduce the role of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and that of the JAC.
- c. A number of organisations that are members of the JAC have evolved, changed or ceased over the past 2 years. The following changes are proposed to the constitution to update it:
 - i. Other voting members. Natural England to have 1 voting member, reduced from 2
 - ii. Other voting member. GOSW removal of representative with cessation of GOSW
 - iii. Other voting member. Addition of DEFRA as sponsoring body.

8. 2011 – 12 Business Plan

- a. The 2011/12 Quantock Hills AONB Service business plan was signed off in April 2011. *Please contact Iain Porter for full copies.* Appendix A1 highlights progress against actions from the Business Plan, **KEY:** Green – Complete or on target. Amber – Progress made. Red – no progress or not on target.

9. Office Working Group Reporting

- a. Meeting held 4th July 2011. With a change of line management by the host authority a new chair needed to be elected. Ian Clark, TDBC, is the chair for the next 12 months.
- b. Discussion over DEFRA grant requirement for a Memorandum of Agreement, or a similar local approach, which all funding partners sign up to. AONB Service is investigating different approaches as previously some partners have expressed an unwillingness to sign a MoA. The AONB Manager will be developing a Statement of Intent to be signed by funding partners.
- c. The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) was discussed. Due to the rapidly changing situation there was no clear direction for the AONB Service to pursue until further discussions with other partners had taken place. Further information on the NEWP can be found in Report B.
- d. The OWG was brought up to date on the work of the Future Directions Working Group (see Sc 5)

10. Project Development

- a. The AONB Service has recently joined with FWAG in the launch of the **Western Somerset Woodlands Project**. The launch event was hosted on the Quantock Hills at West Bagborough with site visits to nearby Cothelstone estate. The project aims to assist local woodland owners to sustainably manage their woodlands through free visits to identify objectives and potential funding and income streams. The project aims to achieve greater habitat connections through working with landowners and looking at hedgerows and field margins as well as woodland. *For more information please contact Emma Wright, FWAG Project Officer on 01823 355427*

- b. **Quantock Blackdown Link:** The feasibility study has now been completed (copied available from Iain Porter). There is broad support for the project and it has now been noted within the Taunton Deane draft Core Strategy. The project officer post has come to an end and we are awaiting the outcome of a number of funding bids for the first stage (Blackdown – Taunton) before progressing with the Quantock to Taunton section.
- c. The AONB Service is in discussion with the Blackdown Hills AONB, SERC and the Somerset Bat Group over the development of a joint Batscapes project. Initial bat survey work on the Quantock Hills, in Taunton and on the Blackdown Hills has identified the importance of these locations for a number of bat species. The project idea is looking to undertake further research as well as promote and encourage the importance of Bats to the local communities.
- d. **1SW.** The Quantock Hills AONB is one of a number of protected landscapes within the south west involved with this project. There are 3 main elements connected with our involvement, mapping of the bridleways, website with off-road cycling specific information and community infrastructure funding. A draft website is nearing the end of build and the surveys have started (Quantock Hills due for survey September 2011). The community infrastructure funding is due to be ready in 2012. *For more information contact Iain Porter.*

11. Future Directions Working Group (FDWG)

- a. The FDWG met on 28 March 2011. At the meeting ToR were agreed and a vision drafted. Subsequent meetings have been delayed due to the elections in May. Due to the limited progress a full report will be submitted to the next JAC meeting.
- b. The second meeting will be held 19 July. *For further information please contact Iain Porter.*

12. Sustainable Development Fund.

- a. The SDF for 2011/12 is £45,000. There have been 2 funding rounds with 7 applications received. Of those applications 6 have been accepted with 1 pending decision, and £18,797 has been allocated. There are 2 further application rounds, 22nd August and 24th October.
- b. The SDF panel currently consists of Mark Anderson, Jane Birch and the vice-chair of the JAC (to be appointed at this meeting).
- c. Please promote the SDF to local communities and your partners.
- d. *SDF Contact: Owen Jones*

13. Quantock Hills AONB Led Events

- a. The 2011 AONB led events has started well with 9 out of the 12 events going ahead with 121 attendees. There have been a few minor issues with the new booking system which is through Somerset Skills and Learning. However as these have been resolved the system is providing a more flexible and easier to use than the AONB Service could provide itself.
- b. *AONB Events Contact: Andy Harris*

14. AONB Service Budget 2011 – 12

- a. Core funding partners have now confirmed contributions for 2011/12 (Table 1). Core expenditure (months 1-2) is running at expected levels (Appendix A2) with no need for viament between budget lines.
- b. Project funding is currently being reassessed as the AONB Service is looking to undertake different projects due to changes in priority. These include some landscape

research type projects (e.g. views to/ from) which will be used to inform future policy and funding bids.

Table 1: Quantock Hills AONB Service – Main Funding Contributions 2011/12

Partner	Contribution
DEFRA	186,877
Somerset County Council	21,500
Forestry Commission	17,300
Taunton Deane Borough Council	12,000
West Somerset Council	11,575
Sedgemoor District Council	11,550
Total	243,502

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The JAC agrees the amendments to the Quantock Hills JAC Constitution as outlined in Sc 1.c.
2. The JAC notes the report.

Appendix A1: Quantock Hills AONB Service. Progress Against Business Plan

ACTION POINT	Action	Milestone / Target	Progress	Comments
FAP 2	Collate monitoring information of uptake of CSS / ES / EWGS etc. Promote ES schemes through web-promotion & targeting of areas under represented if ES has funding.	ES data provided to AONB unit from NE. 75% of eligible AONB land area in ES. Evidence of appropriate targeting in Quantock ES schemes.	●	Final agreement on data release between SWPLF and DEFRA delayed. Expected September 2011.
FWAP 4	Comment on draft SAC Woodland Management Plan to ensure plan with bring greatest benefit to subsequent management	Comments received and actioned	●	Full engagement
WAP 4	Support continued monitoring of LBAP species (adder) to inform future management plans for Quantock Common and surrounding agricultural land	Adder population and hibernacula survey carried out on 3 sites in Quantock AONB	●	RAGS and Kevin Palmer survey complete. Figures being processed
WAP 4	Support monitoring of Pied Flycatchers on Quantock Hills and feed into regional project on effects of climate change on indicator species	5 volunteers trained in bird monitoring. Monitoring of 30 boxes in key locations throughout AONB	●	CHECK
WAP2	Implement or manage implementation by others of the Quantock Hills BAP. Specific actions	?? % of LBAP Targets achieved – need to check delivery by others	●	No action
WAP2	Provide concise monitoring and reporting on LBAP actions	Produce a LBAP actions report	●	No action
WAP 4 FAP 2	Apply to external funders for project funding of joint Bats project. Run a joint Bats Project which will increase awareness of special landscapes importance for bats as well as increase knowledge of bat populations and allow targeting of land management to improve habitat of farmland and woodland.	Successful application to external funders. Project started with project officer in place and first season bat monitoring underway.	●	Project development taking longer than anticipated. Currently developing 1 st stage bid
DAP 6	Produce an integrated Landscape Character Assessment and environment report that will set the framework to the next Management Plan based on the latest guidance on NCA assessment from NE	Draft report produced ready for consideration by partnership	●	CHECK
DAP 1 DAP 4 DAP 5	Monitor planning applications in and around the AONB and identify any potential damaging developments. Comment on potentially damaging applications on behalf of the JAC	Planning Database up to date and reporting back against database possible through GIS. Comments sent to relevant planning authorities	●	
DAP 2	Engage with Local Development Framework (LDF) consultation	Relevant LDF consultation responses sent	●	
DAP 7	Engage with and offer specialist advice on impacts of major infrastructure developments such as Hinkley Point C	Engagement with consultation process and comments received and acted upon	●	

	Make AONB planning comments available on the website (or synopsis with link) to ensure partners and communities can see AONB response to planning application	All planning comments (1 st April 2011 – 31 st March 2012) to be available on the website.	●	
	VOLUNTEERS – Continued engagement with Quantock Countryside Volunteers ensuring tasks occurring through AONB area.	3,000 volunteer hours completed.	●	1 st Qu = 1,126 volunteer hours
ARAP 8 VAP 2	VOLUNTEERS - Volunteer involvement in local events and other visitor management to raise AONB profile and provide information.	30 volunteer work days spent at local events or engaged in visitor management activity	●	6 visitor management volunteers engaged and being trained. 4 volunteer work days completed so far but early in season.
ARAP 8 VAP 2	VOLUNTEERS - Development of Full-time volunteer post expanding the existing partnership with National Trust to include a 9 month placement for a second FTV which will be hosted by AONB.	FTV in 'post' and 9 months placement successfully completed.	●	Tori Kirk in post and task programme developed. .
EAP 6	VOLUNTEERS - Development of a 'Young Ranger' scheme based on successful Mendip AONB model	12 'Young Rangers' enrolled on the Quantock Young Ranger Scheme	●	No progress to date
CAP 1	Deliver Sustainable Development Fund to fund local projects which will deliver Management Plan objectives	Fully expenditure against SDF with project targets being fully met	●	
CAP 6	Host a Parish conference to engage with Parish Council and inform them of AONB work as well as discussing Parish Council involvement with the AONB and Partnership	75% of parish representatives invited attending 1 parish conference	●	In discussion with parishes at present.
CAP 3	Engagement with Western Somerset Local Action Group to ensure funding opportunities through this scheme are available for Quantock projects.	Quantock Hills AONB Service retains place on executive meeting and attends	●	WSLAG currently on hold due to DEFRA review, expect to start operating again in Sept 2011
CAP 6	Encourage and practically support parish initiatives such as parish plans in and around the AONB to help local communities protect the character of their villages and ensure local distinctiveness is integral to the local community	Development of Parish Plans or other relevant initiatives supported by AONB Service	●	
FWAP 2 CAP 2	Support of the Working the Woods Project which aims to work with woodland owners and workers to strengthen local supply chains and maximise biodiversity and business opportunities	Project running with project officer in post. Targets as project plan but include woodland Management Plans, creation of woodland associations etc.	●	Launch 13 th July.
WAP 1	Provide secretariat and support for Quantock Commons Management Group (QCMG) and Quantock Police & Conservation Agencies Working Group (QPCAWG)	2 meetings of each group. Meeting notes and progress on actions recorded	●	
WAP 4	Provide on the ground support to the Quantock Deer Management and Conservation Group (QDMCG) deer count	Deer Count undertaken and results fed back to QDMCG and JAC	●	
VAP 2	Provide 14 events open to the public, including specialist walks and events aimed at families. The theme for 2011 will be 'Discovery'	300 people attending AONB events	●	9 of 12 planned walks occurred with 151 attendees

EAP 2	Distribute AONB Visitor Guide through the LIPs distribution points	Restocking of LIPs distribution points x 4	●	On target.
EAP 2	Publish and distribute e-newsletter. Hardcopy can be printed off for distribution through schools	At least 4 newsletters produced with distribution to 1,100 individuals	●	1 e-newsletter submitted
EAP 3	Regularly update the website to include blogs, news items, planning comments etc	New content to be added on at least a fortnightly basis (26 blogs annually)	●	12 blogs submitted.
	Produce media content (press release direct media contact) to include standard messages (lambing, ticks etc) as well as specific project successes	12 press releases sent out with 50% picked up by local media	●	4 press releases issued, SDF, events, lambing and ticks
	Produce and distribute a annual report to show progress against AONB Management Plan Targets	Annual Report produced and distributed by end of June 2011	●	
	OWG and JAC reports produced. These reports will provide monitoring against the action plan targets	3 OWG reports and 3 JAC reports produced.	●	
	Develop new 'business delivery model' that can co-exist with the AONB Service but which will reduce reliance on exchequer funding while allowing continued or enhanced delivery of the Statutory Management Plan. This will be overseen by a Funding & Delivery Working Group made up of 2 JAC members, officers and 2 others.	Options paper produced and favoured option agreed by partnership	●	Limited progress due to elections.
	Write NE/DEFRA AONB bid with input from OWG and JAC partnership	NE / DEFRA bid accepted	●	
	Host 3 OWG and JAC meetings – July, November and February 2012 to allow informed and engaged ownership of partnership by JAC.	3 meetings held.	●	On target
	Regular meetings of AONB Service team to review AONB Management activities and issues	45 meetings held.	●	Meetings fallen off due to annual leave and new work patterns.
	Membership and involvement in the NAAONB and SWPLF to ensure national and regional liaison and to ensure that the NAAONB represents the views of the Quantock Hills partnership in its new business model. – Includes Countryside Management Association	Attendance at Lead Officers meetings and other meetings where applicable	●	
	Host 2 Partnership workshops on relevant issues which could include 'the role of volunteers' and Landscape scale biodiversity enhancement	2 workshops held with 12 partnership members in attendance on each	●	Workshops planned for late autumn and spring
	Undertake fixed point photography monitoring on 12 sites to provide a visual record of landscape and change over time including views into and from the AONB	Take photographs from 12 sites twice during 2011/12.	●	On target.
VAP 8	Collect bi-annual data from 15 visitor counters installed through the Quantock Hills and disseminate information to	Information collected, processed and disseminated. Information in format to	●	First collection missed. Next due August 2011. This should not

	partners	be used as evidence in funding bids		create issues but will mean reporting will be delayed.
	Provide support to the 1SW off-road cycling project with officer time for the collection of local data and input into route description as a visitor management tool	Officer time allocated and routes data vetted and agreed by AONB	●	Surveys planned Sept 2011.
EAP 7	Owls Schools Project delivery. A project which will raise the importance of the various Quantock habitats to owls and other raptors based on the recent monitoring of the Long Eared Owl.	10 local school visits. 8 volunteers trained to assist delivery of education of project	●	X number of volunteers trained. School visits due September 2011.
VAP 1	Engage with event organisers to ensure notification of events occurring on the hills. Offer advice to ensure minimal adverse impact from events to the landscape, tranquillity and natural environment of the Quantock Hills	Creation of events database. Event monitoring information available through website	●	Events database created. Information not on website
VAP 2	Ensure on the ground presence during busy periods to engage visitors and provide information.	24 days patrol throughout year, with volunteer involvement	●	12 patrols undertaken in report period. On target
VAP 5	Completion of flytipping database with hotspots provided to local authorities and negotiate a enhanced level of service to ensure waste is cleaned quickly	Database finalised and sent to local authorities. Agreement from local authorities to clear flytipping	●	Database up to date. Further work to pull out data for local authorities
ARAP 4	Limit vehicle damage to hilltop tracks through engagement with user groups.	Continued erosion monitoring project. Access agreement in place with main user groups	●	Progress made with report submitted. Further work planning required.
CORE DUTIES				
H&S	Annual risk assessment reviews, instigate new H&S procedures in line with best practice. Audits of promoted routes and carry out safety works (VAP 6)		●	Promoted route auditing review complete. H&S assessment due August 2011
Finance	Undertake finance monitoring and provide reports in various formats to partners, hosts and grant giving organisations		●	¼ reports to DEFRA & reporting to SCC
Support Activities	Undertake a range of support activities such as answering enquiries, filing, procurement etc		●	
Line Mgt	1-1 management meetings, annual PRaD meetings staff management		●	

Appendix A2: Quantock Hills AONB Service – Mth 2 Expenditure

Expenditure	2011 12	Exp	%
Salaries	160,619	27,630	17.2%
Training et al	2,000	341	17.1%
Electricity	200	11	5.4%
Rates	900	187	20.8%
Rent of Room	8,645	761	8.8%
Water Charges	400	0	0.0%
Car allowance	4,300	140	3.3%
Hired Transport	0	0	#DIV/0!
Travel costs	500	182	36.4%
Vehicle costs - Fuel	3,340	269	8.0%
Vehicle costs - Insurance	1,150	490	42.6%
Vehicle costs - Maintenance	1,820	535	29.4%
Vehicle costs - Lease	7,786	7,824	100.5%
Equipment et al	6,530	621	9.5%
Literature & Pubs	1,200	0	0.0%
shows & Exhib	3,200	0	0.0%
Clothing & Uniform	150	0	0.0%
R & D	7,000	800	11.4%
Advertising Staff Vac	0	0	#DIV/0!
Photocopying	700	111	15.8%
Stationary	1,500	153	10.2%
Postage	300	0	0.0%
Telephones	1,300	35	2.7%
Subs allowance	100	0	0.0%
Interview expenses	0	0	#DIV/0!
Hospitality	700	0	0.0%
Subscriptions	2,250	600	26.7%
Insurance	80	0	0.0%
Cross Service recharge	3,000	3,000	100.0%
TOTAL CORE	£219,671	£43,691	19.9%
Other income			
SCC - Amenity Land	£0	£0	
Mendip Hills AONB	£11,000	£11,000	
FC Contribution	£17,300	£17,300	
Events	£1,000		
Other Core Income	29,300	28,300	96.6%

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee
Author: Iain Porter, Acting AONB Manager **Date:** 22 July 2011
Subject: National Association of AONBs Briefing Paper.

15. Introduction

- a. This paper introduces the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), its role and the relationship with the Quantock Hills AONB JAC. The work of the NAAONB will become increasingly important to individual AONBs and the JAC will need an understanding of the NAAONB to engage effectively in the future.

16. Background

- a. The NAAONB was formed in 1998 as an independent organisation to act on behalf of AONBs in England and Wales. The membership is primarily AONB partnerships and local authorities.
- b. The vision of the NAAONB is to be part of a major national independent body representing those responsible in the management of AONBs. Main areas of work have included:
 - i. internal communications to share good practice.
 - ii. Developing national contacts, such as MPs and members of the house of lords, to ensure a national awareness of AONBs
 - iii. Develop contacts with national bodies such as Natural England and DEFRA in order to promote the awareness and commitment to AONBs
 - iv. Proactively work with government departments and agencies to strengthen policy and practice in pursuit of the purpose of AONBs.
- c. In 2003 the NAAONB became a company limited by guarantee to ensure its independence from national agencies. At this time 2 part-time staff were employed. In 2004 the staff forum merged with the NAAONB which strengthened the aim of the NAAONB in sharing good practice and providing a liaison between protected landscapes at a regional and national level.
- d. Currently the NAAONB employs 2 part-time staff, a CEO and a Communications Manager with support from 2 regional posts.

17. Recent Activity

- a. In recent years the NAAONB has acted as the central voice for AONBs and has released a number of position statements. These have been around such subjects as renewable energy and climate change. The position statements will be drafted before going to all AONBs for comment, amendment and sign off. Position statements can usually be adapted by individual AONBs to add a local context whilst keeping the national perspective.
- b. The NAAONB has run an annual 'training' programme for its members allowing a targeted and relevant approach to issues affecting AONBs. Last year Owen Jones and I attended a training session on non-exchequer funding sources as well as setting up a CIC or trust. As this funding is developed with AONBs in mind it is more relevant (and cheaper) than other training provided.
- c. In providing a central voice the NAAONB will engage on national consultations, such as the Public Forest Estate consultation earlier this year. This has been shown to be an effective way to engage national audiences. The Quantock Hills AONB Service has been an active participant of these consultations and has often commented on NAAONB responses, the latest being the 'Joint Response' to the Natural Environment White Paper. Other consultations this year include the Rural Tourism Action Plan, National Grid's Approach to undergrounding new transmission lines, Natural England's Corporate Plan 2011-15 and the English Biodiversity Strategy.

- d. In 2010 the NAAONB engaged with Natural England and DEFRA to negotiate the transition of sponsorship from Natural England. During this period arms length public bodies such as Natural England were experiencing sever cuts and it was likely that some of these would have been passed onto the AONBs. A move of sponsorship to DEFRA has not removed the cuts but it has spread the cuts over the CSR period.

18. Future Work

- a. The NAAONB is supported, both financially and with staff resource, by AONBs nationally. It is likely that with the increasing workload that the support from the Quantock Hills AONB will need to increase. Currently the AONB Manager and JAC Chairman are involved committing resources for local, regional and national meetings and engaging in the business planning process for the association as well as comment on consultations. Other staff within the team will comment on specific consultations, e.g. National Planning Policy Framework, where appropriate.
- b. The NAAONB AGM is on 14th October and the AONB Manager will feed back on the agreed business plan and the future implications for the Quantock Hills AONB.

Notes:

- The NAAONBs website: www.aonb.org.uk
 - A very useful induction to AONBs is available from the NAAONB website (<http://induction.aonb.org.uk/index.htm>) or hard copies are available from the Quantock Hills AONB Office
 - Copies of 'AONB News' a quarterly information sheet is available from the website or from the Quantock Hills AONB Office.
-

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee
Author: Tim Russell, Senior Ranger **Date:** 22 July 2011
Subject: Rangers Report

1.0 Introduction

Elements of the report will be highlighted as a brief PowerPoint presentation. It covers the period from January to July and includes the Easter and Whitsun school holidays as well as Bank Holidays. Both Rangers have been involved in project work as well as their core duties of habitat and visitor management. The winter period included the coldest December for over 100 years, whilst this report period had the driest April for over 100 years. The dry spring allowed our swaling quota to be met but also meant that the hills were susceptible to some unplanned fires.

2.0 Practical Management

Rangers have been involved in a whole range of practical activities over the report period, including:

Habitat Management:

Swaling

Dry weather during late February and early March allowed us to achieve our annual target of around 60 hectares. Burns were achieved working with a stalwart group of trained volunteers and National Trust colleagues.

Scrub removal

Scrub removal and spraying of sycamore re-growth from cut stumps on Cothelstone Hill has taken place and initial results appear to have been successful.

Access Management:

Volunteers have assisted with maintenance and auditing of promoted routes and other access areas. Recent work has included clearing out the drainage grips on the Easy-Access path up Cothelstone Hill and clearance along the Greenway section between Halsway and Crowcombe and around the restored limekiln in Hawkridge Woods.

3.0 Visitor Management

Interpretation

New information posts have been installed at the major access points at hilltop car parks. These posts have been funded through Natural England's Access Management Grant Scheme. The posts provide important information for the public, highlighting issues such as Lambing Season, fire risk and car park crime.

A new interpretation panel has been installed at the access point to Hurley Beacon as part of the landowners HLS scheme. This describes the archaeology of this important Bronze Age funerary and burial site and includes illustration by Time Team artist Jane Brayne.

Patrols

Rangers have ensured that there has been cover over the holiday periods. This report period has included five Bank Holidays as well as the Easter school holiday. There have been occasions when the hills have been particularly busy. Good Friday and Easter Monday both being particularly popular. Police Community Support Officers have accompanied Rangers and have also followed up anti-social behaviour incidents (including illegal swimming in Triscombe Quarry).

Fly tipping incidents seem to be on the rise in the AONB, with more known incidents happening this year as were recorded for the whole of last year (12 recorded events). This could be due to recent charging introductions for tipping at rubbish/re-cycling centres. Particularly annoying are the old engine oil and old car tyres that are regularly dumped halfway up the road between Cothelstone and Park End. The incidents are being collated by the AONB office and have been reported to the Environment Agency and District Council.

Three unplanned fires were recorded and AONB/National Trust Rangers assisted the Fire Service bringing the May Bank Holiday fire on Woodlands Hill under control. Fortunately the fire was contained fairly rapidly and did not cause too much damage.

4.0 Volunteers

Six new Voluntary Rangers are currently being trained to assist the Rangers with visitor management. This role will be different to the general habitat and access management work as it will focus on interaction with the public.

Volunteers have once again assisted with the Spring Clean litter pick. (See Owen Jones's report for more detail).

5.0 Rangers

As demands from the public increase for access to quality countryside Rangers are constantly trying to balance the 'demands of the hill' with the 'demands of the office' and are increasingly grateful for assistance from our volunteers.

AONB staff have attended two village fetes this season at Nether Stowey and West Monkton. The new gazebo, leaflet stands and information banners proving to be most useful!

Meetings hosted by the Rangers include the bi-annual Police & Conservation Bodies meeting and meetings with Natural England, Quantock Commons Management Group and the first Quantock Hills Access Management Group.

Tim Russell gave a talk to the Watchet Conservation Society and Andy Harris was interviewed for the BBC's Saving Species natural history programme. This interview focussed on the interesting association between Pied Flycatcher numbers and climate change.

Tim Russell attended a one-day seminar called Natural Connections (details in Emma-Jane Preece's report) and led a guided walk for Bristol University's Historic Landscapes field trip at Halsway Manor.

Guided walks for the public as part of the AONB 2011 Events Programme so far include: Dawn Chorus walks, Discovering Wildlife, Family Bush Craft, Nightjar Watching and Jurassic Coast walks.

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

Author: Owen Jones, Volunteer Coordinator

Date: 22 July 2011

Subject: Volunteers

1. Whilst the AONB Service looks to develop the volunteer roles it offers it also continues to value the work of the established groups and individuals already involved. Since the last Joint Advisory Committee the AONB has had a change in personnel of the full time volunteer and has established a new group of volunteer rangers.
2. **Quantock Countryside Volunteers.** The main group of volunteers have been very busy in this period from February 2011. They have been instrumental in helping with the swaling that took place on the Hills in March, which without them would struggle to happen. The volunteers have also been busy helping with nightjar surveys, the annual deer count as well as being involved with SDF projects and carrying out site maintenance at Cothelstone Hill.
3. **Full-time Volunteer.** After nearly 9 months in the role of FTV, Jen Lynch has now moved on to a paid position in the environmental sector located in Wales. She has however continued to be involved with helping Andy Harris with bird ringing and mapping boxes using the GPS unit. Her replacement, Tori Kirk, has now been in place since May and is starting to develop a good understanding of the Hills. All the team have been involved with helping to provide a varied and interesting work programme including gaining experience with planning issues and assessment, helping develop additions to guided walks and collating records from previous year's surveys and audits.
4. **Estates Team.** These individuals have been busy in recent months helping to mow and strim the main car parks on the Hills keeping them tidy and useable. They have also been involved with auditing the fence lines on Cothelstone Hill, removing tree guards and installing information posts at various key locations throughout the Quantocks.
5. **Volunteer Rangers.** As part of the continual development of the services that we offer we recently identified the role of volunteer rangers to help interact with the public and raise the profile of the Quantocks. A poster to advertise the position was positioned at the main sites and we received a good number of applicants. After interviewing the potential candidates we have appointed 6 people in this 'pilot year' project. With help from Tim and Andy, the volunteer rangers are getting introduced to the key sites of the Hills and will look to be visible on the ground by the summer holidays.
6. **Future Progress.** Since the new financial year my role of volunteer coordinator has changed slightly and the position is now split with the Mendip Hills AONB Unit. Whilst my time allocated with the Quantocks has decrease, I am still looking at opportunities for volunteers to be involved with the AONB Service and would welcome any suggestions from members.

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

Author: Emma-Jane Preece, Landscape Planning Officer **Date:** 22 July 2011

Subject: Landscape Planning Officer Report

This report covers the period from January to June 2011 - providing a brief progress report on some of the main areas of work undertaken by the Landscape Planning Officer. Emma-Jane continues to work 15 hours/week for the Quantock Hills AONB Service.

1. Update on Hinkley Point C

- 1.1 Following on from the detailed Stage 2 consultation, EDF launched an additional consultation phase to deal with a wealth of comments from Stage 2. This further consultation phase was called Stage 2 Update – ‘Update on and Proposed Changes to the Preferred Proposals’ and ran until the end of March 2011. EDF dealt with issues raised during Stage 2 by speaking directly to the Landscape Planning Officer and through invitations to attend specific landscape-based meetings. Emma-Jane attended two meetings – during March and April to discuss changes to Landscape Proposals and how this information will be presented in the Environmental Statement being submitted to the IPC. Subsequently she has been asked to review the final version of the Landscape and Visual Impact chapter and is meeting with Chris Mayes of Natural England on 25th July and 1st August to undertake the review and submit any final comments to EDF before the final application is submitted. This information will be shared with Somerset County Council.
- 1.2 Emma-Jane has also submitted comments to West Somerset Council regarding EDF’s application for site preparation works and to the Marine Management Organisation in respect of the application for a Jetty at the Hinkley Point C site. The AONB Service’s comments have stated an objection to both proposals. A Public Inquiry has been called by the Secretary of State for the Department of Energy and Climate, in respect of the Proposed Jetty.
- 1.3 The AONB Service has also been consulted on possible mitigation and compensation funding being sought through a possible Sc106 agreement. A range of landscape-based projects have been put forward for consideration.

*The IPC is the independent body that decides applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

2. Planning Policy Consultation

2.1 During the 2010-2011 period, the AONB Service has consulted on:

- West Somerset Council’s Core Strategy Options Paper (April 2010);
- Sedgemoor District Council’s Core Strategy (Nov 2010) – joint response made by the Quantock Hills AONB Service and Mendip Hills AONB Unit; and
- West Somerset Council and Sedgemoor District Council’s Hinkley Point C Development Supplementary Planning Document (April 2011).

3. Conferences and Training Courses

- 3.1 Emma-Jane attended a national conference in March. This was entitled **Natural Connections (achieving more with less across rural and urban landscapes)** and covered a range of issues including landscape-scale projects, green infrastructure, integrated management, big-society and joined-up thinking. This was very useful one-day conference and in particular one very inspirational speaker spoke about 'Do It Yourself – local people taking the initiative'. The speaker, from a local community organisation, spoke about her local action group (BWAG – Bredhurst Woodland Action Group) which was set up to restore and preserve a 600 acre area of ancient woodland, surrounded by chalk grassland on the North Downs. Starting with only 6 people in 2005, with the aim of stopping the destruction of the woodland (it was subject to fly-tipping on an industrial scale as well as anti-social behaviour such as illegal off-roading), the organisation is now an approved charity, has significant support with over 300 members and has managed to secure £85,000 from various sources. I mention this example as the conference was entitled 'doing more with less' and this was an excellent example of the 'big society' already in practice and being hugely successful in gathering support and monies for the purpose of landscape protection and management.

For more information you can go to www.bwag.org.uk

- 3.2 On May 11th, Emma-Jane attended the annual Planning and Transport Seminar organised by Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. One of the key topics for discussion was the need to use an appropriate level of highways infrastructure and signage within a protected landscape. Following this seminar and the recent addition of on-road incongruous SLOW markings up and down Buncombe Hill, the AONB Service is keen to engage with Somerset Highways to discuss a sensitive approach to highways treatment within the Quantock Hills. Emma-Jane has discussed the possibility of organising a collaborative planning and transport seminar for the Somerset AONBs and this is under consideration.

4. Collaborative working

- 4.1 On 4th April Emma-Jane met with Lisa Turner (Community Planning Officer for the Blackdown Hills AONB) and Jonathan Richards (Planning Liaison Officer for the Mendip Hills AONB) to discuss issues affecting the AONBs but predominantly focussed on the issue of micro or small-scale renewables and on large scale solar pv development. A copy of the AONB Service's Position Statement on Large Scale Solar PV Development will be made available to the JAC at the committee meeting on 22nd July.
- 4.2 The AONB Service joined forces with the Mendip Hills AONB Unit to consult on two planning applications for large scale wind energy schemes. The turbines would be located on the open and exposed Somerset Levels – at East Huntspill and West Huntspill and equidistant between the two protected landscapes of the Quantock Hills AONB and the Mendip Hills AONB. Both organisations are concerned about the impact of these very large turbines on the visual interrelationship between these two nationally designated landscapes and the quality of the views to and from the each of the AONBs (independently of one another). These applications are still under consideration at Sedgemoor District Council.

5. Planning Application Consultation

- 5.1** Responses have been made to a number of planning application consultation requests. Colin Blundel continues to work with the AONB Service in respect of Development Management whilst some of Emma-Jane's time is committed to Hinkley Point C consultation. Colin's contract will come to an end on 31st July 2011 at which time the Landscape Planning Officer and AONB Manager will need to review the AONB Service's time commitment to commenting on planning applications. This is due to the need to move forward with developing our more strategic work and guidance, in particular the Landscape Character Assessment review which is due to start in earnest during August.
- 5.1** Katy Coate continues to provide excellent support in ensuring applications are being monitored and recorded for the purpose of extrapolating trends and figures later in the year (and in subsequent years).

6. Website

- 6.1** Emma-Jane has worked with Georgie Grant and Katy Coate to ensure all planning application responses are now available via the Quantock Hills website. This is a more efficient way of allowing organisations and individuals to gain instant access to AONB Service comments.

7. Meetings

- 7.1** Emma-Jane attended the South West Protected Landscape Forum planning meeting on 24th May at Dartmoor National Park offices at Bovey Tracey. Attended by other Planning and Landscape officers from south west protected landscapes, the meeting tackled issues including Planning Reform, the Localism Bill and using the planning system and developer contributions to fund off-site mitigation works.

Recommendations:

1. The JAC notes the report.