



**Quantock
Hills
National
Landscape**

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday 22nd April 2026

Holford Village Hall

To: The members of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Quantock Hills Communications and Support Officer Amanda Sampson on email quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk

Guidance about procedures at the meeting is given on page 2.

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.

JAC Agenda:	
1.	Apologies for absence.
2.	Declarations of interest - Members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting (see Sc 5 page 2).
3.	Accuracy of the previous minutes (copy appended) and to consider any matters arising.
4.	Public question time - The Chair 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.	Paper A – Partnership Update (Iain Porter).
6.	Paper B – Quantock Hills Management Plan / Delivery Plan update (Iain Porter).
7.	Paper C – Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (Stewart Ford).
8.	Paper D – Land Management (Owen Jones).
9.	Paper E – Engagement Report (Jon Barrett).
10.	Paper F – Planning Report (Alex Meletiou).
11.	AOB.
12.	Future JAC meeting dates (all start at 2.00pm). Wednesday 22 nd July 2026.
	Note: Further information about any of the reports for this meeting may be obtained from the report authors based at the Quantock Hills National Landscape Office, Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater, TA5 2EQ. Tel: 01823 451884 or Email: quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk

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 the Quantock Hills Communication and Support Officer Amanda Sampson at quantockhills@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 the Quantock Hills Communication and Support Officer Amanda Sampson at quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk
3.	Public Question Time At the Chairperson'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 Amanda Sampson, the committee administrator, before the meeting. You must direct your questions and comments through the Chairperson. You may not take direct part in the debate. The Chairperson will decide when public participation is to finish. If there are many people present at the meeting for one particular item, the Chairperson 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 can appoint substitutes if they are unable to attend the meeting.
5.	Declarations of Interest It is a member of the JACs responsibility to declare a personal or prejudicial interest at all meetings where matters being discussed or to be discussed affect their interests. Full guidance can be found in appendix 3 of the JAC Constitution.



Quantock Hills National Landscape

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (JAC)

Minutes of a meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held on:
Wednesday 21st January 2026 at 2.00pm, Spaxton Village Hall

Present:

Members:

Hugh Warmington (HW)	JAC Chair
Alan Bradford (AB)	JAC Vice Chair/Somerset Council
Fran Smith (FS)	Somerset Council
Cara Strom (CS)	Somerset Council
Barbra Lakin (BL)	Somerset Council
Laura Daniells (LD)	Natural England
Tommie Muncie (TM)	National Trust
Rob White (RW)	Quantock Commoners Association
Robin Stamp (RS)	Friends of the Quantocks
Sarah Nason (SN)	Parish Representative - Holford Parish Council
Mark Philipson (MP)	Parish Representative - West Quantoxhead Parish Council
Dixie Darch (DD)	Co-opted JAC member

Officers:

Iain Porter (IP)	Quantock Hills National Landscape Team
Amanda Sampson (AS)	Quantock Hills National Landscape Team
Stewart Ford (SF)	Quantock Hills National Landscape Team

Also present:

Joshua Schweiso (JS)	Spaxton Parish Council
David Stripp (DS)	Kingston St Mary Parish Council
Martin Jones (MJ)	West Bagborough Parish Council
Paul Trolley (PT)	QHNL Volunteer

1. Apologies

James Divall (Somerset Council), Mike Caswell (Somerset Council), Julian Taylor (North Petherton PC), Alicia Aras (Somerset Local Access Forum) and Sam Tyson (Forestry England).

2. Declarations of Interest

HW declared himself as a Quantock Hills landowner, a member of CLA (Country Land & Business Association), Friends of the Quantocks, Falcon and Rural Housing, Somerset Local Access Forum and the Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group. No other declarations were given.

3. Accuracy and matters arising from the previous minutes

The minutes of Wednesday 22nd October 2025 were signed off as a true representation of the meeting.

4. Public Question Time

No public questions.

5. Paper A – Partnership Update (Iain Porter)

IP introduced Stewart Ford to the group as the new Quantock Hills Project Officer who has been in the role for 1 week. IP also updated the group that Lucy Stockton had left the Quantock Hills Team on the 18th December 2025, after deciding that the post was not for her. Lucy had been in the Landscape Skills Project Officer position since 14th July 2025.

Defra has started consultation on the governance of Protected Landscapes with a view to develop a framework in late 2026. There was a discussion regarding the governance of the Quantock Hills JAC. FS - it's good to have a large and broad group of people on the JAC. TM - we are a really good group working together for the Quantock Hills and entirely fit for purpose. HW - if you lose flexibility then you lose control. MP - do we have enough power as a group. IP - overall the level is about right, as we are here as an advisory committee to Somerset Council, which is the primary relevant authority. IP asked for any further feedback from members of the JAC regarding the Protected Landscapes Governance to be emailed back to him.

MP wondered if the meetings being held during the weekday afternoon prevent younger people being a member of the JAC and being more engaged with the group.

DS - are National Parks under the same structure as National Landscapes. IP - the Quantock Hills National Landscapes works closely with the Somerset Council, and we manage the land for them, we do not own any land like National Parks.

Paper A Recommendation(s):

1) The JAC noted the report.

6. Paper B - Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (Iain Porter)

IP gave an update on the recent good news that the FiPL programme has now been extended by Defra for a further 3 years until March 2029. There will be more comprehensive FiPL presentation at the next JAC in April when Stewart is more established in his new role.

Paper B Recommendation(s):

1) The JAC noted the report.

7. Paper C - Quantock Hills National Landscape Business Plan 2026/27 (Iain Porter)

RS - are the Quantock Hills Team planning on running another wildlife symposium this year after the success of the last one. IP - the team are proposing to do a heritage symposium this year and run the wildlife symposium again next year.

RS - Friends of the Quantocks will be running their own similar wildlife symposium on the 21st March 2026 (Nature of the Quantocks Conference) and will be promoting this nearer the time.

MP – Regarding the solar farm near Williton. Has heard from some neighbouring parish council of potential discussions with Somerset Council regarding the possibility that the outcome of the appeal could be challenged due to procedural / factual errors. IP – not aware of any discussions but will check with Alex Meletiou (Landscape Planning Officer) who is more likely to be aware of any discussions. Subsequent to the meeting Alex has spoken to members of the local community who had responded to the original application and been informed that Rachel Gilmore MP was investigating certain aspects of the application and appeal. There has been no further information forthcoming.

There was discussion about the Quantock Hills volunteers and how often they undertake litter picking and levels of flytipping. IP to check with the rangers about the possibility of holding a public litter picking event.

Paper C Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.**
- 2) The JAC approved the Quantock Hills National Landscape Business Plan.**

8. Paper D – National Landscape Finance Report (Iain Porter)

IP gave an update on the finance report. As per the report the QLPS scheme has an overspend, but final overrun figure is unknown due to Somerset Council recharges due to be applied in March 2026.

Paper D Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.**

9. AOB

None.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 22nd April 2026 at 2.00pm (venue TBC).

Meeting was closed at 3.20pm

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER A
Subject	Partnership Update	
Author(s)	Iain Porter, Manager	
Date	22/04/2026	

1. Staffing

- a. Farming Engagement Support Officer. Sally Pheasant submitted her resignation in February with her final day being 31 March. I am very thankful to Sally for extending her notice period to the end of the FiPL year, ensuring a smooth transition as well as allowing a short handover with Jules Jameson, who started the role on 31 March. Sally has undertaken the role with great enthusiasm and competency over the past 2 years, especially given the gap in Landscape Project Officer postholder in late 2025. We wish Sally the best in her future endeavours as she pursues a career in Ecology.
- b. Vacant posts. With Somerset Council's restructure the Team had to identify posts that it wished to remain open, i.e. that the team would be looking to recruit to when resources allowed. The current vacant posts are:
 - Development Officer.
 - Community Engagement Ranger.
- c. As mentioned at the January meeting there is a requirement to review the core team structure. This is due to financial pressures on the core budget, shifting local and national priorities and ensuring the structure is fit to deliver the revised Management Plan. Somerset Council is currently undertaking a Pay & Grading review process which is likely to impact staffing costs for the team and HR have advised that we should look to start a review in the summer once there is a greater understanding of the likely impacts for the P&G review. The Partnership will be engaged through JAC meetings to ensure that their priorities are included.

2. Partnership

- a. Since the last meeting I have enquired about the use of microphone / speaker systems to allow for hybrid meetings. After discussion with the LCN Officers it is apparent that there are a number of issues with the system they use. I have approached Somerset Council ICT to assess other systems on the markets. As part of the agenda for the July meeting the Partnership will be asked to discuss potential ways to increase attendance such as changing days / times of some or all of the meetings for 2026/27.
- b. I have contacted SALC to start the parish representative's election process with the aim that the process is completed by the end of September 2026.

3. Ken Brown

- a. We note with regret the death of Ken Brown in February 2026. Ken contributed significantly to the development and standing of National Landscapes during the 1970's and into the 1990s.
- b. Ken joined Somerset County Council in 1972 in the newly formed Countryside Team, under the County Councils Planning Department. As an experienced Landscape Architect he was responsible for overseeing the design and implementation of many of Somerset Council's landscape and planting schemes including the new Frome By-Pass, Hatch Beauchamp By-pass and Ashill By-Pass to name a few. These landscaping schemes comprising thousands of trees and miles of hedging are now well established

and provide a legacy of enhancement not only to the adjacent highway but as a habitat for wildlife and biodiversity.

- c. At a time when most National Landscapes (AONBs) had no dedicated staff and many had no governance structures / committees Ken ensured the relevant local authorities took the National Landscapes seriously. From his small countryside budget he provided the majority of the funding in the early 70s and through the 80s and 90s, using his diplomatic and negotiating skills to bring together a strong partnership and fund the Warden Services (the precursor to the National Landscape Teams) for the Quantock Hills and Mendip Hills National Landscapes. He had a longer-term vision for the National Landscapes, speaking at the very first Conference he gave a heartfelt talk about the value of these landscapes to us all, and challenged central government representatives that they were getting critical conservation 'on the cheap'. He was very well liked by all who worked with him and very supportive of his teams. For many years he kept the Quantock Hills and Mendip Hills at the lead of National Landscape protected for the UK. Ken was instrumental in having the first Quantock Hills Management Plan developed, the first of its kind for any National Landscape and pre-CRoW Act. It won a National Planning Award, which I believe is still unique as it didn't feature a single building.
- d. Ken was also involved in the creation of the Somerset Landscape Scheme in association with the then Countryside Commission. Countryside staff including Phil Stone, Gerry Andrews (County Forester) and the Farming & Wildlife Group advising farmers and landowners on grants available for tree and hedge planting, traditional orchards planting, hedge laying, pollarding of willows, pond restoration and the rebuilding of stone walling particularly in the Mendip area of the County available through the scheme. These schemes contributed hugely to the Conservation and Enhancement of the Somerset Landscape and leave a long-lasting legacy.
- e. Ken left Somerset County Council in 2001 after reaching the position of Assistant Director of Environment. Colleagues enjoyed working with Ken as "The Boss" and there was always a good, humoured rapport between colleagues. Having spoken to many colleagues who worked with Ken words such as kind, gentle, measured are often used and people have fond memories of a person who passionately cared about the landscape and people of Somerset.

4. Consultations

- a. Defra. Protected Landscape Governance Research Project. Launched in January the project has engaged National Parks and National Landscapes and is looking at both 'hard' and 'soft' governance. Hard governance includes structure, membership of partnership boards, senior leadership etc, while soft governance is looking at engagement throughout the work of a protected landscape. I found it interesting that those undertaking the project appeared more interested in the soft governance element, while there was greater interest in the hard governance element from the PL officers. The project is expected to inform new guidance due out in autumn.

5. National Landscape Team 2026/27 Budget

- a. In early March Defra sent the indicative grant funding settlement for 2026/27 (table A1). Given the nation's financial position and the cuts Defra and other Government departments have had to absorb the flat settlements and additional capital funds shows that the work delivering the national priorities of nature recovery, climate, people and place by the protected landscapes has been recognised.
- b. With the indicative funding provided the Business Plan (attached) has been updated including the National Landscape Team budgets.

Table A1: Defra grant funding settlement (Quantock Hills National Landscape 2026/27)

Grant	Budget	Change	Notes
Core (revenue)	£190,604	-	Flat settlement. Confirmed for 2026/27, indicative for 2027/28 & 2028/29
Capital Grant	£119,207	-	Criteria for grant due April 2026. Likely to include 30by30 delivery.
Access	£60,292	-	Criteria for grant due April 2026. Different to Access4All though likely to include many of the same criteria.
FiPL	£250,980	-	Flat settlement. Confirmed for 2026/27, indicative for 2027/28 & 2028/29
Wildlife-rich Habitat Fund	£25,000	New	New. Capital funding for creation / enhancement of wildlife-rich habitat (as defined under the Environment Act 2021). Indicative figure, will be confirmed in April 2026.
Total	£646,083		

Recommendation(s):

- 1. The JAC notes the report.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER B
Subject	Quantock Hills Management Plan / Delivery Plan update	
Author	Iain Porter, Manager	
Date	22/04/2026	

1. Quantock Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2026-2031.

- a. Following the agreement of the draft Management Plan by the JAC in January, the formal consultation with the Statutory Consultees – Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England – was undertaken. Feedback within the required timescale was received from Natural England.
- b. As no amendments were required following the feedback from Natural England the Management Plan was submitted to Somerset Council for adoption. The Management Plan was formally adopted by Somerset Council on 09/03/2026 following their internal adoption process.
- c. Unfortunately, feedback on the Management Plan was received from Historic England just after the statutory consultee period ended. The comments and my response to them is captured in the attached consultation report. Many of the comments, in my opinion, do not require the Management Plan to be amended. However there are some comments which the Partnership may wish to consider whether a change would be beneficial (Table B1). My opinion is that the suggested amendments I recommend would not constitute material change to the Management Plan however a second opinion would be sought. If they do constitute a material change the Management Plan would need to be resubmitted to Somerset Council for consideration.

Table B1: Historic England comments and suggested amendments

Historic England comment	Response
3.2 PLACE – Guiding principals We generally support the guiding principles. To better align with planning policy for heritage, Principle 3 could say “We need to ensure that any development and infrastructure affecting the National Landscape is of the highest quality, sensitive to landscape setting and historic character <u>and significance</u> , conserving and enhancing wildlife and other special qualities.”	Recommend changing wording to that suggested. Non-material change.
3.3 PLACE – Aims At 3.3.2 we suggest the text is amended to say “historic character <u>and significance</u> ” as when dealing with heritage assets it is their significance, including any contribution made by their setting, which is protected by statute and policy.	Recommend changing wording to that suggested. Non-material change.
3.3 PLACE – Aims 3.3.3 we also suggest a slight adjustment: “That the National Landscape’s historic environment is protected and understood in detail; that both characteristic and exceptional man-made elements are conserved <u>and enhanced</u> , and the cultural contributions of the Quantock Hills to society are recognised.	Recommend changing wording to that suggested. Non-material change.
3.4 PLACE – Objectives It would also be helpful if a reference to conservation and enhancement of “the historic environment” was added to P5 Planning development and infrastructure.	Recommend changing wording to: <i>P5: To ensure development and infrastructure conserves and enhances the special qualities of the Quantock Hills; that it is compatible with its distinctive character described by the LCA and that landscape character, <u>heritage</u>,</i>

	<i>biodiversity, dark night skies, tranquillity and local distinctiveness are protected from inappropriate or excessive development</i>
3.5 PLACE – Current Status The table at the bottom of p37 provides statistics for listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens, along with information on the number of those assets defined as ‘at risk’. While the third column illustrates the change in number of assets at risk, it is unclear whether the negative numbers presented mean that more assets have fallen into the ‘at risk’ category, or conversely whether this is the number of assets removed from the Heritage at Risk Register? It would be helpful if this were clarified.	Look to include trend column with visual representation of change.
5.7 CLIMATE – Policies We request that policy CL1 is amended as follows: “CL1: Support initiatives and actions that allow farmers / landowners to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and maximise carbon storage such as regenerative farming systems or tree planting or restoration of soils, <u>subject to integrated planning and management to ensure these will conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape including the historic environment.</u>” It would also be helpful if CL3 referred to the historic environment, bearing in mind that low carbon and renewable energy can either be sensitively incorporated or can have adverse impacts on heritage.	Recommend changing wording to <i>CL1: Support initiatives and actions that allow farmers / landowners to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and maximise carbon storage such as regenerative farming systems or tree planting or restoration of soils, <u>which will conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape.</u></i> Special qualities include historic environment. No requirement to separate out.

Table B2: Current Heritage asset table in the Management Plan

Heritage Assets	No. in Quantock Hills	No at risk (2024)*	Change in No at risk since 2019
Listed Buildings	205	1	-1
Scheduled Monuments	51	6	-3
Registered Parks & Gardens	3	1	No change
Total	259	8	-4

Table B3: Suggested Heritage asset table for the Management Plan

Heritage Assets	No. in Quantock Hills	No at risk (2024)*	Trend (change since 2019)
Listed Buildings	205	1	1 ↓
Scheduled Monuments	51	6	3 ↓
Registered Parks & Gardens	3	1	No change
Total	259	8	4 ↓

Recommendation(s):

1. The JAC notes the report.
2. The JAC consider comments received by Historic England and advise on response.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER C
Subject	Farming in Protected Landscape (FiPL) Programme	
Author	Stewart Ford, Landscape Projects Officer	
Date	22/04/2026	

1. We have successfully completed Year 5 of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme. In January, we welcomed confirmation from Defra that FiPL will be extended for a further three years, through to March 2029. This reflects the success of the programme to date and provides an opportunity to develop larger, longer-term projects that can be delivered over multiple years.
2. In March, we ran a very successful mailshot campaign targeting farmers and landowners in the Quantock Hills who have not yet applied for FiPL funding. We received an excellent response, with over 25 phone calls and emails from interested parties. Stewart Ford, Landscape Project Officer, is now arranging site visits over the coming weeks to meet with potential applicants.
3. This highlights one of the key strengths of the FiPL programme compared with other agri-environment schemes. While the funding comes from Defra, it is delivered locally by the Quantock Hills National Landscape team, meaning applicants benefit from direct, face-to-face support from a small, knowledgeable team with strong local understanding. We currently have 32 projects in development, and the first Panel meeting to assess applications is scheduled for 13 May 2026.
4. Reflecting on project year 5;
 - a. the team has faced some challenges, including a period without a Project Officer for approximately one third of the year. Despite this, there is much to celebrate.
 - b. Having allocated the majority of our project budget, we are pleased to confirm that 20 projects have been completed this year. Of these, 19 delivered outcomes for **Nature**, 18 for **Climate** and **Place**, and 19 delivered benefits across three categories spanning **Nature**, **Climate**, **People**, and **Place**.
5. Some of the outcomes for nature are shown in the figure below.

Fig. 1 – FiPL Year 5: Nature in Numbers



6. We would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable support of our Landscape Projects Panel. The Panel is made up of individuals with excellent specialist expertise, combined with strong local knowledge of the Quantock Hills. It meets between six and eight times each year to review FiPL applications, and many members have served continuously since the programme began in 2021.
7. To date, the Panel has attended a remarkable 32 meetings and considered over 100 applications. We are extremely grateful for the time, energy, advice, and commitment that members continue to provide.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. The JAC notes the report.**



Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER D
Subject	Land Management	
Author(s)	Owen Jones, Partnership Ranger / Andy Stevenson, Ranger	
Date	22/04/2026	

Please note – Some workstreams in this report are led by or assisted by other members of the team. If we are unable to answer queries raised at the meeting about these we will ensure the appropriate member of the team responds to the JAC.

1. Cothelstone Hill

- a. The National Landscape Team undertake the day-to-day management of Cothelstone Hill on behalf of the South West Heritage Trust. This includes securing and delivering agri-environmental schemes with the grassland currently in a Higher Level Stewardship scheme and the woodland in a Countryside Stewardship Scheme.
- b. The regular management of the site carried on through the winter with gorse being cut and burnt by a diverse range of volunteer groups and our tractor was put to good use topping the bramble and bracken areas.
- c. The woodland has been severely impacted by Ash Dieback. Where ash trees are dying and pose a risk to visitors the team will fell and clear them. Once the dead ash had been cleared in one compartment in autumn our volunteers planted up the area with a mix of native broadleaved species including wild cherry, oak and hazel.
- d. In two other compartments where over 6,000 tree trees were planted shortly after Covid we have been through and assessed which trees failed and which needed the stakes and/or guards re-installing. Well over 75% of the trees have survived and are growing well.
- e. The hilltop grassland is mainly managed through grazing, with the current Exmoor Pony herd being a firm favourite with visitors. The site would benefit from more diverse grazing with the team wanting to also introduce summer cattle grazing. For the past six months we have been in negotiation with Natural England and the RPA to amend the current Higher Level Stewardship scheme grazing requirements which has now been granted. The rangers are currently in discussions with a potential grazier with the aim of introducing cattle grazing this summer.

2. New Stowey Farm

- a. The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team have a 10-year Management Agreement on New Stowey Farm, a 45Ha (111 acres) grassland farm on the edge of Nether Stowey. The farm is owned by Somerset Council and under the MA the team aim to use the farm as a demonstrator farm, using regenerative agriculture systems to show economic sustainable farming that benefit nature and climate objectives.
- b. Over the past year the team have undertaken significant works to get the farm back into a good state including stock fencing, installing a new water system for livestock and enhancing the infrastructure to allow the farm to be used by volunteers and community groups.
- c. The farm is now in Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) and Countryside Stewardship Capital Grant (CSCG) schemes allowing more work including creating wood pasture, flood mitigation and habitat enhancement works.

3. Swaling

- a. Due to the very wet winter the ability to carry out land management activity was severely impacted. Due to the requirement for very specific conditions swaling was the most impacted activity and in fact we didn't manage to complete the annual training of volunteers until late February.
- b. Working with the Commoners and contractors however the fire breaks alongside the main tracks were cut in the autumn and following advice from Natural England we have trialled another two plots of cut and collect – the cuttings being spread at West Hill for the National Trust where they are trying to diversify the vegetation mix including heather and along tracks near Hare Knapps where erosion had been cause. In addition two plots of cut and leave were carried out where the gorse was too leggy to burn. Natural England staff will monitor the impact of these different techniques especially if the climate isn't conducive to swaling.
- c. In summer 2025 Natural England produced a new [England Peat Map](#) . This was produced to provide evidence and data allowing management of peat soils in line with the new [Heather and Grass Management Code 2025](#) which placed greater restrictions on when burning of heath and grass can take place. Unfortunately, the England Peat Map is a desk-based assessment, and it was quickly apparent that there are a number of errors, especially over areas deemed 'deep peat' – greater than 30cm peat depth – with much of Quantock Common being assessed as being on deep peat. An issue with this would be the need to get a license to be able to undertake swaling on these areas, which would not be granted for burning for normal management purposes. NE understood the limits on the data and therefore required testing of peat depth on any potential swale site, which was undertaken by the rangers and the results sent to NE to ensure that no burning on deep peat would occur. All measurements on Quantock Common were less than 30cm, with virtually all below 20cm.
- d. The Commoners have applied for and successfully gained funding from FIPL to provide extra equipment for swaling and to help fight summer wildfires – this included an additional power bowser, radios and PPE.

4. Visitor Management

- a. Fly tipping / litter – Unfortunately, the wider Quantock Hills National Landscape continues to suffer with regular, small scale fly tipping events. This often is located towards the South of the Quantock Hills, around easily accessible points from Taunton. Support from Somerset Council in removing the items had for the previous year's been prompt and most welcomed. However in the last couple of months flytipping incidents have been referred back to the QHNL Team, usually the rangers to clear up. It has been pointed out that the statutory purpose of the National Landscape is not to clear flytipping, which is clearly a local authority duty and that by referring incidents to the QHNL Team, SC may be failing in its duty under LURA. There have been 2 vehicles set alight within the National Landscape – again in both incidences the offending item was dealt with and removed swiftly.
- b. Patrols – some frustrating issues have increased in frequency in the last six months that have required the rangers to observe and tackle the behaviour including illegal motorbikes/e-bikes use and flytipping. Patrols and use of technology have been used to gather information, and the volunteers have been briefed to keep an eye out when patrolling. The annual push to get the message out about dogs on leads has taken the form of radio interviews and signs across the hills.
- c. Access and information – Volunteers and the Communications and Volunteer Support Officer have enhanced and created new resources in the Information point materials

that they can take out to car parks and engage with the public as well as get key messages out.

- d. Under the Access4All fund access improvements have been carried out on tracks at Quantock Common and Holford Bowling Green car park. Other projects include enhancement of bridges on the waymarked trails at Fyne Court, enhanced visitor information (information points), enhanced website accessibility and installation of accessible compostable toilet at New Stowey Farm for volunteer and visiting groups
- e. The rangers are working to finish the series of videos for the Quantock Hills NL website to show people the four different waymarked trails – the videos highlight the facilities on site, the terrain and the specific waymarking at each location.

5. 30by30

- a. During 2025/26 the Team Defra opened the Capital Fund to Protected Landscapes. Funding could be used to deliver 30by30 (nature recovery) or Invest to Save projects. The team prioritised 30by30 delivery – capital works that create or enhanced priority habitat outside of protected sites (SSSI) and allocated funding to 3 projects including
 - i. support to the Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group for collaborative working.
 - ii. Grant to the National Trust supporting grassland enhancement work working towards mosaic habitat creation at West Hill.
 - iii. Grant to the National Trust supporting grassland enhancement working towards species rich grassland habitat at Fyne Court.
- b. Defra have confirmed that a similar grant will operate in 2026/27 though have not released the criteria.

6. Wildlife Monitoring

- a. Pied flycatchers – the boxes in the four Combes have been cleared out and replaced where necessary. Results from 2025 showed that in all of the 40+ sites that have box transects the average occupancy by Pied Flycatchers was approximately 20%, whereas the Quantock transects all exceeded that with one being 75%.
- b. Dormouse surveys – the boxes at Cothelstone Hill have been cleared out and replaced where necessary. Andy has now managed to obtain his dormouse license and so this allows more flexibility to monitor the boxes.
- c. Nightjar surveys – Owen is starting to organise the annual nightjar surveys, which cover ten 1km² squares across suitable habitat in the National Landscape. Results will be compiled and compared to previous data to identify trends and feed into management of the habitats.
- d. Butterfly surveys – Volunteers are starting to survey the transects at Cothelstone Hill and Fyne Court. Result from 2025 are positive with both transects showing increased diversity of species and Fyne Court abundance increasing as well.
- e. Tick survey – Undertaken as part of the national health surveillance monitoring programme rangers from the team collect ticks during May sending them off for testing to identify the proportion carrying diseases. Results from 2025 showed that nationally 5.7% of ticks carry the *Borrelia* species bacteria that causes Lyme disease but reassuringly none of the ticks from the Quantock Hills were positive.
- f. Adder Hibernacula – the two hibernacula constructed by volunteers in 2024 have been checked weekly since mid-March and are showing good numbers of adders emerging from near the purpose built structures. Both are located in quiet areas of Cothelstone Hill which reduces incidents of disturbance.
- g. Deer count – the annual Quantock Hills deer count co-ordinated by the rangers took place on Sunday 1st March. Weather conditions were mixed with some parts having fog

and drizzle at daylight. Results will be published by the Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group (QDMCG) soon.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. The JAC notes the report.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER E
Subject	Engagement & Volunteering	
Author	Jon Barrett, Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer	
Date	22/04/2026	

Please note – Some workstreams in this report are led by or assisted by other members of the team. If we are unable to answer queries raised at the meeting about these we will ensure the appropriate member of the team responds to the JAC

1. Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer (CEVO)

- a. The past six months has seen a transition from Jon's role for the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme to a permanent engagement role within the core team.
- b. In the past quarter since the role moved into the core team there has been the development of an enhanced events programme that works alongside the engagement workstream and supports the development of audiences, and opportunities to engage with the National Landscape.

2. Events

- a. At the beginning of the calendar year the new approach has been to create a themed programme of events that reflect the coming seasons and a month-by-month engagement with the Quantock Hills. In particular, it has been about turning attention to the benefits of being outdoors during the less traditional audience/events season of the year – the off-season of sorts, from January onwards during the winter and into spring. A time to work closely with local audiences and engage more meaningfully with audiences – to get people outdoors and actively engaged when the weather and elements might encourage us not to do so.
- b. We know the benefits of social prescribing, so to make the most of the winter period seemed of critical importance to both engagement and events when considering the resource the hills can provide – and the value it gives us during this period to work with local audiences we may not have had the opportunity to engage before.
- c. One programme of events that managed to achieve particular publicity and success was our February festival of events, Month of Mud. The season of events wanted to look at embracing the muddy season (as we know that February is a very muddy time of year) and encourage people to get outdoors and into the mud, rather than avoid the problematic terrain and elements around us.
- d. This seemed to be well-timed as January had been one of the wettest in over 13 years, so mud was an inevitability. February is also a dormant and dead time for much of the natural world, so having a festival of things to do brought attention to our corner of the country. So much so, that it hit the cultural and topical stories of national press – appropriate then that something as of-putting as mud should be the thing we get most coverage for. BBC Radio 4 had us on the Evan Davies show, the Jeremy Vine BBC Radio 2 show also aired us, BBC Radio Somerset also had us on their breakfast drivetime show, ITV wanted to come and do a piece for television, and most publicly, The Guardian newspaper came and did an article on the events.
- e. The coverage thrust our programme into the light of day during the darker months and was a great way to kick-start a new season of events. Similarly, the programme brought a quantity of events to the hills that hadn't previously been seen during this time of year – we were now running between 7 – 8 events a month, from walks to family-friendly activity days, wellbeing walks, and workshops.

- f. Audiences came in their hundreds for the family-friendly days, and we were able to engage our Walk Leader volunteer cohort to run several of the programmed walks, which many were consistently well-attended. Importantly, the events programme allows us to engage our volunteers and make the family of volunteers feel part of a greater public programme (the national press helped here), which in turn retains volunteer contribution and support – but it also makes our engaged audiences feel part of something that is considered nationally significant at that time. Mud (or any other themed event programme) brings into the frame conversations about the natural world and our cautionary approach to climate or local environment. It allows us to have deeper conversations and engagement where we would otherwise not have had this at the same level.
- g. Month of Mud was followed by Lide & Seek, a March programme of events looking at the windier month of the year – which also had radio coverage for the Lide and Lone Trees event. It was a time of year that allowed us to look, from a different perspective, at some of the unique aspects and qualities of the hills.
- h. This was then followed by April Open, a programme of events celebrating the coming of spring, where all events are free. First impressions are that the concept has worked – bringing 300 people to a family friendly day at Fyne Court, but we will have a chance to reflect on all of the events before considering our summer programme.
- i. It has been a busy period, yet it has brought great partnerships – the events hosted at Fyne Court have been partnered with National Trust, which allows us to share audiences (particularly important since the Visitor Experience team are longer at Fyne Court). The partnerships and themes have allowed us to grow our programme and opportunities yet keep audiences manageable and local enough to appeal to the communities around us. The ranger have partnered with Somerset Council's Rights of Way Team and will be leading a number of coastal guided walks during the summer to celebrate 10 years since the Somerset section of the King Charles III England Coast Path was opened. We've brought a diverse audience to the programme, and it is great to see new people engaged as a result.

3. Volunteer Groups

- a. Volunteer Rangers – Continue to provide ongoing patrols and assist the rangers with their work sometimes at short notice. On the first Thursday of the month they carry out a practical tasks and this has included gorse cutting, clearing around a pond at St. Audries wood, helping remove vegetation on Cockercombe Camp and tree planting. A couple of new VRs were recruited in the late autumn bring the group back up to its maximum number.
- b. QCV – We have worked with the National Trust to recruit some new members to add to the band of experienced volunteers. Tasks during the period have included Hedgelaying along a bridleway in Holford and cutting and burning gorse.
- c. Estates Team – our two volunteers combine together or sometimes assist the rangers so that we can work as separate teams. Work this period has included installing new footpath and bridleway signs, clearing fallen trees, trees planting, auditing waymarked trails and enhancing paths by repairing gates and stiles.
- d. Corporate Volunteer Groups – we have regular links with colleagues in Somerset Council and at Hinkley Point and we have hosted groups doing tree planting and gorse cutting and burning.
- e. Hedgelaying – working with the Somerset Hedge Group, the rangers have assisted with the training days and the running of the annual competition that was held at Cothelstone Estate.

- f. Walk Leaders – The team have six Volunteer Walk Leaders, who completed their training and assessments in 2025. During 2026 they will be organising and leading a number of public events as well as supporting the Teams events programme.
- g. Working Well group – The Working Well group is open to participants with poor mental health and wellbeing where the aim is enhancement of wellbeing for the participants rather than delivery of tasks. The group are getting new attendees from a variety of sources but attendance at each session does vary due to the weather or the state of mind of the individuals.
- h. Wildlife Surveyors – The group contains a number of sub-groups undertaking specific species monitoring including butterflies, adders, bats, dormice, nightjar, pied flycatchers as well as supporting a number of other volunteers such as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker monitoring.
- i. Heritage Surveyors – This group was re-invigorated during 2025 with support from Historic England and undertakes monitoring of the scheduled monuments with the National Landscape. Monitoring is undertaken during winter and summer to assess potential issues such as scrub growth or visitor damage. Surveys are collated by the National Landscape Team and sent onto Historic England to inform management priorities. During winter 2025/26 the majority of scheduled monuments were surveyed with all surveys now sent to Historic England.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. The JAC notes the report.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER F
Subject	Planning Report	
Author	Alex Meletiou	
Date	22/04/2026	

1. Planning applications

a. From 1st October 2025 to 31st March 2026 the National Landscape received 43 planning applications for consideration and one application for a timber felling licence, which have been followed up from the published lists or by direct invitation to comment. The level of applications is a little less than average.

b. The distribution between the two planning regions is listed below together with the number of applications within each Parish (table E1) and by application type (table E2).

Table E1- **Planning applications by area.**

<u>Planning North</u>		<u>Planning West</u>	
Broomfield	1	Bicknoller	2
Goathurst	2	Crowcombe	1
N. Stowey	1	East Quantoxhead	1
N. Petherton	6	Holford	1
Over Stowey	1	Kingston St Mary	1
Spaxton	6	Kilve	2
Total	17	Monkton Heathfield	1
		Staplegrove	2
		Taunton	1
		Washford	3
		West Bagborough	6
		West Quantoxhead	3
		Wellington	2
		Total	26

Table E2 - **Planning applications by type.**

Agricultural buildings	6	Agricultural conversions	1
Car park	1	Domestic extensions	11
Domestic buildings	4	Educational facilities	1
Equestrian	2	Holiday lodge/tourist	2
Major residential	7	New footpath/track	1
Scoping opinion	1	New dwellings	4
Variation/conditions	2		
Total	43		

2. Current Issues

a) In October 2025 I reported to the JAC that we were awaiting a response from Somerset Council's planning department on some specific cases, following the meeting we held with them on the 26th June 2025. It was hoped that we would have had a response by the end of October following the self-imposed period when the planners were concentrating solely on outstanding applications. Unfortunately, this has not happened, and no response has been received. The intention now is to arrange another face to face meeting with the planners especially as a new head of planning has been appointed.

b) Two consultations have recently been carried out by the government.

i) *Proposed reforms to the statutory consultee system.*

The main response from the National Landscapes Association was that all National Landscapes should be made *specific* consultees with regard to local plans and also the specialist advice of the National Landscapes that are hosted by one or more local authorities should be accorded the same weight as other specialist internal advice received by the local planning authority.

ii) *Proposed reforms to the planning system with alterations to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).*

A summary of the main changes affecting National Landscapes:

Probably the most significant adverse change relating directly to National Landscapes is that the new draft NPPF makes no explicit reference to the circumstances in which the application of NPPF policies relating to National Landscapes can provide a strong reason for refusal in decision making. This is currently provided in paragraph 11d(i) of the current NPPF. In this regard the new draft NPPF is a lot weaker than the current NPPF in terms of protecting National Landscapes.

The new draft NPPF uses the term 'Protected Landscapes' and makes clear in the glossary that this term includes National Landscapes. It is disappointing to see the removal of the statement that Protected Landscapes 'have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty'.

The current NPPF has explicit presumption of refusal of major development in National Landscapes (i.e. para 190 'should be refused'). This changes to 'should only be supported' in the draft NPPF. This would weaken in-practice protection of these landscapes.

Given that the main thrust of the draft NPPF is to streamline the planning system and have more of a pro-growth agenda, it is not surprising that there are some proposed changes that would weaken the current protection for National Landscapes.

The consultation closed on 10th March 2026.

Recommendation(s):

1. The JAC notes the report