

Silver Washed Fritillary © Robin Stamp

Quantock Hills National Landscape

Annual Report 2025 - 2026

Chairs Forward



Last year saw the completion of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. This ambitious project launched in 2020 with a budget of £2.8 million and immediately ran into the Covid pandemic. The project was led by Bill Jenman, who managed to bring together a strong team, and together they achieved great success. The standout successes were community engagement, reaching more isolated and urban communities of Taunton and Bridgwater; and archaeology, which included some really well supported and revealing digs.

Last year also saw the completion of the Management Plan review, a major piece of work involving many partners and public consultations. This is an important document, setting out clear objectives for the period 2026-2031 which will guide targets and priorities over the next five years.

The first management plan had been written by Ken Brown, who led the Countryside Section of County Hall for some years. He won an award for this, and it was Ken who inspired and argued for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be taken more seriously, and even funded! Ken died in February 2026, having left an indelible mark on this most special part of England.

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) has continued to receive Government funding, with confirmation that the scheme will be extended to March 2029. This is most welcome, supporting small scale projects within the National Landscape that are good for nature, climate, place and people. It has proved to be particularly helpful for smaller farmers who are reluctant to commit to longer term Countryside Stewardship schemes.
As I write this, we are in the midst of another heat wave, the third this summer and the second drought in two years. This puts huge pressure on farmers, impacting on yields of both grass and crops, at a time when farming profitability is slim. My greatest worry is a wildfire, which for a small area like the Quantock Hills would be devastating, impacting not only the wildlife but the entire landscape.

And finally, some good news. It would appear that DEFRA's computer system will shortly allow commoners to apply for Countryside Stewardship, a vital source of funding for the ongoing management of the special heathlands of the Quantock Hills.

Hugh Warmington (Chair of the Joint Advisory Committee)

New Management Plan for the Quantock Hills

In March the Quantock Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2026 – 2031 was adopted by Somerset Council. The review and production of the Management Plan was the most significant iteration since management plans became statutory for National Landscapes back in 2000 with a new requirement to set targets for the area.

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2026–2031 is the statutory framework for conserving, enhancing and managing the Quantock Hills over the next five years. It follows updated Natural England guidance (April 2024) and responds to strengthened statutory duties introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.

The Plan is structured around four themes - **Place, Nature, Climate and People -** each containing context, guiding principles, aims, objectives, current status, targets and policies.

Vision (or what do we want the Quantock Hills to be in 30 years)

The long-term vision describes a Quantock Hills where:

- Nature is restored and connected.
- The area is climate-resilient.
- Farming, commoning and forestry are productive and sustainable.
- Historic and cultural heritage is protected.
- Communities are engaged and thriving.
- Access, enjoyment and sustainable tourism flourish without harming natural beauty.



Identifying the Special Qualities

The Plan identifies the elements that make the Quantock Hills nationally important, including:

- **Dramatic sandstone upland plateau**, steep combes and extensive views.
- **Internationally important habitats**, including sessile oakwoods, heathlands and acidic flushes.
- **Rich historic environment** spanning from the Neolithic to modern times.
- **Distinctive settlements and strong community identity.**
- **Cultural inspiration**, from Coleridge and Wordsworth to contemporary artists.
- **Tranquillity, dark skies and exceptional access** (3,000ha Open Access land, 242 km of rights of way).

Place

The Quantock Hills is a highly diverse, historic and tranquil landscape, shaped by geology, land use and settlement patterns. The new plan promotes a Landscape Character Approach to underpin management— where understanding distinct local character enables informed decision making.

The landscape delivers wide ecosystem services, including:

- Provisioning: food, timber, water
- Regulating: flood control, carbon storage, pollination
- Cultural: heritage, recreation, sense of place
- Supporting: biodiversity, soils, nutrient cycling

Land management (farming, forestry, commoning) has shaped the landscape over centuries but faces challenges including, farm consolidation and intensification, declining commoning viability and soil degradation risks. However opportunities though transition to regenerative practices and new funding models can support economically viable land use.

Under the Place theme the Plan aims to conserve and enhance landscape character, natural resources and ecosystem services, Support sustainable farming and forestry, protect geological and historic assets and ensures development respects local character and setting.

Current Status:

- Water quality: poor overall (73% rivers poor, 27% moderate).
- Dark skies: degrading at edges due to nearby development (Taunton, Bridgwater, Hinkley Point C).
- 45% of land in agriculture; 76 farm holdings.
- Agri-environment scheme coverage declining (37% of area in 2023).
- 259 heritage assets; 8 at risk

Targets:

- Nature-friendly farming:
  → 80% of land managers managing ≥10% of land for nature by 2030.
- Heritage:
  → Zero assets on the “at risk” register by 2050.

The Plan establishes that “Place” is about managing change carefully balancing conservation of landscape character and heritage, sustainable land management, economic vitality and controlled, landscape-sensitive development. It provides the core spatial and planning framework for the whole Management Plan.


Aisholt Common from Middle Hill

Nature

The Quantock Hills support high biodiversity within a small area, including: three SSSIs (27% of area) and one SAC. Within the National Landscape priority habitats cover 34% and woodland 32% (11.6% ancient), considerably above the national average. Monitoring has identified 35 priority species live and breed in the Quantock Hills and the assemblage of heathland bird species have led to the designation of the heathland core as an Important Bird Area.

The landscape plays a strategic role in ecological connectivity, linking habitats across Somerset and neighbouring landscapes. Despite its importance, nature is in decline, driven by agricultural intensification (major historic habitat losses), development and habitat fragmentation, pollution and poor water quality, climate change and invasive species. This can be seen through habitat loss (e.g. 47% decline in species-rich grassland, 85% in heathland since 1960) and climate impacts (drought, flooding, wildfire, shifting species timing), increase prevalence of tree diseases (ash dieback, Phytophthora ramorum).

Current Status:

- SSSI condition: 78% favourable or recovering (down from 91% in 2017)
- SSSI condition: Favourable improved (16% → 47.5%)
- SSSI condition: (2025) 25% of features favourable
- SSSI condition: (2025) 20% of features with actions on track
- 34% of National Landscape land cover is priority habitat
- 32% of National Landscape land cover is woodland, of which 77% is actively managed

Targets (to 2042 unless stated)

- Habitat creation/restoration 1,328 ha (≈66 ha/year).
- 80% of SSSIs in favourable condition
- 60% of SSSI features “on track” by 2028
- Maintain and expand habitat outside protected sites
- Nature-friendly farming - 80% of land managers on ≥10% of land by 2030.

The Plan set out a nature recovery strategy focused on reversing biodiversity decline by scaling up habitat restoration and landscape connectivity, supporting nature-friendly farming and woodland management and tackling key pressures (climate, deer, pollution, fragmentation). It aligning with national targets (30 by 30, EIP, PLTOF) apportioning actions locally allowing partners and stakeholders to develop delivery plans. The Plan suggests the use of Champion Species to engage people through flagship species and partnerships and emphasises a shift from site-based conservation to integrated, landscape-scale ecosystem recovery.

Climate

Climate change is identified as a major and accelerating threat, with UK temperatures already ~+1.2°C above pre industrial levels. Key projected impacts for the Quantock Hills include Hotter, drier summers; warmer, wetter winters, Increased winter flooding, summer droughts and wildfire risk, sea level rise and coastal erosion. It is anticipated that these changes will lead to shifts in species distribution and timing (e.g. migratory mismatch), rising pests and diseases (e.g. ash dieback, Phytophthora) with water resources and habitats will face increasing stress and variability impacting all land uses, especially farming and forestry.

The landscape of the Quantock Hills also provides critical solution in climate mitigation, through storage of carbon in its soils, woodlands, heaths and grasslands. Through nature based solutions the National Landscape will provide adaptation opportunities especially in respect of flood management, cooling and species resilience.

Current Status:



- Total emissions within the Quantock Hills reduced 22.3 $ktCO_2e$ (2005) → 10.8 $ktCO_2e$ (2022)



- Estimated total soil carbon: ~1.85 million tonnes



- Annual carbon sequestration: ~−9,980 tC/year

Targets



- Net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050



- Peat restoration: 14.87 ha restored by 2050 (no net loss)



- Woodland cover: +3% (≈186 ha new woodland)

The Quantock Hills is both highly vulnerable to climate change, and central to the solution through land management and nature-based approaches. The plan prioritises protecting existing carbon-rich habitats, scaling up nature-based solutions and integrating actions for climate, nature, and farming.

People

The Quantock Hills are a living, working rural landscape with strong cultural identity rooted in farming, forestry and commoning. Communities are small, dispersed and rural, with a population of roughly 2,500–8,000 (depending on boundary definition). The area supports a local economy based on small businesses, especially agriculture and tourism and strong community pride and volunteering culture.

The Quantock Hills attracts significant recreation activity with ~700,000 annual visits making use of the extensive access land and rights of way network.

The Plan has four broad aims for the People theme including supporting a **thriving, diverse rural economy** that supports jobs while conserving landscape qualities, enables communities with **skills and knowledge** to conserve and enhance the landscape, **supporting resilient, connected communities** with access to services and active involvement and **provide High-quality, inclusive access** to nature while enhancing **health and wellbeing** benefits from the landscape and supporting sustainable tourism that **does not harm natural beauty**.

Current Status:

- ~205 businesses, mostly micro/small
- ~30% in agriculture/forestry
- Ageing population:
  - ~37% over 65
  - ~13.5% under 18
- Extensive network:
  - ~241 km rights of way
  - ~30% open access land

People are central to landscape stewardship, and in recognising this the Plan prioritises, increasing people's connection with nature, supporting strong rural communities, deliver health, economic and social benefits while ensuring the landscape's special qualities are protected. However, the Plan acknowledges that there are challenges including managing visitor pressure and impact on tranquillity, ensuring equitable access for all groups, ability to support rural services and younger populations, how to maintain traditional skills and land practices and adapting to demographic and economic change.


Disabled Ramblers


Young Rangers on Kilve Beach

Delivering for Nature

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team delivers nature recovery through three main mechanisms, direct delivery of habitat improvements works, provision of grants to allow landowners to undertake habitat improvement and research and monitoring ensuring land management decisions are well informed and have the best outcomes for habitats and species.

Direct land management.
The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team is unusual nationally in that it has staff and volunteers that undertake direct land management. This includes two sites, Cothelstone Hill and New Stowey Farm, where the team have management control, as well as private landholdings where the team will support landowners to enhance or create priority habitat.
Over the past 12 months the team - staff and volunteers - have undertaken coppicing, scrub control, hedge management and tree planting across a number of sites. Much of this work is required to be undertaken on an annual basis to ensure the habitat e.g. woodland, remains in good condition. Other land management this year has included:

New Stowey Farm - Owned by Somerset Council and near Nether Stowey, this 45Ha farm came back in hand in 2023 with Somerset Council breaking the farm up to sell some for development.
Over the past year the grazing on the farm, undertaken by a graizer working to the farm plan, increased with more of the farm grazed through a mob grazing system.



Over the coming years works will include tree planting, orchard and wood pasture creation, grassland enhancement, stream restoration, hedge management and grassland enhancement. In 2025 the farm will also host the Land Management Skills Scheme, which will provide training and experience in land management, such as fencing, tree planting, hedge laying to young people and those who are unemployed.

Habitat and species monitoring
The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team and volunteers lead on a number of monitoring programmes including butterfly, bat, dormice, pied flycatcher, nightjar and deer. Other site specific surveys, usually to support the development of land management plans, have included bat, butterfly and flora, e.g. grassland species. This monitoring work would not be possible without the immense support of our volunteers who put in hundreds of hours each season, often at unsocial hours, supporting or leading on the various surveys that are undertaken.


Butterfly


Bat


Dormouse


Pied Flycatcher

Delivering for Nature

Butterfly Surveys

Volunteer led surveys first started in 2014 and have been carried out annually ever since on two sites, at Cothelstone Hill and Fyne Court. The surveys are undertaken weekly between 1st April and 30th September, with results sent to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme as well as the landowners. The surveys are carried out along a set route at each site, known as a transect, each of which is about 1.5 miles and takes about an hour or two depending on time of year. Each transect is divided into different sections to reflect differences in habitat type, eg meadow, woodland or heathland . At Cothelstone there are 4 divisions and at Fyne Court there are 13.

Surveys are usually undertaken with two people, or even three at the busiest time of year, which tends to be mid- summer. Numbers of butterflies seen on the surveys can vary significantly from none at the start of the year to over 500 per survey during the peak.

For the volunteers flexibility in when to undertake surveys is key. Butterflies are incredible sensitive to variations in the weather, ideally requiring sunny days with little or no wind, no rain, and temperatures above 12 degrees. Outside of these parameters and very few butterflies will fly.

During each survey 2-3 volunteers walk the set route recording all the butterflies seen within a 5-metre radius, both numbers and species. At the height of summer this can be extremely busy. Of the 60 odd species in the UK, it would be normal to record around 25 on the transects over a full season.

2025-26 In summary:

Fyne Court

- A count was recorded every week throughout the season (volunteers).
- Total counted was 4,235 butterflies of which 2,564 were Meadow Browns with 22 species seen.

Cothelstone Hill

- A count was recorded every week throughout the season (volunteers).
- Total counted was 1,664 butterflies with Gatekeepers are the kings of Cothelstone with 359 counted and a total of 22 species counted.
- Green Hairstreak Butterflies seen for the first time.

Species distribution

Species	Cothelstone Hill	Fyne Court	Species	Cothelstone Hill	Fyne Court
Small/Essex Skipper	✓	✓	Painted Lady	✓	✓
Large Skipper	✓	✓	Small Tortoiseshell	✓	✓
Brimstone	✓	✓	Peacock	✓	✓
Large White	✓	✓	Comma	✓	✓
Small White	✓	✓	Silver-washed Fritillary	✓	✓
Marbled White	✓		Speckled Wood	✓	✓
Green-veined White	✓	✓	Gatekeeper		✓
Orange Tip	✓	✓	Wall	✓	
Small Copper	✓	✓	Meadow Brown	✓	✓
Common Blue	✓	✓	Ringlet	✓	✓
Holly Blue	✓	✓	Small Heath		✓
Red Admiral	✓	✓	Green Hairstreak	✓	✓



Gatekeeper



Meadow Brown



Green Hairstreak

Delivering for Nature

Defra – Capital Grant funding

During 2025/26 Defra launched a Capital Grant fund available to National Landscape and National Parks which could fund activity that –

- Delivered actions achieving or working towards 30by30 (The UK has committed to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (30by30), to support the global 30by30 target agreed at the UN Biodiversity Summit (COP15) in 2022.
- Met Invest to Save criteria, whereby in-year capital activity would provide future income generation or long-term savings in usual activity.

While the capital funding pot was able to fund activity across a number of themes there were a number of criteria which made project selection very important such as funding for 30by30 activity needing to meet the 3 criteria of (a) purpose of the site, with achieving conservation objectives being the main purpose (b) protection for at least 20-years such as the landowners having legally binding charitable aims and objectives or having entered into a conservation covenant and (c) Management, that there is a appropriate management plan or schedule to achieve the conservation objectives. The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team undertook the following activity:



Invest to Save: Purchase of workshop / hospitality unit to be installed at New Stowey Farm, allowing volunteers and external groups a safe and welcoming environment. The unit has a small welfare area and storage facilities and coupled with the composting toilet also installed in 2025, allow use of the site by those who require more amenities, opening the site to a wider and more diverse audience. Capital Grants also funded installation of gates increasing site security as well as easier access.

30by30: Under the 30by30 theme a number of projects were funded including grassland enhancement at two National Trust sites - West Hill and Fyne Court – with ground preparation and reseeding. Fencing was undertaking with water infrastructure installation at New Stowey Farm to enable mob grazing with the aim of enhancing the grassland to species rich status. In total this moves 85Ha of grassland into more favourable habitat status. Two smaller pieces of work included the purchase of a cut & collect flail, to be used by the National Landscape Team and other farmers within the Quantock Hills. This machinery allows grassland management where there is a requirement to remove nutrients and is particularly useful moving improved pasture to species-rich grassland. The final piece of work was research into the creation of a deer management cooperative with specific guidance into the setting up of a cooperatively managed deer larder.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

Year 5 of the FiPL programme saw the delivery of several innovative programmes within our farming community. The years saw an upsurge in the delivery of projects relating to orchard planting, both reinstating traditional ones and the planting of new in order to establish and develop local economic activity.

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Quantock Hills National Landscape

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

Following the pattern of previous years FiPL applications delivered primarily for nature and climate with many applicants investing their energy in tree and hedge planting meeting nature recovery objectives.

Summary

- **22 projects supported, with 41 individuals involved, meaning that in some cases multiple farmers and landowners partnered on projects.**
- **14 projects delivering climate actions.**
- **14 projects delivering a greater area of wildlife rich habitat.**
- **12 projects which facilitated greater connectivity between habitats.**
- **12 projects helped existing habitats to be better managed for biodiversity.**
- **12 projects included tree planting with 344 planted during 25/26 and 2,328 standard trees planted since the FiPL programme began.**
- **3,090ha of wildlife habitats created, restored, and managed for biodiversity in25/26.**
- **102 volunteer days supporting project delivery.**

In February 2026 we were excited to hear that the FiPL programme has been extended by 3-years now running until March 2029. With assurance of the continuation of the programme the Team have been engaging with farmers and landowners to assess opportunities to add value to previous schemes as well as explore new projects. Having a funded programme for three years provides opportunity for farmers and land managers to develop more ambitious multi-year projects with the Team to deliver more for nature, climate, people and place.



hedging and fencing project

Farming in Protected Landscapes

Case Study - Purchase of a low-disturbance subsoiler, liquid application nozzles and associated equipment to enable the use of biological inoculants and fertilisers in the seeding zone
Keirles Farm, Thurloxton
QH4070: £10,888.74

The applicants have been zero-till farming since 1998 and are one of the local pioneers in regenerative techniques. They plant a wide range of crops on the farm from the classic arable crops, forage and cover crops through to maize, sunflowers and pumpkins. They already owned a tractor-mounted tank and pump which they wanted to use as the basis for a liquid application system.

A liquid applicator system allows for the use of biological fertilisers and inoculants such as molasses, humic acids, and compost extracts which improve plant growth, promote rooting - and therefore improve crop resilience from drought, flood and pest attacks - and further the family's mission of growing a wide range of crops sustainably and carbon-negatively. The kit also enables one-pass drilling into grass leys, which dramatically reduces the soil impact of maize growing - no erosion and much less damage at harvest as the soil is kept firm and bound by roots.

To increase the value of the project the applicant has added a low-disturbance subsoiler, which is used ahead of the precision drill to create narrow, loosened slots for the drill to follow.

In order to profitably grow maize in the UK, starter fertilisers are required. Traditionally, granular Di-Ammonium Phosphate would be placed alongside the seed, which can be environmentally damaging and renders the plant dependant on further chemical fertiliser inputs as these fertilisers inhibit the plant from forming mycorrhizal associations with soil fungi. By using biological products such as compost extracts, humic acid, rhizobacteria and carbon sources such as molasses, the need for fertilisers can be mitigated.



The soil around Broomfield is particularly steep, and vulnerable to erosion. By growing crops in a regenerative system it is possible to reduce runoff and erosion as the soil is more effectively bound by roots and fungal hyphae. Along with the reduced disturbance to the soil, the system also increase the soil organic matter, sequestering CO2 The business also contract-drills maize and pumpkins to local farmers, and are spreading awareness and use of regenerative techniques to 'traditional' farmers around the Quantock Hills.

A further benefit of reducing tillage depth is protection of underground historical features. Studies of aerial photography and LiDAR have identified numerous cropmark enclosures in the Quantock Hills with particular concentrations around the southern foothills. Few of these have been archaeologically investigated but most are broadly thought to originate from the Iron Age or Romano-British periods. One such crop mark, which is in a field cropped by the applicant, was excavated by the QLPS in 2023.



The feature was found to be unusual in being almost perfectly circular and of considerable size, measuring approximately 93 metres in diameter. This has led to the suggestion that the site could be that of a henge, an earthen enclosure, dating from around 3000 BC to 2000 BC, during the Neolithic and early Bronze Age, showing that use of the no till systems provides a real-life benefit across many outcomes.

Delivering for Climate

During 2025 the team undertook woodland management at Cothelstone Hill as part of the approved Woodland Management Plan. The woodland has been badly affected by Ash dieback (Hymenoscyphus fraxineus) since 2015. Ash dieback is a highly destructive disease of ash trees and is caused by a fungus. It can kill young and coppiced ash trees quite quickly, however older trees can resist it for some time. Forestry Commission currently recommend not felling diseased trees. This is because there is good evidence a small proportion will be able to tolerate the ash dieback infection and there is also the possibility that a proportion of ash trees can become diseased but then recover to good health.

Diseased ash trees are weaker and prone to dropping limbs and branches and, in extreme cases, having their trunks shattering and crashing to the ground. Due to these potential risks ash trees near to public areas such as roadsides, car parks or rights of way are managed differently. This can include increased monitoring of diseased trees, works on the trees to remove potentially dangerous branches or even felling diseased trees.



Ash clearance area replanted



Ash dieback lesion

This is the case in one compartment of the woodland, where ash trees adjacent to a public footpath have become more impacted by Ash dieback with some being blown over in recent winter storms. During September and October contractors felled the remaining 300 ash trees adjacent to the footpath and removed the timber, clearing the site ready for replanting. The rangers with support from volunteers from the Team then planted the site with 275 trees including hazel, oak, field maple and rowan. By planting a mix of native broadleaved trees, the nature value of the woodland will increase as will the resilience of the woodland to potential future tree pests and diseases.

Delivering for People

Engagement

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team have delivered walks and events for over 30 years, however with the emergence of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme the level of engagement increased one hundredfold. The work of the QLPS in respect of engagement was nationally recognised not only for the increased diversity of inclusive events but also the diversity of the communities the scheme worked with.

The National Landscape Team recognised the importance of this work stream and brought the QLPS Community Engagement and Volunteer Officer into the core team when the QLPS ended in November. This has allowed the learning from the QLPS to start being embedded into the Team's core events and engagement. One of the early successes has been the Month of Mud, a month long series of events held in February 2026, traditionally a quiet month for events.

Month of Mud - 25 new events, 919 people attended, 6 Walk-Leader led events, 11 partnership events (National Trust/RSPCA/Blabbermouth Storytelling), 9.2k social media site visits during period, 348 new follows on social media during period. 5 media appearances (Guardian newspaper online, BBC Radio 4 PM Programme, BBC Radio 2 Jeremy Vine, BBC Somerset two radio appearances, ITV West scheduled but not fulfilled – plus local press, Somerset Gazette/West Somerset Free Press).

Historically, February was known as Solmonath in Old English, which often gets translated as 'Mud Month'. Appropriately then, it was the time of year to make the most of mud. This festival of events during February featured everything from storytelling, hikes, photo walks, welly walks, family-friendly activities, creative craft, workshops, and mud bingo nature activity packs.

The programme of events was then followed by **Lide & Seek** in March, celebrating the windy month and the coming spring, and finally our **April Open**, where all events were free.







Delivering for People

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme

2025 saw the end of the highly successful Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. The scheme which ran for five and a half years with a £2.6m budget delivered 23 projects across three themes of Inspire, Live and Learn. With a wide and diverse base of partners the Scheme engaged with many different audiences, many of whom the National Landscape Partnership had never engaged with before.

It was apparent early in the Scheme that projects delivering on engagement, cultural and historic heritage were not only in demand but also fitted the skill set of the Team. Following the Covid pandemic the appreciation and value of accessing greenspace became apparent and the Scheme was able to provide a significant level of engagement opportunities to communities and groups that would previously not have accessed greenspace. The type, level and opportunities provided through the engagement workstream of the Scheme has been recognised nationally by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and others and forms one of the main elements of the legacy of the Scheme.



Dan and volunteers at Cothelstone Hill

Highlights of the QLPS:

- 5.75 km of hedge planted or restored.
- 140km of hedges surveyed.
- 3,100 woodland trees and shrubs planted.
- Nearly 2,500 young people accessing the Quantock Hills National Landscape
- Over 4,000 other beneficiaries and 600 individual volunteers (>4,000 vol days total).
- Over 300 public events.
- 750 potential new archaeological sites located.
- >20 historic structure restored.
- 12 community Archaeological projects.
- Over 1,000 finds.
- We may have discovered a type of circular enclosure from the late Bronze Age that was previously unknown.

Running a multi-year, multiple million-pound scheme there will always be some things that did not go to plan. At its start in April 2020 the Scheme had to account for the Covid pandemic. Initially this impacted on the scheme startup such as recruitment, process mapping and project partner delivery. Throughout 2020/21 the ability of the Scheme to deliver, especially engagement activities, was tested with many programmes having to be significantly adapted to take account of heath authority restrictions. The Scheme took the opportunity to review its five-year delivery plan adapting the engagement and historic heritage workstream, expanding the amount of activity in these, while recognising that the natural heritage workstream could be delivered through other programmes.

As expected the Scheme provided a number of lessons for the Partnership. The National Lottery Heritage Fund were very demanding at Application stage – did they really want an events programme for 4 years' time? However, it became apparent that they wanted assurance that the Partnership and team had thought it through, in terms of audiences, workload, evidence that our budgets weren't fingers in the air, etc. All that preparation wasn't wasted, even though we later changed many of the details of the programme almost entirely, the aims and objectives set back in 2017 have remained sound. In fairness the National Lottery Heritage Fund have been very flexible and pragmatic once in delivery.



Children smiling doing clay bark art on a Wild Wednesday


Child blowing bubbles at the community mural

Covid obviously had a massive impact just as the Scheme starting, but they have remained supportive throughout. NLHF were truly partners, not just funders.

During the latter part of 2025/26 the National Landscape Team began taking over the legacy elements of the Scheme, with particular emphasis on taking the learning from the engagement work of the Scheme. To aid this Jon Barrett, Community Engagement and Volunteer Officer, moved into the core team, building many of the engagement activities into business as usual.

Delivering for People

Nature Calling

Quantock Nature Calling was an innovative new art programme being held nationally by the National Landscape Association facilitated by Activate Performing Arts. The programme aimed to provide creative ways for people to engage with the countryside on their doorstep, and importantly, invites new audiences to engage with National Landscapes.

Quantock Hills National Landscape and Somerset Art Works developed their Quantock Nature Calling project in partnership to offer a series of creative workshops, led by artist Luan MacDonald, for AfriQuan groups and communities – African families living around the Quantock Hills in Somerset.

Over a period of six months, these creative workshops took place on the hills and at National Trust Coleridge Cottage. Each session invited people to experience nature and explore collective cultural and historical perspectives, celebrating Quantock and African culture. The workshops provided space for connection, community and creativity - an opportunity to learn new skills, meet new people and learn about migratory birds and their significance to Quantock wildlife.



"The workshops bring people together from all walks of life, it's been nice to mix with new people and learn new skills together. It's refreshing being here because it provides relief from my day-to-day life. I felt creative, energised, powerful and really inspired by the sessions." Susan, group member.



The artwork created through this project is touring to 7+ venues around the county in 2026. The artwork was displayed at St Mary's Church North Petherton, National Trust Coleridge Cottage Nether Stowey and Nether Stowey library. We hope that showcasing the beautiful artwork around the area will provide opportunities to open positive dialogue around inclusion, migration and belonging.



"As an artist of Irish/South East Asian descent living in Somerset, I am fascinated by cultural identity as it pertains to belonging, integration and engagement within rural communities and landscapes. The Quantock Nature Calling Project is a unique opportunity to explore and look at the Quantock Hills from perspectives that have historically not been represented."

"Through sharing and learning, we can create new dialogues and ways of seeing; building a deeper understanding of migratory wildlife and its impact and influence, here and beyond the physical boundaries of the Quantock Hills. The workshops aimed to create and share new interpretations and narratives around nature, migration and inclusion, for a group that is not often given a platform or heard, so in itself it has been an important collaboration to counter negative dialogue that has been dominating the public sphere."
Luan MacDonald

To find out more and see the final report visit - www.quantockhills.com/completed-projects/quantock-nature-calling

Delivering for People

Land Management Skills Scheme

During 2025/26 the Land Management Skills Scheme moved to a different delivery model following a review of the first phase. The Team recruited a specific Project Officer to develop and deliver a programme of rural skills training based on six-week courses.

Two sets of courses were developed and run during the autumn / winter of 2025 with one course aimed specifically at young people (16-25 years old) and one for long-term unemployed. The courses included training in basic tool use, manual handling and first aid, with participants getting their Emergency first aid certificate as well as rural skills such as hedging, coppicing and tree planting.



Tree planting smiles



course participant with volunteer learning hedgelaying

In total seven participants undertook the courses with very positive feedback however it was apparent that the courses were viewed by those making referrals and participants as more akin to nature and wellbeing rather than purely skills training, with many participants requiring significant additional support. Evaluation showed that if the courses and participants continued as they had on the first tranche then additional staff resources would be required to ensure safeguarding and participant wellbeing were maintained. Given the limited budget the decision was made to adapt the delivery model for the project and relaunch in 2026.

Access 4 All

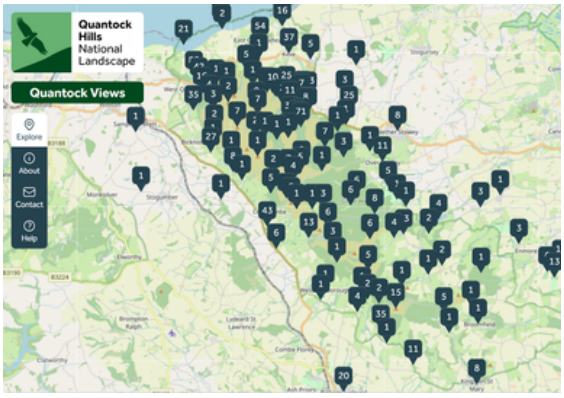
In the fourth year of Defra Access4All funding the Team delivered a number of project, both physical infrastructure improvements and digital information enhancements.

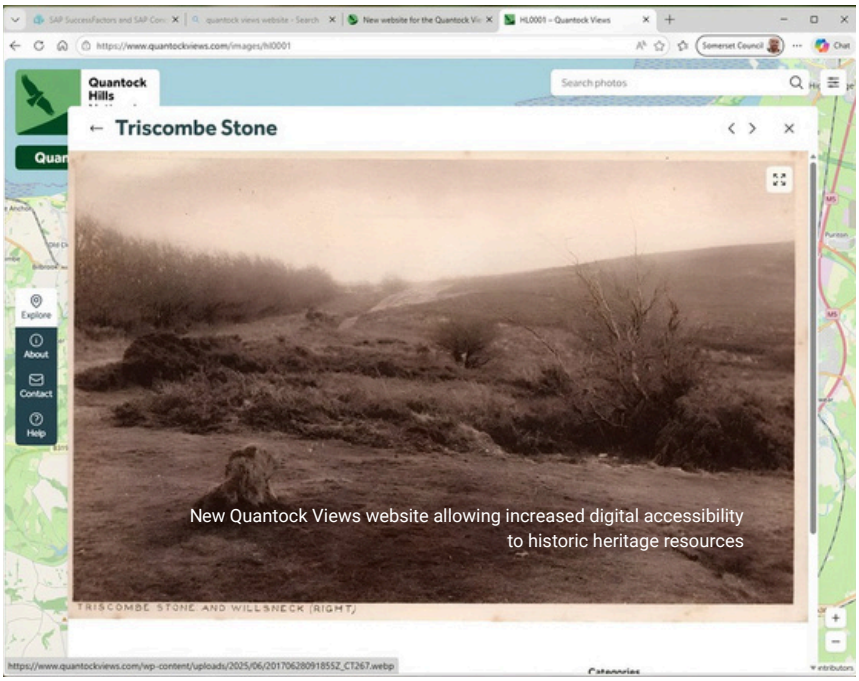


New resources allowing volunteers to engage with visitors at key sites

Information Points – funding for resources such as information and engagement leaflets to allow volunteer rangers to undertake ‘pop-up’ information points with volunteers undertaking 8 sessions at key car parks across the Quantock Hills. This increased opportunity for the Team to engage, especially with family groups.

Interpretation – This project included digital and physical information enhancement. The project created the Quantock Views website, enhancing access to the historic heritage of the Quantock Hills. 16 Interpretation panels were produced including 3 reconstruction drawings enhancing the understanding of the landscape for visitors and users of the Quantock Hills.





New Quantock Views website allowing increased digital accessibility to historic heritage resources

Track enhancement – regrading of 260m of tracks allowing buggies and tramper type wheelchair access across Quantock Common to key viewpoint.

Car parks – installation and surface work at Holford village green car park to create disable parking bays at a key visitor car park.

Fyne Court – Installation of three bridges increasing access for buggies and tramper type wheelchairs opening up two promoted routes across the site.


New wider bridges with kickboards and handrails increasing accessibility of promoted routes at Fyne Court


New accessible toilet at New Stowey Farm

Site enhancement – Installation of accessible composting toilet at New Stowey Farm allowing more groups to be able to use the site for land management, nature and wellbeing and volunteering activities.

New leaflets aimed at young people increasing understand of the special wildlife of the Quantock Hills.



Spot the leaflets

Delivering for Place

Quantock Botanical Arts Project

In 2024 the South West Society of Botanical Artists approached the Quantock Hills National Landscape Team with a proposal for an arts project, following successful projects in the New Forest and in other Protected Landscapes. The project would concentrate on the flora of the Quantock Hills, celebrating the special habitats including heathland, woodland, farmland and the coast. The timing was perfect, as having just produced the Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan, the Team was aware that the understanding and promotion of flora and fungi was behind that of the fauna of the National Landscape.



Illustration of Gorse and Green hairstreak butterflies
© Angie Girling

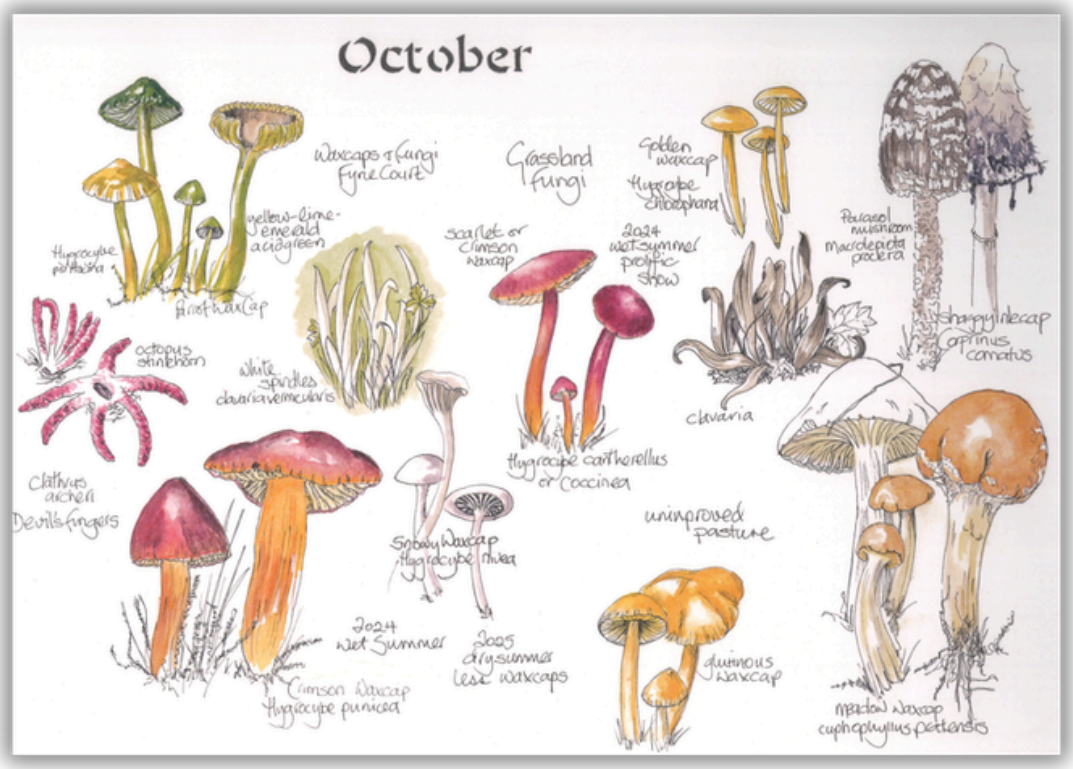
The project has undertaken a number of arts days, usually one a month, where the group's artists will convene and draw and paint specimens from the various habitats of interest. This has allowed some members to concentrate on particular groups of flora / fungi e.g. waxcaps, or to follow the lifecycle through the seasons.

The **National Trust** very kindly subsidised the use of the Music Room at Fyne Court once a month for the artists to come together. The room is a suitable space being large, open and having relatively good light.

As the project progressed it became apparent that the visiting public were interested in the project and the group decided to run several painting workshops open to the public, this resulted in a number of people joining SWSBA to continue to develop their artistic skills.

The project has produced a significant body of art based on plants, fungi and lichen species. These along with exhibitions planned for 2026, will promote the special plant species of the Quantock Hills, as well as the importance of flora more generally.

Sketchbook Diary October
© Alison Finch



To find out more about the South West Society of Botanical Artists visit their website at **https://swsba.org.uk**

SWSBA
South West Society of Botanical Artists

The National Landscape Team Changes

Leavers



Joanna Hicks
QHNL Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer



Helen Richardson
QHNL Landscape Project Officer (FiPL)



Paddon
QLPS Wildlife Officer



Bill Jenman
QLPS Manager



Dan Broadbent
QLPS Historic Heritage Officer



Lucy Stockton
QHNL Landscape Skills Project Officer



Sally Pheasant
QHNL Farming Engagement Support Officer (FiPL)



Lisa Whittle
QLPS Project Support Officer

Starters



Stewart Ford
QHNL Landscape Project Officer (FiPL)

Quantock Hills National Landscape Partnership

Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) members as at 31st March 2026:

- Hugh Warmington - (Chair) The Countryside Landowners & Business Association
- Alan Bradford - (Vice Chair) Somerset Council
- Fran Smith - Somerset Council
- Mike Caswell - Somerset Council
- Tom Deakin - Somerset Council
- Lee Baker - Somerset Council
- Cara Strom - Somerset Council
- Tim Whittingham - Friends of the Quantocks
- Tommy Muncie - National Trust
- Sam Tyson - Forestry England
- Standing rep - DEFRA
- Laura Daniells - Natural England
- Bob Croft - South West Heritage Trust
- Mike Rawle - Quantock Commoners Association
- Alicia Aras - Somerset Local Access Forum
- Dr Martin Jones - Parish Representative - West Bagborough
- Julian Taylor - Parish Representative - North Petherton
- Mark Philipson - Parish Representative - West Quantoxhead
- Sarah Nason - Parish Representative - Holford
- Dixie Darch - Co-opted Member

Quantock Hills National Landscape Team as at 31st March 2026:

- Iain Porter - Manager
- Vacant - Development Officer
- Alex Meletiou - Landscape Planning Officer
- Amanda Sampson - Communications & Support Officer
- Andy Stevenson - Ranger
- Owen Jones - Partnership Ranger (Quantock Hills & Forestry England)
- Caroline Tilley - Communications & Support Officer (Volunteers)
- Jon Barrett - Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer
- Stewart Ford - Landscape Projects Officer
- Vacant - Farming Engagement Support Officer

Quantock Hills National Landscape

Key Performance Indicators

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are collated by all National Landscapes and reported to Defra. As such some KPIs are not workstreams currently being delivered by the Quantock Hills National Landscape Partnership and identified by a nil return.

1. Land where natural beauty has been conserved or enhanced through the work of the National Landscape Team:
a. Hectares of habitat conserved or enhanced for biodiversity = 545Ha.
b. Hectares of land conserved for geodiversity = 0Ha.
c. Hectares of land where the heritage asset condition has been conserved or enhanced = 2Ha.
d. Hectares of land enhanced via the removal of overhead cables = 0.

2. Heritage assets where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced:
a. Number of Scheduled Monuments where setting has been conserved or enhanced = 54.
b. Number of other designated sites e.g. listed buildings where condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced = 0.
c. Number of non-designated heritage assets where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced = 2.

3. People directly engaged through the work of the National Landscape Team:
a. Number of volunteers = 146.
b. Attendees at events convened / organised by National Landscape Teams = 1,061.
c. Number of young people (<18yo) engaged = 1,233.
d. Number of farmers / land managers engaged with = 70.
e. Number of people engaged with via activities linked to the health & wellbeing agenda = 93.
f. No of people engaged in Management Plan review = 327.
g. Number of people engaged with via National Landscape promotional publications e-newsletters, mailchimp etc = 3,608
h. Number of people engaged with via social media - engagement rate = 20.3k.

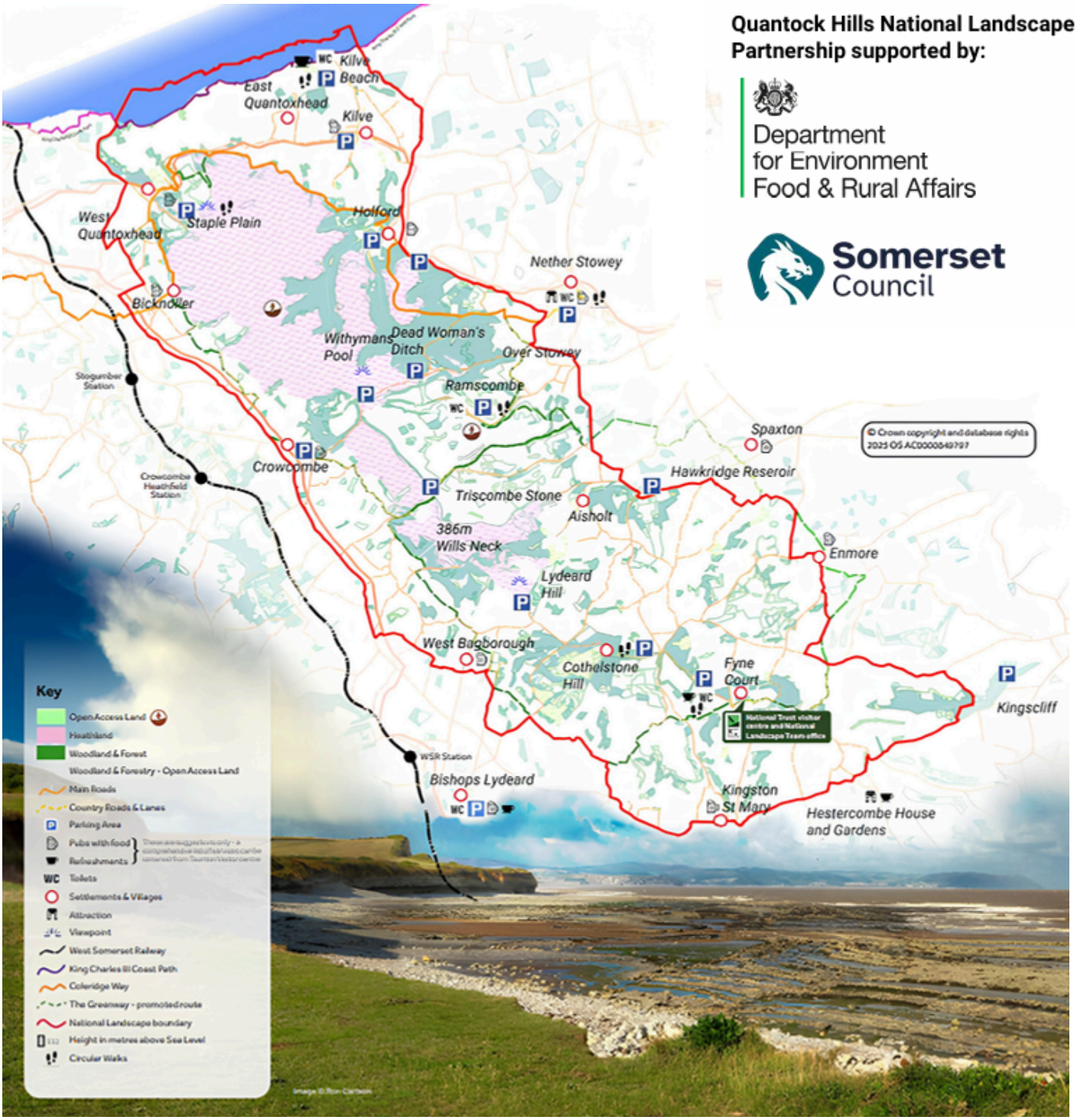
4. Partnerships / initiatives influences by the National Landscape Team to deliver Management Plan objectives:
a. Number of partnerships where the National Landscape Team is part of the project / team / steering group lead = 5.
b. Number of partnerships where the National Landscape Team is a supporting partner = 6.

5. Strategies, plans, policy, guidance documents, development:
a. Number of strategies, plans, policies or guidance documents appraised or developed by the National Landscape Team = 16.
b. Number of Major development schemes appraised = 10.
c. Number of non-Major development schemes appraised = 70.
d. Number of other development schemes appraised = (Highways England, Environment Agency, etc) = 1.
e. Number of National Infrastructure Projects appraised = 0.
f. Number of land management schemes appraised (WMP, WCS, CS, NFM, CSF) = 4.

Financial Statement (summary)

Opening balance 01/04/2025	*£296,885.22*			
Income (core)			**Expenditure (core)**	
Defra	190,604		Staff costs (salary, NI, SA)	290,610
Somerset Council	24,970		Training	4,513
Recharges	34,159		Accommodation	14,287
Contributions	25		Stationary, post, phones	1,926
Misc.	50		Travel & vehicle costs	34,314
			Equipment, materials	3,010
			Literature & publications	6,748
			Meeting costs, hospitality	1,370
			Management fees, insurance & memberships	14,913
			Research & development	4,221
Total	**£249,808**		**Total**	**375,917**
Income (general projects)			**Expenditure (general projects)**	
Defra	£244,083		Access4All	£46,368
National Landscape Association	£2,000		Capital Grants	£114,305
Charges	£1,500		Botanical Arts Project	£190
			Land Management Skills Scheme*	£2,021
			Nature Calling	£3,700
Total	**£247,583**		**Total**	**£168,584**
Income (Quantock LPS)			**Expenditure (Quantock LPS)**	
NLHF	£240,219		Staff	£111,339
Event income	£397		Partnership Costs	£105,803
			Project delivery / contractor costs	£36,618
			Events	£5,482
Total	**£240,617**		**Total**	**£259,242**
Income (Landscape Projects)			**Expenditure (Landscape Projects)**	
Defra	£187,174		Staff (both FiPL & LMSS)	£48,825
HPC – S106	£6,669		FiPL – Admin	£1,149
			FiPL – Advice & guidance	£16,698
			FiPL – Project delivery	£150,025
			Land Management Skills Scheme	£3,215
			Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund	£174
			Landscape Improvement Scheme	£3,230
			Access4All*	£12,800
Total	**£193,843**		**Total**	**£236,118**
Income (Land Management)			**Expenditure (Land Management)**	
Agri-Environment Schemes	£25,828		Cothelstone Hill	£2,642
Income / Charges	£7,650		New Stowey Farm	£21,221
HPC recharges	£11,376			
Total	**£44,855**		**Total**	**£23,863**
Income (RIA)	**£84**		**Expenditure (RIA)**	**£7,209**
Income - Somerset Council (missing cont)	£92,144			
Closing Balance (31/03/2026)	*£259,096*			

*miscoded expenditure



Quantock Hills National Landscape Team
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Instagram: instagram.com/quantock.hills
Linkedin: linkedin.com/in/quantockhills/
YouTube: youtube.com/quantockhills

Quantock Hills National Landscape