



Quantock Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Report

2020 – 2021



Funded by:

Landscapes
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QUANTOCK
HILLS
One of the
AONB Family



SOMERSET
County Council



Somerset West
and Taunton



Highlights

- ◆ Over 150Ha of habitat conserved or enhanced for biodiversity.
- ◆ Over 1,000 broadleaf trees planted at Cothelstone Hill.
- ◆ Over 300 trees planted by project supported by the GQLDF.
- ◆ 2,670 hours of volunteer engagement in visitor management, wildlife surveys, practical land management and nature and well-being activities.
- ◆ Over 1,600 hours of visitor engagement by rangers and volunteers.
- ◆ 14 monitoring schemes completed with surveys for Bats, Butterflies, Deer, Dormice, Nightjars, Pied Flycatchers.
- ◆ 15 Scheduled monuments surveyed.
- ◆ Delivery of ELMS Test & Trial project creating the landscape spatial framework for the Quantock Hills.
- ◆ Engagement with over 35 farmer / land managers increasing awareness of the Agricultural Transition Plan and new ELMS schemes.
- ◆ 117 planning applications assessed with detailed consultation and comments on 35.
- ◆ Launch of the new £2.6m Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme in April 2020.





Covid-19 Response

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on all aspects of life in the UK during 2020 - 21. In March 2020 the AONB Service stopped all face to face engagement work including volunteering activity. In July limited engagement started but numbers were restricted meaning that overall people engaged with by the AONB Service is vastly reduced.

In spring 2020 a number of land management projects and contracts had to be postponed due to the restrictions. While some projects/works were able to be undertaken in autumn/winter some had to be postponed to 2021.

The impact on the hills and surrounding countryside has been one of extremes, with the hills initially experiencing their quietest period of time since Foot and Mouth to being the busiest our Rangers have ever seen last summer. The hills and coast provided a welcome escape for this large audience from dawn until dusk.

The number of visitors, issues such as high fire risk during the summer of 2020, higher levels of livestock worrying and the restrictions on volunteer support required our Rangers to be out patrolling for significant periods. However the majority of visitors and users were sensible and it was great to see so many people enjoying being out in nature. The AONB Service also enhanced its information provision making much better use of social media and online content to engage visitors and users as well as those who were unable to visit the hills.

From January to March some AONB and LPS team members were redeployed to support the Covid-19 response allocating over 100 days in support of mass testing/vaccinating. This reduced towards the end of March as both teams started gearing up for on the ground delivery in the new financial year.



Delivering for Wellbeing

2020 was the final year of the Somerset AONB's Nature & Wellbeing Project. The project was extended until the end of August as project officer, Kristen Lambert, supported groups through the initial phase of the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The 4-year project has been a huge success with over 2,300 people engaged in nature and wellbeing activities, over 200 people being trained and the recruitment and training of 10 engagement volunteers.

In September 2020 Somerset Nature Connections Project was launched. The 3-year project, a partnership of the Somerset AONB's (Blackdown Hills, Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills) and Somerset Wildlife Trust is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, HPC Community Fund, Somerset County Council, the Discovery Fund and South Somerset District Council, and will support local communities and individuals most vulnerable to mental health issues access nature and develop a network of skilled volunteers who can support communities for the longer term.

Initial start up of the project was affected by the Covid-19 restrictions with the project team's recruitment delayed until December 2020 and January 2021. The team quickly developed virtual and online resources that they promoted to community groups and contacts. As restrictions have eased the project is planning for the face-to-face sessions to begin in May 2021.





Delivering for Nature

The Quantock Hills AONB Service has a significant history of not only developing projects supporting sensitive land management but also directly delivering land management where appropriate.

Unfortunately one element of the AONB Service had to lead on during the autumn/winter was the felling of potentially dangerous diseased ash trees alongside the road at Cothelstone Hill.

Thanks to support from the Landscape Partnership Scheme the AONB Service was able to quickly replant with over 1,000 native broadleaf trees. Ash dieback is having a massive impact on our woodlands and will cause changes in our landscapes over.

As well as direct delivery during 2020/2021 the AONB Service also led on projects that aim to improve land management for biodiversity. A significant example is the Environmental Land Management System (ELMs) Test & Trails and Advocacy projects we ran for Defra in the AONB.

These included giving a direct voice to Defra from Quantock farmers/land managers to inform the new systems of agricultural policy and support, and raising awareness among our farming community.

The AONB Service runs a grant scheme called the Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund, which is funded by the S106 associated with the HPC development. During 2020/201 this funded projects delivering on habitat and biodiversity enhancements including hedgerow planting and pond creation.



Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS) is a £2.6m five-year scheme supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. It was developed by the Quantock Hills AONB in partnership with South West Heritage Trust, Friends of Quantock, and many others. It started on time on 1st April 2020, but inevitably the first year has been significantly disrupted by the pandemic.

The Scheme aims to protect and restore some of the distinctive features of the Quantock landscape, improve management of the access pressures on the Hills, and make the health and wellbeing benefits of recreation more available to communities in the surrounding towns and villages.

The QLPS covers the whole of the AONB as well as the ring of surrounding parishes. It is made up of 23 projects ranging from historic heritage, to wildlife conservation, and community engagement, with activities such as restoring hedgerows and traditional orchards, through to educational work with local schools, archaeological excavations, archival research, and a wide-ranging and inclusive events programme.

Recruitment of the new team was completed by early November. The team consists of an LPS Manager, Bill Jenman, Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer, Jon Barrett, and a Project Support Officer, Vickie Sellick. Unfortunately Simon Phelps (who was the Natural Heritage Officer) left at Christmas for a role with Natural England. At the end of March, we were in the process of recruiting a replacement for this position.



Due to Covid the team worked from home with weekly online meetings, during 2020 - 2021 they only all met in person on three occasions! None the less a lot of groundwork was done, getting the www.qlps.org website and social media up and running, commissioning a LiDAR scan of the project area, developing community contacts, preparing for educational visits to the Hills, and generally getting ready for when normal delivery could start.

Extensive safety felling in response to ash dieback at Cothelstone Hill and Broomfield was followed up by volunteers planting 1700 trees. The LPS was also able to support a programme of activities at Kilve for Young People at Risk of Offending during the winter lockdown.

Over winter the LPS Manager and the Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer were seconded to support the vaccination and testing effort. Well worthwhile in their own right, these SCC/Government funded redeployments “recycled” about £8k back into the LPS budget to pay for extra staff time post-pandemic. Both redeployments ended by Easter as the LPS work was picking up and the team looked forward to delivering the full programme without being quite so restricted by Covid precautions.



Staff Changes



Kristen Lambert, our Nature and Wellbeing Project Officer over the last 5 years working across the Quantock, Blackdown and Mendip Hills AONBs, has left the team at the end of the hugely successful Somerset AONBs Nature and Wellbeing project.

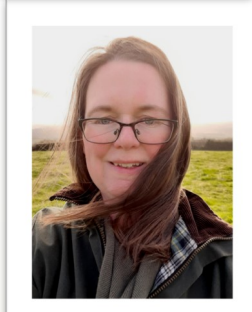
Now employed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust it was great to see Kristen, two weeks after finishing with us, start her new role as Project Manager of Somerset Nature Connections, we look forward to Kristen making as great a job of managing Somerset Nature Connections as she has done in recent years developing this important role specifically for the AONBs. This is an area of our work that has a particular impact on people's lives and shows the importance of safe access to the natural environment and our wilder places. We wish Kristen all the best in her new role.

Welcome to the new QLPS team members



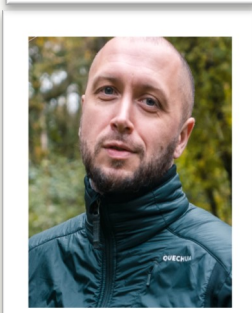
Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager - Bill Jenman

The Manager has overall responsibility for seeing that all the different projects are delivered and targets met, keeping the budget on track, and liaising with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other funders. The manager reports to a governing Partnership Board.



Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Project Support Officer - Vickie Sellick

The Support Officer role is responsible for the QLPS' day to day communications on the QLPS website and on social media, as well as helping to organise and administer the events and activities. Also the vital behind the scenes finance work to raise and pay orders and invoices.



Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer - Jon Barrett

Jon will have the key outreach role within the team, responsible for leading our events and activities programmes, both for the general public and those specifically for disadvantaged communities and individuals. He will also be overseeing all the volunteering recruitment and activity within the LPS, working alongside Verity the Quantock & Blackdown Hills Volunteer Coordinator.



Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Historic Heritage Officer - Dan Broadbent

Dan will lead on all the archaeological and historic buildings work for the LPS. He will also have a major role in leading our archival work, looking at historic records held at the Somerset Heritage Centre to better understand and interpret the manorial history of the area.

Quantock Hills AONB Partnership



Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) members as at 31st March 2021:

Anthony Trollope-Bellew	(Chair) Somerset West & Taunton Council
Mike Caswell	(Vice Chair) Sedgemoor District Council
Mandy Chilcott	Somerset County Council
Hugh Davies	Somerset County Council
Dixie Darch	Somerset West & Taunton Council
Alan Bradford	Sedgemoor District Council
John Ebsary	Forestry England
Hugh Warmington	The Countryside Landowners & Businesses Association
Alice Roberts	DEFRA
Philip Comer	Friends of Quantock
Matthew Uren	National Farmers Union - Somerset County Advisor
Kristina Luxton	National Trust
Jo Chesworth	Natural England
Dr Martin Jones	Parish Rep - West Bagborough
Julian Taylor	Parish Rep - North Petherton
Mark Philipson	Parish Rep - West Quantoxhead
Steven Campbell	Parish Rep - Holford
Debbie Salvidge	Quantock Commoners Association
Alicia Aras	Somerset Local Access Forum
Vacant	Somerset and Wiltshire Federation of Small Businesses

Quantock Hills AONB Service Team as at 31st March 2021:

Chris Edwards	AONB Manager
Iain Porter	Development Officer
Alex Meletiou	Landscape Planning Officer
Amanda Sampson	Communications & Support Officer
Andy Stevenson	AONB Ranger
Owen Jones	AONB & Forestry England Partnership Ranger
Verity Jones	Quantock & Blackdown Hills AONB's Volunteer Coordinator

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme as at 31st March 2021:

Bill Jenman	QLPS Manager
Vickie Sellick	QLPS Project Support Officer
Jon Barrett	QLPS Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer
Dan Broadbent	QLPS Historic Heritage Officer

Looking forward 2021-2022



- ◆ As announced in the Agricultural Transition Plan in October 2020 the Government will be Launching the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme in 2021. This is a £52m fund over 3 years for all protected landscapes to support farmers and land managers through funding projects that support nature recovery, mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide opportunities for people to engage with the landscape and cultural heritage or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses.
- ◆ Government response to the Landscape Review due autumn 2021. The Landscape Review had 27 proposals, from a night under the stars for every child, to ranger services in all protected landscapes and enhanced planning protection. The Government's response on the Landscape Review could have a significant impact on the way the Quantock Hills AONB goes forward.



- ◆ Development of Nature Recovery Plan to embed in AONB Management Plan. Part of the Colchester Declaration of July 2019 the Quantock Hills AONB, along with other AONBs nationally, pledged to produce a Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB. This is the first pledge which will lead to enhanced action in the delivery of other pledges such as at least 200,000Ha of SSSI within AONBs will be in favourable condition and at least 36,000Ha of new woodland will have been planted or allowed to regenerate in AONBs by 2030.

Financial Statement



Core Income

Defra	£166,239
Somerset County Council	£24,000
Sedgemoor District Council	£12,000
Somerset West & Taunton	£12,000
Friends of Quantock	£1,105
Cost Recovery (contract delivery)	£6,909
Cost Recovery (redeployment)	£6,229
Blackdown Hills AONB (recharge)	£13,452
Forestry Commission (recharge)	£21,613
Contributions—other	£2,345
Funds from reserves	£24,800

Core Expenditure

Salaries NI, pension	£230,140
Training	£900
Accommodation	£14,419
Stationary / post / phones	£2,679
Travel & vehicles	£15,524
Equipment, materials	£2,033
Literature & publications	£1,247
Meeting costs / hospitality	£9
Hosting cost / Insurances	£8,911
Memberships	£2,756
Research & Development	£512

Budget

Budget	Expenditure	Income	Balance
Core	£279,130	£290,692	£11,562
Project	£94,549	£82,430	-£12,119
Landscape Partnership Scheme	£155,618	£155,318	-£300
Projects HPC S106	£35,213	£35,223	£10
Land Management	£35,899	£33,203	-£2,696

Summary

Total Expenditure	£600,409
Total Income	£596,866
RIA (b/f from 2019/20)	£34,475
Balance	£30,932
<i>Less Earmarked reserves</i>	<i>£19,000</i>
<i>Income b/f</i>	<i>£6,959</i>
Surplus	£18,891



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