



QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday 24th January 2023

2.15pm, Enmore Memorial Hall
Enmore Road, Enmore, Bridgwater, TA5 2AN

To: The members of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Quantock Hills AONB Communication 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.

Agenda:	
1.	Apologies for absence
2.	Declarations of interest - an opportunity for members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting.
3.	Accuracy of the previous minutes (copy appended) and to consider any matters arising.
4.	Public question time - The Chairman will allow members of the public to ask questions or make statements about any matter on the agenda for this meeting or present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit.
5.	Paper A – Partnership activity report (Iain Porter)
6.	Paper B – Ranger's report (Andy Stevenson)
7.	Paper C – Volunteers update (Abby Wilkinson)
8.	Paper D – Nature Recovery Plan update (Mark Baker)
9.	Paper E – Partnership Constitution & Membership (Iain Porter)
10.	Paper F – Business Plan report (Iain Porter)
11.	AOB
	<p>Future JAC meeting dates:</p> <p>Tuesday 18th April 2023 Tuesday 18th July 2023</p> <p>(All start at 2.15pm venues TBC)</p>
	<p>Note: Further information about any of the reports for this meeting may be obtained from the report authors based at the Quantock Hills AONB Service, The Quantock Office, Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater, TA5 2EQ. Tel: 01823 451884 or Email: quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk</p>

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 AONB 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 AONB Communication and Support Officer Amanda Sampson at quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk
3.	Public Question Time At the Chairman's invitation you may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about any matter on the Committee's agenda . You may also present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit. The length of public question time will be no more than 20 minutes in total. A slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been signed. If you wish to speak, please tell Amanda Sampson, the committee administrator, before the meeting . You must direct your questions and comments through the Chairman. You may not take direct part in the debate. The Chairman will decide when public participation is to finish. If there are many people present at the meeting for one particular item, the Chairman may adjourn the meeting to allow views to be expressed more freely. If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group. An issue will not be deferred just because you cannot be present for the meeting. Remember that the amount of time you speak will be restricted, normally to two minutes only.
4.	Substitutions Committee members can appoint substitutes if they are unable to attend the meeting.

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (JAC)

Minutes of a meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held on:
Tuesday 18th October 2022 at 2.15pm at Kingston St Mary Village Hall

Present:

Members:

Anthony Trollope-Bellew - JAC Chair (ATB)	- Somerset West & Taunton Council
Mike Caswell - JAC Vice Chair (MC)	- Sedgemoor District Council
Julian Taylor (JT)	- North Petherton Town Council
Dixie Darch (DD)	- Somerset West & Taunton
Philip Comer (PC)	- Friends of Quantock
Alan Bradford (AB)	- Sedgemoor District Council
Hugh Warmington (HW)	- Country Land & Business Association
Nicola Sampson (NS)	- Natural England
Laura Daniells (LD)	- Natural England
Emily Heckscher (EH)	- Holford Parish Council
Alicia Aras (AA)	- Somerset Local Access Forum

Officers:

Iain Porter (IP)	- Quantock Hills AONB Service
------------------	-------------------------------

Also present:

Bill Jenman (BJ) Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, David Stripp (DS) Kingston St Mary Parish Council, Philip Hackett (PH) British Horse Society, Joshua Schweiso (JS) Spaxton Parish Council.

1. Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

Chairman and Vice-chairman due to be elected at this meeting. With changes in partnership as a result of Local Government Reform in April 2023, proposed that Anthony Trollope-Bellew continues as Chairman of the JAC with Mike Caswell continuing as Vice-Chairman until the new partnership comes into place 1st April 2023. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall then be elected from the membership of the partnership in line with the new constitution and terms of reference. DD proposed with PC seconding. All members in support.

IP – currently pushing democratic services at Somerset County Council for draft constitution. This will be sent to members as soon as received. ATB will no longer be a councillor as of the end of March 2024, if the election were to be April ATB would be happy to chair the last meeting in April as the current chairman if everyone were in agreeance. All agreed.

DS welcomed the JAC to Kingston St Mary on behalf of Kingston St Mary Parish Council.

2. Apologies

Fran Smith (Somerset County Council), Lee Baker (Somerset County Council), Tommy Muncie (National Trust), Deborah Prestwick (Quantock Commoners), Martin Jones (West Bagborough Parish Council).

3. Declarations of Interest

ATB declared himself to be a member of Quantock Eco, Friends of Quantock, Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group, Quantock Stag Hounds and a Quantock Hills Landowner. No other declarations were given.

4. Accuracy and matters arising from the previous minutes (Tuesday 19th July 2022)

ATB thanked DD for chairing the meeting in his absence. IP, EH to be added to the minutes as was in attendance.

The minutes of 19th July 2022 were signed off as a true representation of the meeting.

5. Public Question Time

No public questions.

6. Paper A - Partnership Activity Report (Iain Porter)

- 6.1 IP gave an update on the Partnership Activity Report. Amanda has been on a period of leave and so social media feeds ect may be less frequent than normal. Abby Wilkinson, Community Engagement Ranger, has embedded well and is pleased with the work she is doing with the Rangers and volunteer groups and has some good ideas for engagement. Mark Baker, Projects Manager has started to get to grips with his role now and is engaging very well with the national work streams and the local projects.
- 6.2 Natural England representation, Nicola Sampson and Laura Daniells taking over from Jo Chesworth as a job share. Both have met many of the stakeholders including the main Commoners and have received feedback on plans for future schemes.
- 6.3 ATB requested that when one attends the previous JAC meeting that they fully brief the other before the next meeting to allow for continuity at each meeting.
- 6.4 Somerset County Council have now appointed Fran Smith (Lib Dem, Taunton South) and Lee Baker (Lib Dem, Taunton North) to the JAC. IP has met with them both and given them some background information on the JAC and both are committed to coming to future JAC meetings.
- 6.5 The AONB Service's bid to Defra for a Capital Access Grant has been successful and will cover a period of 3 years, with just over £30,000 to be spent by the end of March 2023, nothing allocated for the next financial year 23/24 and £37,000 for year 24/25. The funding is to be used on capital access improvements as well as other non physical works to improve access. If anyone know of any projects which might be able to come under this funding let IP know. DD do the AONB replace the wooden signs on the ROW. IP the AONB pay 30% and ROW pay 70% of the costs of these.

DD some 'off roaders' are claiming they haven't seen the signs so some need looking at or moving. IP asked DD to put something in an email and to copy in QH Ranger Andy Stevenson stating the location of the signs and the request either repair, replace or alteration. BJ added that QLPS have recently funded some wooden signs so will also investigate this. IP Going forward into year 3 if anyone has an idea for small projects for the grant, please let us know and we can add to the list.

HW does this grant cover works that the Highway Authority should be doing. IP not this grant, it is above and beyond any works carried out by Highway Authority (Public Rights of Way).

There were no further comments or questions

Paper A Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.
- 2) The JAC approved the extension to the membership of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to 31 March 2023.

7. Paper B – National Activity (Iain Porter)

7.1 IP gave an update on national activity and rebranding of the AONBs, a recommendation of the Landscape Review, which suggested that the term AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) was not very well understood by government or the general public and that rebranding to 'National Landscapes' should occur. Defra keen to take this forward and have offered a grant to NAAONB to delivery this by March 2023. There could be some good elements of the rebranding but would need to be the complete package, we are waiting for more information so we can feed this back to the JAC.

DD what will the money from Defra for the rebranding be used for, as the word rebrand seems to suggest a change of logos. IP to rebrand correctly would be about the culture and vision, all funds will be going directly to the National Association of AONB's not directly to individual AONB's.

PC would work be done locally in terms of the Quantock Hills AONB. IP once we have a more concrete idea about what is being proposed then will know more.

HW will this include National Parks. IP National Parks will remain as National Parks they are not involved in this. ATB lots of people think that if it's a National Park then they are not privately owned.

7.2 Members of the QH team and the QLPS team attended the National Association of AONB's Conference last month with a good opportunity to engage and reflect on the national picture.

No further comments or questions.

Paper B Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

8. Paper C – Review of draft Partnership Constitution (Iain Porter)

- 8.1 IP gave an update and presentation on the draft Partnership Constitution as per paper C. Due to staff illness at Somerset County Council the draft was not able to be prepared ready for today's meeting. IP presented to the JAC the proposals for the Joint Advisory Committee to become an Advisory Committee.
- 8.2 Other AONB's have the chair and vice chair in the position for a fixed term. This could be taken forward, such as 5-years fixed to fit with Management Plan periods.
ATB - 4 yearly term would be better as would run in line with local council elections with the next one being in May 2023.
- 8.3 DD face to face meeting is favourable depending on whether there is another pandemic. ATB if there is another pandemic then presumably changes will be made to legislation allowing decisions at online meetings. AB face to face meetings are important.
- 8.4 ATB page 3 Quantock Commoners Association noted as no attendance for many years, must try to keep them on board. IP there needs to be a process going forward for us to try and get them reengaged. ATB most active commoners will be out on the common during meetings times and not able to attend and some who are more likely to attend meetings.
- 8.5 IP the removal of Defra from the draft constitution as they have never attended a meeting are quite honest in saying that it is unlikely they would attend meetings so do not need to remain a voting member.
- 8.6 A general discussion was had about specific group representation at the JAC including rather than organisation such as British Horse Society (BHS) over Somerset Local Access Forum (SLAF) and landowners.
- 8.7 IP the timeline for the completed constitution will be the January JAC.

No further comments or questions.

Paper C Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

9. Paper D - QLPS Progress Report (Bill Jenman)

- 9.1 BJ gave a brief update on the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme as per the report.
- 9.2 ATB declared a personal interest in the carpark as is going on his land but has no financial gain from it.
- 9.3 HW how many vehicles will the carpark hold. BJ around 55 depending on how people park.

No further comments or questions.

Paper D Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

10. Paper E - Landscape Planning Report (Iain Porter)

10.1 IP asked if there were any questions about the planning report in the absence of Alex Meletioui the Quantock Hills Landscape Planning Officer.

No comments or questions.

Paper E Recommendation(s):

1) The JAC noted the report.

11. Paper F - Business Plan Progress Report (Iain Porter)

11.1 IP gave a presentation on the Progress Report for the Business Plan.

No further comments or questions.

Paper F Recommendation(s):

1) The JAC Noted the report.

12. AOB

EH - Holford PC have had quite a few mountain bikers through with over 250 in one day for an event in September (Quantock Quake) with gates being left latched open to enable easier access for bikers ect. IP will ask the Rangers and Volunteer Rangers to spend some time in the Holford area to promote awareness about the hills and mountain biking. ATB mountain bikes have been a problem on the hills since being invented. EH would like more awareness of the Countryside Code.

Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 24th January 2023 at 2.15pm (venue TBC).

Meeting was closed at 4.20pm.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER A
Subject	Partnership activity report	
Author	Iain Porter, Quantock Hills AONB Manager	
Date	24/01/2023	

1. Staffing

- a) Amanda has returned to work after a period of leave. Impact of reasonable period of absence of this key post were managed through prioritisation of work, postponing some work elements – mainly the communications side, and some cover provided by Vickie Sellick. This has been a good test of business continuity with this key post.
- b) Abby Wilkinson (Community Engagement Ranger) submitted a flexible working request to reduce their hours from 37 to 22.2 (3 days a week) in November. As this is a shared post with Blackdown Hills AONB it was considered with Tim Youngs (Blackdown Hills AONB Manager) and decided that we would offer a reduction to 29.6 (4 days a week) but that it would be reviewed in April 2023. We were keen not to reduce the resource associated with this post as we are looking to increase our engagement area of work
- c) I am currently assessing if we can increase the Planning Officers contracted hours. These are currently 15hrs per week (2 days) and it is apparent that this only allows the postholder to undertake basic responses to planning applications during busy times. In discussion with the post holder I am looking to increase to 19hrs per week (2.5 days), but this will be dependent on grant / funding outcomes for 2023/24.
- d) Some members of the QLPS team have had various periods of leave, either through illness or planned medical procedures. None of these have significantly impacted upon delivery.

2. Partnership

- a) As Partnership members will know Anthony Trollope-Bellew, Chairman of the JAC, died as a result of an accident on his estate on 28 October. Condolences on behalf of the team and partnership were sent to the family and staff, including former AONB Manager, Chris Edwards, attended the funeral held in late November. Anthony had been Chairman of the Quantock Hills JAC for over 21 years and as far as I am aware was the longest serving Chairman of any AONB Partnership. His commitment to the Quantock Hills was unwavering even when he was a cabinet member in Somerset County Council and later as leader of West Somerset Council. Being a landowner he bridged the political and local communities and was respected by farmers, user groups and politician colleagues alike. Anthony was looking to step down next April with the transition to the unitary authority, though he had indicated his keenness to remain engaged with the AONB. I will be speaking to the family later this year to ask them for their thoughts on an appropriate way to remember his significant contribution to the Quantock Hills. Usually we would have requested a new representative from Somerset

West & Taunton Council however with advice from both SW&T and SCC it was decided to wait until the new unitary authority is vested on 1st April with a new membership and constitution. Cllr Mike Caswell will chair the January JAC, and a new Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected in at the April 2023 JAC.

- b) Due to sickness leave in SCC's Democratic Services the production of a first draft Constitution for the Quantock Hills JAC was delayed. A first draft came through 29/11/22. Unfortunately it required significant amendment, but a first draft was sent to the JAC members on 03/12/22. All feedback has been incorporated into an updated draft which will be brought to the meeting for approval.

3. Defra Grant Agreement

- a) As the Partnership will be aware Defra confirmed in April 2022 the AONB Grant Agreement for the period 2022-25. The core figure was a 14.7% increase on the 2021/22 grant amount, with this increase being indicative for 2023/24 and 2024/25. With the considerable change in Government policy and priorities Defra have not been able to give an indication of whether the higher grant figure of 2022/23 will continue, though we have not had any indications that it will not. The Business Plan, therefore, will include 2 scenarios', one with the 14.7% increase applies and one with the grant settlement at 2021/22 levels. You may have seen the publicity generated by National Parks regarding their 'real term cut' in funding. Locally there has been an effort to engage the Quantock Hills in this campaign. I have not engaged as the AONBs Defra grant has not been cut in recent years and my approach is to offer solutions to Ministers / Defra and not to publicly complain about cuts in funding.
- b) Defra have released the Contract Change Notice (CCN) for the Capital Access Grant for 2022/23. For the current financial year, the grant is £31,257 and for 2024/25 £37,138, totalling £68,395. Detailed guidance has been released and the fund can be used for on the ground capital works to increase accessibility as well as increasing access by providing or improving information provision. For the next period we are taking forward a number of sub projects including car park enhancements on Quantock Common, Track repairs at Cothelstone Hill and on Quantock Common and a 'refresh' of the AONB website to include on accessibility information. There are challenges due to the lack of contractors locally and the tight timeframes, but we are confident we can spend all the grant.
- c) A new set of clauses in the Grant Agreement involved working with the National Landscapes Partnership (NLP). Defra have been progressing the development of the partnership during the latter half of 2022 with the aim that it is running by April 2023. Engagement will be via the NAAONB, though I expect that there will need to be resource allocated to the NAAONB in support of this. This is to ensure that the priorities and views of the Quantock Hills JAC / Partnership are fully considered.

4. Landscape Review – Government Response

- a) Defra have provided a grant to the NAAONB to take forward the rebrand of AONBs to National Landscapes. There is a tight timeline for completion of this work with it having to be completed by the end of March 2023. While supportive of this proposal and engaging with the consultation I have expressed concerns about tight timescale and that appears to be no additional resource to affect the re-brand in 2023. Initial consultation started w/b 19 December and further consultation will be shared with the OWG and JAC.
- b) Natural England have been tasked by Defra to produce targets and outcome frameworks for Protected Landscapes. These are for the designated area rather than the PL Teams / Partnerships – though there is concern on reflections if targets are not met. The targets will be selected based on their contribution to key national priorities. Defra will be setting targets at a national level for all Protected Landscapes to collectively achieve. Natural England will then work with individual Protected Landscapes to apportion their individual contributions which will be included in the PL’s management plan. Progress will be monitored through an outcome’s framework. The shortlisted target areas are:

b) Nature	c) Climate
d) Habitat restoration	g) Net zero
e) Protected sites	h) Peat restoration
f) Tree canopy & woodland cover	
i) People	j) Places
k) Access	m) Heritage assets
l) Diversity of visitors	

- c) Defra is aiming to produce the collective targets in spring 2023 though there is no timescale for Natural England to apportion these to individual Protected Landscapes. I would expect that Natural England will be looking to start this work during summer 2023 to ensure targets are built into the AONB Management Plans, most of which are due for production in April 2025.
- d) Among lead officers there is great concern, especially given the significant development of this work prior to consultation with the Protected Landscapes. There is also concern that delivery to achieve the targets will become the responsibility of the Protected Landscape partnership / team, and failure to meet the targets will reflect poorly on the partnership / team. Given that currently AONB Partnerships / teams have very limited ability to influence land management it.
- e) All England Strategic Landscape Map – Launched by Natural England in October the All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Tool has met with significant concerns from AONB lead officers and planners - [All England Strategic Landscape Mapping Tool \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com) . Concerns include:
- Named as ‘All England Strategic Landscape Mapping – Decision Support Tool’ could this be used by developers to push through development that is inappropriate.

- While it does have caveats, such as maps not being used for LVIAs, it is likely to be used as evidence and what weighting will planning inspectors give to this.
 - Ranking of landscape. Under LVIA landscape is assessed based on a threshold being reached. By ranking landscapes there is a risk that those lower ranked areas of an AONB may be seen as opportunities for development.
 - The factors being used for 'natural beauty' have been developed from a number of pieces of work by LUC (NE's preferred contractor), none of which have been independently reviewed or tested.
- f) The NAAONB has written to Tony Juniper (NE) expressing these concerns and NE have strengthened the cautions and caveats on the website however the core concerns over the methodology and presentation of the data (ranking NCAs) have not been answered at all. Lead officers, through the NAAONB have now requested a meeting with NE to further express concerns.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER B
Subject	Rangers Report	
Author	Andy Stevenson, Quantock Hills Ranger Owen Jones, Partnership Ranger	
Date	24/01/2023	

1. Introduction

- a. Since our last report in April 2022, the Rangers have noticed that the number of visitors to the Hills in general are reducing from the post Covid lock down summer but are still relatively high compared to pre 2019 numbers. The climate is affecting when certain traditional work can be carried out, such as swaling or when fence posts can be knocked in, as well as having an impact on nesting and breeding seasons. We have also had the highlight of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations as well as the sad time of her passing.

2. Land Management

- a. Cothelstone Hill –
 - i. In the autumn the coppice rotation continued, and 3 new coupes were cut by volunteers with 2 other coupes finished from last season. As per last year gaps identified in the canopy will be planted with additional new hazel trees and a couple of standard oak and field maple trees – this is to increase the density of habitat for the dormice and provide a more diverse and resilient range of native species. The 7,000 trees planted last winter as part of the Levels Up project have grown well despite the long dry spell in the summer.
 - ii. In other areas of the woodland the glades and rides were kept open, and some sections coppiced to allow more light to reach the ground surface; this has benefitted the butterfly species with more being spotted along the woodland edges. Ash dieback is an ongoing issue on the site with most trees showing signs of the disease. As a result the Rangers, and in a few cases tree surgeons, have removed diseased trees close to the footpaths and bridleways.
 - iii. The Exmoor ponies on the site are checked every day, including Christmas Day, and have thrived over the last year. The 4 young geldings introduced last Easter have grown significantly and are largely accepted into the herd by the old mares. The 4 middle aged mares on loan have remained with us all year and mix well with the 5 original mares.
 - iv. Working with Somerset County Council's Rights of Way team we have made significant repairs to many of the public footpaths and bridleways around Cothelstone Hill. Further work on the main gravelled access path from the car park will be carried out in February as part of the Capital Access Grant.
- b. Swaling – no training or actual burns have been carried out yet this season due to the wet weather. Fire breaks have been cut in a few locations already and so we will aim to achieve some swaling before the end of March.
- c. Volunteer Rangers – throughout the year the VRs have carried out regular patrols and litter picks as well as some practical tasks such as hedgelaying, coppicing and gorse

cutting. We are looking to do more visitor engagement this spring and summer out on the Hills as well as at events.

- d. Working Well group – this group has shown a slight decline in numbers partly due to ongoing concerns about Covid and the long-term effects of the pandemic. Those that do attend enjoy themselves whatever task we throw at them.
- e. QCV – these volunteers carry a wide range of tasks and due to their numbers achieve a great deal each time. Activities have included gorse cutting, coppicing, grip repairs, fence repairs and beach cleans.
- f. Estates Team – our band of 2 trained volunteers are regularly helping with more skilled tasks such as brushcutting the Quantock Greenway, waymarked trails and clearing scheduled monuments.
- g. Hedgelaying – with the Somerset Hedge Group one training date was held at Broomfield followed by the annual competition at the Cothelstone Estate. Over 30 people took part in the competition across the different with approximately 250 metres laid. These events have been funded by Friends of Quantock and QLPS. Many of the competitors are regular attendees but it is great to see novices come along who have only recently attended a training session. A second training date is being held in Aisholt in February. A separate training day is being held for all of the Young Rangers from QLPS.
- h. Adder works – following the trials last year a number of barrows were cleared of gorse and scrub partly to expose them for monitoring as a Scheduled Monument but also to provide a basking site for adders emerging from hibernation. The barrows were selected based on information from the Somerset Reptile & Amphibian Group (RAGS) and English Heritage. A number of metal tin sheets have also been placed out on Aisholt Common, Lydeard Hill and Wills Neck to encourage basking locations away from public paths. The clearance has been carried out by the new QLPS Apprentices and the Estates Team.
- i. Commons – the Rangers have worked with the Commoners again this year to co-ordinate which areas of bracken are cut, which patches of rhododendron are cut or sprayed and with the management of the holly on Hare Knaps.
- j. Hayman's Pond – with funding from QLPS we have completed the first stage in the renovation of Hayman's Pond in Holford Combe. This involved various bat and bird surveys as well as consultation with Natural England before removing a number of trees from the bank of the pond. The aim this year is to dig out the sludge debris from years of accumulation and renovate the stone banks.
- k. During the year we took delivery of an alpine tractor including flail and timber winch funded by QLPS and FiPL which will allow us to carry out many maintenance tasks. A major benefit is the ability to be able to cut fire breaks in preparation for swaling and to break up large areas of gorse.

3. Visitor Management

- a. Fly tipping / litter – there has been a steady issue of fly tipping across all parts of the Hills as well as usual littering mainly around car parks. 9 larger deposits of flytipping were reported and the district councils have been pretty swift to collect any reported items.
- b. Patrols – the Rangers maintained a regular routine of patrols during the week and at weekends/bank holidays. Joint patrols with the police have taken place although two of the excellent PCSOs have recently retired. A larger volume of information has been received from members of the public from various sources including social media.

- c. Events/activities – Unfortunately during summer and autumn a number of planned events were cancelled. Of the events led by the Rangers all have been fully booked despite the weather being poor on each occasion – this was particularly evident at the deer rut walks where the visibility was limited. We have also run a couple of events with QLPS including the Hedgerow Photo walk as part of National Hedge week. A number of external events have been assessed by the Rangers and these have been planned well with the organisers; these have included the annual Quantock Quake and various running events.
- d. Circular walk routes – the Rangers have audited the various routes, such as the Quantock Greenway and waymarked trails, and made any changes to signage and furniture needed. We have also been working closely with the Somerset group of the Disabled Ramblers to recce routes around the hills as well as plan guided events during the Quantock Walking Festival.
- e. Work experience/Young People – over the last 8 months we have hosted 2 students, one on a week-long placement and one once a month. Both threw themselves into the experience both in terms of practical tasks and working with other volunteers. Since then both have stayed in touch by attending events run by us and one has also joined the Young Rangers scheme.
- f. The QLPS Young Rangers and Apprentices, mentored by Young Somerset, have engaged very positively with the work of the Rangers. The Rangers have come up with work tasks across the AONB for them to do and worked with them on occasions; this work has included birch sapling cutting at Great Bear, tree planting and gorse clearance at Cothelstone Hill.
- g. Jubilee celebrations – in June the AONB Service held a celebration at Cothelstone Hill in partnership with South West Heritage Trust and with the Lord-Lieutenants Office including lighting of a beacon, refreshments and a few speeches. The evening was so clear we could see over 40 other beacons across the southwest and into south Wales.
- h. Fire risk – during the summer of 2022 we were particularly concerned about the high levels of fire risk across the heathland areas of the commons. Fire risk signs were put up at each entrance point to the common and specific patrols were carried out to prevent people having BBQs or fires including sites such as Ramscombe, in Great Wood. This message was reinforced on social media. We were fortunate not to have any fires during this period and welcomed the ban on the sale of disposable BBQs by most supermarkets.

4. Wildlife Monitoring

- a. Pied flycatchers – the lines of boxes in the 4 Combes were checked weekly during the early summer months and numbers of the birds remain stable along with great tits and blue tits. Any young of the pied flycatchers were ringed and a number of the females on the nests were birds we had ringed in previous years.
- b. Butterfly transects – we have a good number of volunteers trained to do these transects at Cothelstone Hill and Fyne Court. At Cothelstone Hill 910 butterflies were recorded with the most common being meadow browns. There were also over 100 sightings of gatekeepers, speckled woods and ringlets. These figures are up from 2021 in terms of numbers of species and total butterflies.
- c. Nightjar Survey – nightjars were recorded in every kilometre square (10) surveyed over the summer months. We continue to gather data to influence future management of the common.

- d. Dormouse surveys – the 70 dormouse boxes at Cothelstone Hill continue to be checked monthly – limited numbers but they are present on the site. Andy is continuing to shadow dormouse box surveying on the Blackdown Hills in order to gain his license.
- e. Tick Survey – we continue to collect ticks from around the Quantocks as part of a national survey mainly to identify the range of species present and the proportion of ticks that carry Lyme disease.
- f. Skunk cabbage – the Rangers working with some locals in the Holford area as well as the Somerset Wildlife Trust have been trying to eradicate a line of this plant that has spread down the stream at Holford. It will take a few years, but various techniques have been implemented.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER C
Subject	Volunteer Update	
Author	Abby Wilkinson, Community Engagement Ranger	
Date	24/01/2023	

1. Introduction. Since joining at the end of April 2022 my main tasks have been:
 - a. Meeting volunteers.
 - b. Training on the volunteer management system – Assemble.
 - c. Coordinating volunteering activities – Monthly groups meetups- Working Well, Volunteer Rangers, Quantock Conservation Volunteers, Somerset Council, DoFE.
 - d. Coordinating training events – e.g. bat monitoring training, first aid training for volunteers.
 - e. Supported partner organisations to deliver events: Somerset Nature connections, QLPS.
2. Going forward the main task for my post are:
 - a. Continuing to support volunteers to use the new Assemble portal.
 - b. Increase the number of “information points” for visitors on the hills delivered by Volunteer Rangers.
 - c. Coordinate walk leader training for identified volunteers.
 - d. Link with new potential beneficiaries e.g. military veterans.
3. Current AONB Volunteer Offer
 - a. As the JAC will be aware the AONB Service provide a number of ways that people can volunteer, from practical groups, surveying through to engagement groups. Table 1 below identifies the current volunteer offers of the AONB Service with role descriptions and numbers within that volunteer group (this is not the number of individuals engaged as a number of people undertake more than one volunteering role).

Volunteer group	Role description	No. of volunteers
Volunteer Rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assisting the AONB teams to check visitor sites – Being on hand to answer visitors’ questions – Giving talks to local groups – Reporting issues 	16
Community Engagement Rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Help with activities that raise awareness of the natural environment – Help with activities that raise awareness of local history of the AONB's – Encourage community engagement by assisting with activities and events – Engage the local community especially those from underrepresented groups such as young people or those with poor mental health 	12

Heritage Monument Surveyors	Monitor the 52 scheduled monuments within the AONB.	20
Wildlife surveyors	Butterflies, Bats, Birds, Dormice Taking part in surveys to monitor the presence and abundance of different species	36
Estates volunteers	A small group of specially trained volunteers who support the AONB team in the varied conservation tasks which need to be achieved across the AONB, as set out by the management plan.	2
Swaling Volunteers	This is a small group of specially trained volunteers who support the AONB team in swaling areas of heathland. Swaling is a habitat management practice, where areas of old and woody heather and gorse are burnt on rotation every 15 - 30 years in order that new heather and ground cover plants can grow in their place.	
Working Well	Supportive, friendly monthly group for beneficiaries, sign posted through Mind Somerset . Community engagement volunteers provide additional support.	15 Beneficiaries
Quantock Conservation Volunteers	National Trust Volunteers – A shared group of practical conservation volunteers with the AONB leading a monthly task session	27
Total volunteers (not individuals) - January 2023		128

4. Assemble (Volunteer Management System)

- a. Last summer the Central Volunteering Team at Somerset County Council introduced Assemble, an online Volunteer Management System. This is being used to manage all volunteering within SCC and its hosted partnerships.
- b. The volunteer has everything they need in one place: from the application process through to recording volunteering hours, information on events and tasks, training.
- c. Volunteers can easily manage their profile through the portal which is also available as an App. In addition, the volunteer manager can use Assemble to manage all aspects of each volunteer, whether that recruitment, communications and training.
- d. Training on Assemble for volunteers is ongoing as we transition over to the new portal, we have had reasonably successful engagement of the portal by volunteers to date.
- e. We are currently looking at tailoring some of the training modules to be more relevant to our volunteer roles as well as assessing what outcomes we need to be reporting on and how these can be built into the system.

5. Volunteering metrics

Volunteer type	Hours	Volunteering Value
Unskilled Volunteer hours	796	£39,813
Skilled hours	491	£49,050
Professional hours	0	0
All volunteering hours	1,287	£88,863

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER D
Subject	Nature Recovery Plan Update	
Author	Mark Baker, Quantock Hills AONB Projects Manager	
Date	24/01/2023	

1. Background

- a) We are all aware that both climate and nature are in crisis. In 2019 the Quantock Hills AONB Service committed to the Colchester Declaration - a pledge by AONBs to embed activity that will lead to nature recovery and make meaningful measures around climate change mitigation and adaptation. This will be implemented through the nature recovery plan. The plan will become a key part of the statutory AONB Management Plan and will engage existing and new partners to ensure it reflects the needs of biodiversity not only within the AONB but also around the boundary and in the formation of biodiversity corridors or networks linking habitats across the country. In 2022 Somerset County Council declared a Nature Emergency.
- b) Nature recovery has been at the heart of the work of Quantock AONB Service for decades since its designation and nature recovery has been a key part of some of the 5-year AONB management plans. An extensive range of projects and collaborations with landowners, tenants, partner organisations, volunteers and the public have enabled much valuable nature recovery work to be undertaken over the years. In recent years this has included the extensive work of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- c) The role of the nature recovery plan is to take a more strategic and comprehensive approach to reversing the decline in extent and quality of our habitats and species. It is also to increase the quality and extent of nature to ensure that it is resilient to fluctuations and trends in climate.
- d) The plan also identifies how nature recovery can best be used for the sequestration of carbon and to provide other public benefits such as flood alleviation, soil health, preventing soil erosion, clean water, and access to countryside greenspace for the public.

5. Progress to date

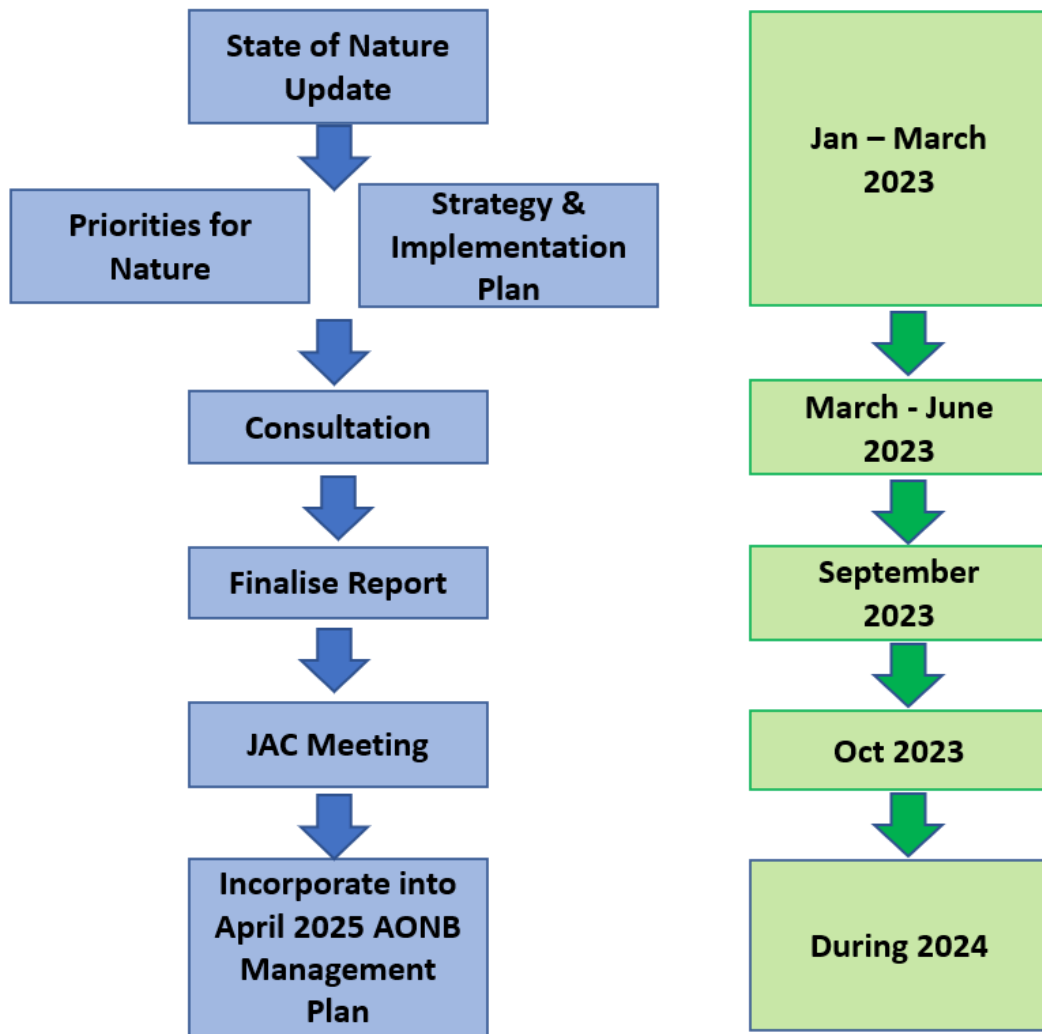
- a) The planning and design process for the nature recovery plan was started in 2020, however this good work was stalled by the pandemic.
- b) Much essential research and development work has been undertaken to inform this process of developing the nature recovery plan. As with all AONBs the Quantocks support a diverse mosaic of important habitats and wildlife, deeply integrated and dependent upon farming and other land-based enterprises. A wide range of datasets have been drawn together from various sources to provide an assessment of the 'State of Nature' for the Quantock Hills area, to ensure that priorities and opportunities for nature recovery can be clearly set out. This process includes Species and Habitats of Principal Importance, legally protected or endangered species, invasive species, designated sites, and a range of other categories.
- c) Digital mapping has been utilised to enable assessments of trends, threats and opportunities to be analysed and visualised at a landscape level. Earlier consultation work with farmers has shown how this can help with collaboration between clusters of neighbouring farmers opportunities for connecting similar habitats across several landholdings.
- d) The process has begun of using the digital mapping to set out where, in principle, the important habitats could potentially be increased in size, increased in quality, fragmented

habitat joined up, strength of connectivity between habitats increased, management practices modified. This is something that can only happen in agreement and consultation with landowners/managers. Consultation will be part of the further work this year. Some consultation with farmers has already been carried out via the ELMS Test & Trail consultation, however more comprehensive consultation is planned for 2023.

6. Further work required

- a) Further work on the State of Nature of the Quantocks is required, particularly in terms of using data for maximising carbon sequestration and increasing climate resilience. For instance, the feasibility of ground truthing the current carbon data for the different habitat types on the Quantocks is being considered to ensure that predictions and targets for carbon are as robust as possible. Work with partner organisations and agencies on the impacts of climate change on nature and potential mitigation solutions are also required.
- b) The nature recovery plan requires a clear 'Statement of Priorities' to ensure that resources, collaborative opportunities and joint aspirations are understood and prioritised by all parties.
- c) A set of 'Champion Species' will be determined that will help to convey to the wider public the importance of nature recovery. Those species will be selected based on agreed criteria for being charismatic, with public appeal, being important indicators of health in key Quantock habitats, or of other particular significance. Initial work has started on this with JAC engagement on S41 and Red Data list species to prioritise species.
- d) Consultations will be undertaken with many statutory or non-statutory organisations and a range of other local interest organisations.
- e) The 'Strategy' for the Nature recovery plan will set out how the AONB plan will integrate or sit alongside the Somersets Local Nature Recovery Strategy, nearby protected landscape plans, Natural England's emerging Nature Recovery Plan and other organisational plans to ensure the benefits of collaboration, funding opportunities and other synergies are realised.
- f) The implementation of the nature recovery is strongly dependent upon the work and cooperation of farmers, foresters and other land managers. The public announcements by Defra on nature recovery funding for landowners, for the coming years, have been erratic and delayed by recent government policy changes. Some very recent announcements in January for increases in some of the Countryside Stewardship payment rates will be welcomed by many farmers and landowners. Further details on different funding types are awaited before landowners are likely to commit to undertaking some nature recovery activities. It is anticipated that whatever the nuances of the funding schemes, they will provide incentives for farmers to undertake further nature recovery work.
- g) The AONB will be working with FWAG and other local advisory bodies to help and encourage clusters of neighbouring farms to work together on landscape scale projects and for them to benefit from funding available.
- h) The nature recovery plan needs to work well for those who are involved in its delivery. Consultation on the delivery of the nature recovery plan will be to two main audiences: firstly, farmers and land managers in terms of delivery and secondly statutory and other relevant organisations in relation to the nature recovery outcomes and delivery. Announcements will be made of the consultation process and opportunities in due course.

7. Process and timelines



Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER E
Subject	Partnership Constitution & Membership	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	24 / 01 / 2023	

- 1) The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership is legally constituted as a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) under Somerset County Council. With the local government reforms – move from 2 tier district / county to single unitary authority – the Quantock Hills AONB JAC needs to amend its constitution and membership ready for vestment on 1st April 2023.
- 2) The Government has indicated it will be creating new governance guidance for protected landscapes in response to the Landscape Review and that this is likely to be published in mid-2024. With this in mind the current review is a light touch review to ensure the constitution and membership is fit for purpose for the new authority
- 3) A draft constitution was sent to partners on 03/12/2022 with comments or observations to be returned by 19/12/2022. Many thanks for those members who responded. The attached draft has been amended to take account of the feedback.
- 4) The JAC is required to consider the attached draft constitution and membership and approve it, with it coming into force on 1st April 2023.
- 5) With the next JAC meeting planned for 18th April, I would like to contact democratic services at Somerset County Council, to request appointments of the additional Somerset Council members. This is to ensure members are notified and informed in plenty of time. It will also allow time to undertake inductions.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC approves the constitution and membership as attached.
- 2) The JAC agrees for the AONB Manager to approach Somerset County Councils democratic services prior to vestment date to appoint members to the committee.
- 3) The JAC notes the report.

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE 1

QUANTOCK HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE, STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

1. Introduction

- 1.1. These are the Terms of Reference for the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership, setting out the structure of the Partnership and the functions of its constituent elements, particularly the Committee and Officer Working Group. They update the terms set out in the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee Constitution and Terms of Reference (last reviewed and agreed October 2021).

2. Purpose of the Partnership

- 2.1. The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership was established as a Joint Advisory Committee on 21st May 1975. The Partnership champions the AONB, providing a united voice to promote its care and management. By bringing together a wide range of interests the Partnership, through its dedicated team of staff and in consultation with others, develops and reviews the AONB Management Plan and takes direct action by leading and supporting initiatives in the area.
- 2.2. The Partnership is set up as a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) under Section 102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to advise the constituent local authorities. The JAC does not have executive powers over the funding partners rather it acts in an advisory and consultative capacity to the funding partners.
- 2.3. The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership:
- Promotes and champions the vision and aims of the Quantock Hills AONB
 - Raises awareness among the public and stakeholders of the special qualities of the area and its importance
 - Enables the agreement of common policies and strategies
 - Ensures implementation of the management plan by enabling and delivering direct action to conserve and enhance the AONB
 - Influences and assists wider work within the Quantock Hills AONB
 - Promotes innovation, acting as a test bed for new ideas and approaches
 - Plays a lead role in championing sustainable development
 - Enables work undertaken in the Quantock Hills AONB to be monitored and evaluated
 - Encourages and recruits wide political and financial support for management measures
 - Encourages and develops community involvement in the management of the Quantock Hills AONB
 - Enables the exchange of information and ideas.

3. Partnership Funding

- 3.1. The funding arrangements for the AONB Partnership will be set out in a 'Statement of Intent' (SoI) between the funding partners which sets out a shared vision for the AONB,

provides a framework for the delivery of the duties and obligations of the different parties and, so far as possible, will give the Partnership a secure financial future.

- 3.2. The annual budget will be agreed by the funding partners in accordance with their SoI. Decisions regarding the annual strategic priorities for this budget will be the responsibility of the Quantock Hills JAC. Day to day management of the budget will be the responsibility of the AONB Manager who will follow the financial standing orders of the host authority. The AONB Steering Group will monitor the budget quarterly and provide guidance/advice to the AONB Manager as required.

4. The Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

- 4.1. The purpose of the Quantock Hills AONB JAC is to be responsible for delivering the statutory duties and requirements for the Quantock Hills AONB as set out in Section IV of the CROW Act 2000.
- 4.2. The objectives of the Partnership (JAC) are to:
 - Ensure the development, adoption and regular review of the statutory management plan for the Quantock Hills AONB JAC as required under the CROW Act 2000
 - Develop and promote a vision for the AONB
 - Co-ordinate and endorse the production and implementation of the management plan to achieve its objectives
 - Consider, debate and recommend courses of action on the main issues relating to the Quantock Hills AONB
 - Accommodate new requirements resulting from changes in national legislation or policy relevant to the Quantock Hills AONB
 - Consider and review the management structure to enable future implementation of the management plan
 - Receive, review and approve the work programmes of the AONB core team, business plans and annual reviews, giving consideration to financial and resource issues
- 4.3. Membership of the JAC includes representatives from local authorities, statutory agencies, regional bodies and landowner representatives. Each partner organisation will be required to nominate a representative (6 for Somerset Council [see Appendix 1] and 4 for Parish Councils [see Appendix 2]) to regularly attend meetings and feedback / co-ordinate any activities within their organisation as required. Support staff may also attend. Each member may cast one vote. Local authority representation will be by elected member appointed by the authority. Members are as follows:
 - Somerset Council – 6 representatives
 - Parish Councils Representatives – 4 representatives
 - Country Land and Business Association – 1 representative
 - Forestry England – 1 representative
 - Friends of Quantock – 1 representative
 - Quantock Commoners Association – 1 representative
 - Natural England – 1 representative

- Somerset Local Access Forum – 1 representative
- The National Trust – 1 representative

4.4 Partnership members are expected to promote the purposes of AONB designation and the work of the AONB JAC and Team within their organisation and/or sector.

4.5 The JAC Chair:

- The JAC will elect a Chair on a biennial basis. A sitting Chair may be re-elected for a further successive term to serve a maximum term of 4 years.
- The JAC will also elect a Vice-Chair on a biennial basis. The role of Vice-Chair is to support the Chair as an ambassador for the AONB and to provide cover for attending required AONB meetings. When acting in place of the Chair, the Vice-Chair will be expected to represent independently of the organisation they normally represent. A sitting Vice-Chair may be re-elected for a further successive term to serve a maximum term of 4 years.
- Either the Chair or Vice-Chair shall be appointed from JAC members of Somerset Council. It will be expected that whichever role is not filled by a Somerset Council member is filled by a JAC member not from Somerset Council.
- Nominations for election will be sought from the JAC at the meeting preceding the end of Chair's and Vice-Chair's term or if the Chair or Vice-Chair stands down
- The Chair / Vice-Chair can stand down, giving reasonable notice
- The election of Chair and Vice-Chair will be undertaken at periods to ensure linkage to the local authority electoral cycle.

4.6 Members of the public may raise an issue with the JAC if it cannot be dealt with by the AONB Team. The issue must be presented in writing and sent to the chair at least ten days before the date of the meeting. A written response will be made within three weeks of the meeting.

4.7 Where an item on the agenda is of overriding importance to an organisation or individual not normally represented, they may be invited to attend for that item at the discretion of the Chair.

4.8 At least 60% of JAC members must be present for a JAC to be quorate. Based on a 17 member JAC this equates to 11 members.

4.9 The JAC Chair:

4.9.1 The JAC will elect a Chair on a biennial basis. A sitting Chair may be re-elected for a further successive term to serve a maximum term of 4 years.

4.9.2 The JAC will also elect a Vice-Chair on a biennial basis. The role of Vice-Chair is to support the Chair as an ambassador for the AONB and to provide cover for attending required AONB meetings. When acting in place of the Chair, the Vice-Chair will be expected to represent independently of the organisation they normally represent. A sitting Vice-Chair may be re-elected for a further successive term to serve a maximum term of 4 years.

4.9.3 Either the Chair or Vice-Chair shall be appointed from JAC members of Somerset

Council. It will be expected that whichever role is not filled by a Somerset Council member is filled by a JAC member not from Somerset Council.

- 4.9.4 Nominations for election will be sought from the JAC at the meeting preceding the end of Chair's and Vice-Chair's term or if the Chair or Vice-Chair stands down
- 4.9.5 The Chair / Vice-Chair can stand down, giving reasonable notice
- 4.9.6 The election of Chair and Vice-Chair will be undertaken at periods to ensure linkage to the local authority electoral cycle.

- 4.10 Members of the public may raise an issue with the JAC if it cannot be dealt with by the AONB Team. The issue must be presented in writing and sent to the chair at least ten days before the date of the meeting. A written response will be made within three weeks of the meeting.
- 4.11 Where an item on the agenda is of overriding importance to an organisation or individual not normally represented, they may be invited to attend for that item at the discretion of the Chair.
- 4.12 At least 60% of JAC members must be present for a JAC to be quorate. Based on a 17 member JAC this equates to 11 members.
- 4.13 JAC members will be responsible for endorsing recommendations and proposals. If necessary this will be conducted by a vote. Each organisation holds one vote, aside for Somerset Council who hold 6 and Parish Councils who hold 4 votes. For decisions relating to the funding of the AONB Team and other core costs only the core funding bodies have the right to vote.
- 4.14 JAC members must declare any financial or other interest prior to discussion of the relevant item by the Committee.
- 4.15 With regard to press and publicity, only the Chair of the JAC and, under the Chair's delegation, the AONB Team Manager or any other person with the Chair's specific authorisation, can speak on behalf of the AONB Partnership.
- 4.16 The JAC will meet at least four times each year, although if necessary additional meetings will be arranged as and when required.
- 4.17 Meetings shall be subject to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and shall be open to the press and public, where the public will be able to present questions to the Committee

5. AONB Steering Group

- 5.1 Purpose: To provide strategic direction and support to the AONB Team to establish, monitor and review the management process for the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to ensure that it supports the Local Planning Authorities and other partner organisations in fulfilling the statutory requirements set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

- 5.2 Principal roles and responsibilities of the AONB Steering Group will be:
- (a) To create and keep under review the management structure for the Quantock Hills AONB JAC
 - (b) To make recommendations to the AONB JAC on its membership
 - (c) To advise the JAC on methods of engaging the Board members, potential Board members and the communities of the Quantock Hills to ensure their active involvement in AONB work.
 - (d) To initiate and oversee appointment of the AONB Team Manager
 - (e) To agree a draft of the AONB Management Plan for submission to the AONB JAC, constituent local planning authorities, Natural England and the Secretary of State for approval.
 - (f) To receive progress reports on the work of the AONB Team.
 - (g) To maintain focus on the delivery of the Management Plan by the AONB Team and JAC.
 - (h) To ensure that the work of the AONB JAC is integrated with the policy making functions of its partners and visa-versa.
 - (i) To ensure that all resources available for AONB management are used to their best advantage.
 - (j) To ensure effective connection is made between the spatial planning and other responsibilities of the local authorities and the AONB management planning process.
 - (k) To support the members at the meetings of the JAC
 - (l) To support the JAC by proposing agenda items for JAC meetings.
- 5.3 The Steering Group should meet no less than four times a year and its meetings should be timed so that they link with the meetings of the JAC.
- 5.4 Membership of the Steering Group:
- a) Chair of the JAC
 - b) Vice-Chair of the JAC
 - c) Somerset Council Officers – A number of relevant officers to represent Planning / Landscape / Communities (Cultural Services) / Climate, Environment & Sustainability / Public Health (Health improvement) /
 - d) Natural England
 - e) AONB Manager
- 5.5 The Steering Group will elect a Chair from amongst its members (neither the Chair or Vice-Chair of the JAC nor the AONB Manager are eligible for this post); the expected term is two years.
- 5.6 Should a vote be required, each member present will have one vote, with the Chair having a second or casting vote if required.
- 5.7 The Secretariat for the Steering Group will be provided by the Quantock Hills AONB Team.

6. The AONB Team

6.1. The AONB Team is employed to service the Partnership and enable fulfilment of its purposes and objectives. The team is an independent unit working to the Partnership. Core functions of the team are set below:

- Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the AONB vision and the CRoW Act AONB Management Plan
- Promoting the AONB vision and management plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside
- Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan
- Advising Local Authorities on their activities within AONBs, to encourage them to go beyond normal levels of service (attain the highest possible standards) in countryside management
- Monitoring and reporting on progress against AONB Management Plan targets
- Monitoring AONB landscape condition
- Accessing resources for management activities
- Working with and contributing to the NAAONB activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally
- Providing a management role to co-ordinate AONB protection through the actions of the AONB unit, the AONB partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level.
- Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB
- Providing landscape related planning advice.

Appendix 1: Somerset Council Elected Member representation

- 1) Somerset Council will elect 6 representatives on to the Quantock Hills JAC as the only local planning authority covering the geographical area of the Quantock Hills AONB. In appointing elected members Somerset Council shall consider:
 - a. Geographical interest – The member represents a division that contains part of or is adjacent to the Quantock Hills AONB
 - b. Thematic interest – The member has knowledge / experience of the main areas of interest of the Quantock Hills AONB [Farming, climate & nature recovery, people engagement, economic development]
 - c. Community interest – The member represents community development interests

Appendix 2: Parish Council Election Process

With regard to the representation of Parish Councils, it is agreed that the Quantock Hills JAC has four Parish Council members. Parishes that lie within or about the Quantock Hills AONB Boundary (see table 1) will be eligible to put forward a member for election.

Broomfield	Bishops Lydeard & Cothelstone	Bicknoller
Enmore	Combe Florey	Crowcombe
Goathurst	Kingston St Mary	East Quantoxhead
Nether Stowey	Lydeard St Lawrence	Holford
North Petherton	West Bagborough	Kilve
Over Stowey	West Monkton	Sampford Brett
Spaxton	West Quantoxhead	Stringston

The elections will be administered by Somerset Associations of Local Councils.

Each candidate will be required to currently hold a position as a parish councillor on one of the parish councils within their local authority area and should not be intending to stand down at the next parish council elections.

Candidates should preferably not be an elected member of a principal local authority: it is hoped that this will ensure that those elected to the Quantock Hills JAC will be better able to focus on issues at the parish council level and give the necessary time and commitment to the work of the JAC Committee.

Each of the four parish councillors elected to the Quantock Hills JAC would hold the post for a four-year term from the date of the Parish Council elections.

Role of Parish Council Members on the JAC Committee.

The role of parish council members of the Committee will be as follows: 'A parish member will be regarded as broadly representative of parish interests but is not a delegate, so cannot be mandated by the parish councils concerned. The involvement of parish members is to ensure that the Quantock Hills JAC takes full account of the needs of their local communities and to improve the links between

the JAC and local residents. Parish members should not just be spokespeople for the local issues, but ambassadors for wider concerns. Parish members are appointed to reflect 'truly local concerns' but, in that, to represent the wider AONB view, not just that of their own parish.'

DRAFT

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER F
Subject	AONB Business Plan report	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	24 / 01 / 2023	

1. 2022/23 Business Plan Qu3 Progress.

- a. The business plan contains 86 actions (3 new actions added October 2022). Table 1 show headline figures (RAG) based on progress at the end of Qu1. Table 2 identifies progress on the 3 headline areas of work from the AONB Business Plan for Qu3. A separate attachment reports on progress on all actions from the AONB Business Plan for quarter 3 (April – December).

Table 1: Summary RAG of 86 actions

● – Complete, targets met.	● – on target	● – behind target but expected to meet targets by end of year	● – behind target and not expected to meet targets by end of year
0 (0%)	73 (85%)	10 (12%)	3 (3%)

Table 2: Qu3 progress on headline workstreams

Work area	Brief Description	Targets	Progress (Qu3)
Nature Recovery & Climate Change adaptation HPC S106 Funded. FiPL funded	The AONB Service will be delivering nature recovery and climate change work through advice and grant provision through the Landscape Development Fund and the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. The projects approved include invasive species removal in woodland (rhododendron), native hedgerow planting, new orchard created and restoration of species rich grassland. Direct delivery of nature recovery work will also occur through the Landscape Improvement Scheme and land management work undertaken on Cothelstone Hill. Through the Landscape Improvement Scheme over 6Ha of scrub woodland will be enhanced through removal of conifer and invasive species. The AONB Service will be delivering a number of environmental stewardship schemes on Cothelstone Hill, enhancing the broadleaved woodlands and acidic / neutral species rich grassland.	12.18Ha of conifer / invasive species cleared to form broadleaved scrub habitat Enhancement of 51.44Ha of broadleaved woodland through on-going management Enhancement of 37.51Ha of acidic / neutral grassland through on-going management 220m native hedgerow planted 120 fruit trees (1 orchard) planted 29.7Ha of species rich grassland restored 5.75Ha of new broadleaved woodland created 1 new pond created 3 ponds restored.	Enhancement of 51.44Ha of broadleaved woodland through on- going management Enhancement of 37.51Ha of acidic / neutral grassland through on-going management 12.18Ha of open / scrub habitat enhanced through invasive and conifer species removal. Other elements due for delivery winter 2022/23. FiPL – There is concern over potential underspend. At the December panel meeting FiPL was oversubscribed, however during December one project admitted to being significantly behind schedule with £13k suddenly coming back into the fund. It is the difficulty in

			<p>managing an in-year fund and the team are assessing applications to see if any can be brought forward.</p> <p>Mark Barker, Projects Manager, is taking forward the development of the Nature Recovery Plan. During this period Mark will be completing the State of Nature and Statement of Priorities elements.</p>
<p>Health and Wellbeing HPC Community Fund / NLCF / SCC</p>	<p>The AONB Service is a key partner in the Somerset Nature Connections Project that will be delivering health & wellbeing activities on the Quantock Hills. These activities include 6 week blocks of sessions that people can self-refer or be referred onto which will provide benefit to those with poor mental health. The project will also run sessions for community groups and will provide training and confidence sessions for group leaders to allow them to access the natural environment when the project ends.</p> <p>The AONB Service will be continuing with the Working Well volunteer group. This group is a next stage volunteering opportunity for people who are suffering poor mental health and referrals / signposting come from MIND though it is expected that people engaged in the Somerset Nature Connections Project will also be offered the opportunity to volunteer with this group.</p>	<p>36 participants on SNC course 3 community group sessions through SNC 12 Working Well sessions run with ave 8 participants</p>	<p>18 participants (some repeat) on 6 sessions. 1 community group session. <i>SNC to provide update</i></p> <p>9 Working Well sessions run with 66 participants (ave 7 participants / session)</p>
<p>Rural Skills Training HPC S106 Funded</p>	<p>Through the Land Management and Skills Scheme (LMSS) the AONB Service will be delivering courses for NEETS and unemployed adults. The training courses will introduce participants to basic skills such as basic health & safety, first aid in the context of land management employment sector before providing the opportunity to undertake specific land based qualifications that contractors and employers have told use are essential for their staff. The project will also be working with local contractors who will be providing guidance to participants about the skills and experience they require when looking to recruit.</p>	<p>16 young people undertaking introductory course 24 young people undertaking further qualifications 16 people undertaking introductory course 24 people undertaking further qualifications / training</p>	<p>Project plan updated with courses reprofiled to allow for lower numbers of participants. Course due to start January 2023 (NEETS) with 14-month delivery period to February 2024. Grant agreement with Somerset West & Taunton has been extended to take account of extended project timescales.</p>

2. 2022-23 Budget Qu3 (April – December) position

- a. Budgets updated to include Defra Capital Access Grant. Overall budgets on track though expenditure appears low on some budget lines especially the projects where works are undertaken in autumn / winter. The Service will need to ensure timely delivery and spend on these projects.
- b. Core budget expenditure is largely on track though some budget lines are overspent or higher than where they should be, and others are underspending. Salaries is higher due to miscoding of the Project Manager salary and on-costs. The salaries budget line is being re-profiled to take account of the pay award which has been applied in December. Literature and publications is overspent due to publication of the Seriously Not Boring walk book. This will be covered through viament of other budget lines (training/ stationary). Meeting costs is significantly higher than anticipated and will need to be monitored during the rest of the financial year. Some of this is associated with hire of village halls for face-to-face team meetings as the office is not large enough. Overall core budget is within tolerance.
- c. Spend on Landscape Projects budget line appears low however majority of expenditure associated with grant claims that will be due in between November and March.

Table 2: Summary Budget Position (Qu 3)

Budget heading	Budget £	Expenditure £	Balance	Comment
Core	£255,073	£201,099	£53,974	
Projects	£145,623	£44,773	£100,850	Increased budget with Defra's Capital Access Grant
Landscape Ptn Scheme	£414,776	£342,074	£72,702	
Projects [FiPL / HPC]	£267,804	£108,386	£159,418	
Land Management	£11,950	£2,666	£9,284	
Total	£1,095,226	£698,997	£626,207	
<i>RIA (b/f 2021/22)</i>	£71,422	£0	£71,422	
<i>Earmarked Reserves</i>	£19,000			<i>To cover 50% of costs of compulsory redundancy of core team</i>
<i>Allocated carry forward</i>	£23,019			<i>Inc carry forward for projects (LMSS) and Land Management</i>
<i>Reserves</i>	£29,402			<i>Predicted figure based on full spend on commitments</i>

Table 3: Budget Position (Qu 3): Core Budget

Measure	Budget	Performance (75% of yr)	Comments	RAG
£ / % Core Budget	£255,073	£201,099 / 79%		
£/% [salaries, NI, SA]	£187,748	£152,191 / 81%	Expenditure higher due to miscoding of Project Manager post. Currently reprofiling as pay award has been agreed which will lead to overspend on salaries budget line. Looking to use R&D and salary budget to cover overspend.	☹️
£/% [training]	£2,500	£1,511 / 60%	On track	😊

£/% [rent, rates, electricity, water, premise insurance]	£12,380	£8,681 / 70%	On track. First set of rent charges paid.	😊
£/% [stationary, post, phones, printing]	£3,700	£1,339 / 36%	Low. Via unallocated into other core budgets	😊
£/% [travel, vehicle costs]	£21,280	£18,179 / 85%	High due to lease costs in July 2022.	😊
£/% [Equipment, maintenance, clothing, uniform]	£2,500	£2,220 / 89%	High, monitor.	😊
£/% [Literature, publications, publicity]	£2,700	£3,447 / 128%	High due to publication of SNB walk book, use underspend in stationary budget to cover.	😐
£/% [Meeting costs, hospitality]	£600	£1,552 / 259%	High, use underspend from training to cover	😐
£/% [Management fee, insurance]	£8,890	£9,066 / 102%	Management fee (hosting costs). Full expenditure	😊
£/% [Memberships]	£2,775	£2,914 / 105%	Membership of National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) and Europarc Atlantic Isles. NAAONB element higher due to project charge being included in subscription invoice.	😐
£/% [Research & Development]	£10,000	£0 / 0%	Management Plan R&D work not taken ahead due to extension. Budget to be allocated to other budget lines.	😊
£ / % Grant – Defra	£172,200	£142,953 / 75%	Interim claim received (75%), final claim due March (25%)	😊
£ / % Contributions – Local Authorities	£47,094	£24,970 / 56%	SDC & SWT contributions received. SCC contribution applied at year end.	😊
£ / % Cost Recovery - Contracts	£300	£800 / 266%	Behind schedule issuing invoices.	😊
£ / % Recharge – Contributions to staff posts	£35,162	£21,613 / 0%	Forestry England contribution received. Blackdown Hills due March 2023.	😊
£ / % Income – AONB led events	£300	£232 / 77%	Initial income received.	😊

Table 4: Budget Position (Qu 3): Projects

Measure (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance (50% of yr)	Comments	RAG
£ / % [Somerset Nature Connections]	£43,300	£43,333 / 100%	Contribution to project.	😊
£ / % spend to date [Land Management Skills Scheme]	£51,662	£0 / 0%	Project start delayed due to recruitment of Project Manager. Expenditure due to start January though overall expenditure this financial year will be significantly less. Project has been given an extension by SWT.	😐
£ / % spend to date [Nature Recovery]	£19,404	£1,440 / 7%	Budget reprofiled (reduced) with Defra confirmation of grant. Initial projects include farmer engagement (Regen Agriculture) and priority species monitoring.	😊
£ / % spend to date [Capital Access Grant]	£31,257	£0 / 0%	NEW – 25/08/2022. Capital access grant (in-year). Sub-projects developed to be delivered Jan – Mar 2023.	😊
£ / % spend to date [Landscape Projects salaries, travel, on-costs]	£79,457	£27,939 / 35%	Expenditure low due to longer recruitment time for Project Manager and miscoding of salary expenditure.	😊

£ / % spend to date [HPC - GQLDF]	£15,000	£3,224 / 21%	Anticipated full allocation of fund by March 2023. Claims to be finalised by March 2024. Estimated budget from projects in pipeline and applications received to date	😊
£ / % spend to date [HPC - LIS]	£48,000	£5,350 / 11%	Contract completed December, invoice due in. Overall project delivery less this FY and carried forward to next FY.	😊
£ / % spend to date [FiPL grants]	£125,347	£21,967 / 18%	Claims due in winter	😊
£ / % spend to date [Landscape Partnership]	£414,776	£342,074 / 82%	On track	😊
£ / % Contractors	£10,350	£2,480 / 24%	Contractor costs from summer work programme due out October. Winter works programme due March. Lower expenditure showing as some invoice late.	😊
£ / % Materials / equipment	£1,600	£186 / 12%	Invoices for material late.	😊

3. 2023/24 Business Plan development.

- a. The 2023/24 Business Plan will be presented slightly differently to allow clearer reporting to Defra. Current; plans have been presented based on the AONB Management Plan themes, of which there are ten. The next business plan will show delivery for (i) Nature Recovery (ii) Climate (iii) Improving access to protected landscapes (iv) Supporting communities (v) Place (heritage) (vi) Core
- b. The business plan is currently being drafted and the initial draft will be tabled at the JAC meeting. Workstream that we are prioritising include
 - i. Provision of grants for farmers / land managers (year 3 of FiPL) to deliver nature recovery / climate outputs.
 - ii. Delivery of nature recovery outcomes through the Landscape Improvement Scheme
 - iii. Direct land management of 'in-hand' land including extensive grassland and native broadleaf woodland.
 - iv. Delivery of natural flood management projects
 - v. Enhancement of information provision to increase accessibility of the AONB
 - vi. Delivery of public engagement events (walks, talks), provision of a range of volunteering opportunities and delivery of rural skills training for NEETs and unemployed.
 - vii. Species monitoring – continuation of AONB species monitoring programme including Dormice, Pied flycatchers, butterflies, bats, deer and nightjar. Support other species monitoring where resources allow.
- c. Hosted and project partners will be delivering outcomes across a range of themes. The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme will be delivering significantly on engagement and heritage with nature recovery, mainly being delivered through woodland management. The scheme will be in its fourth year and will be building on the hugely successful work achieved as well starting the embed legacy elements. The Somerset Nature Connections Project is in its final year with continuing delivery of wellbeing sessions for individuals and training for groups. The project will be ending in

October 2023 and project partners will be meeting in late January to look at project succession.

4. 2023/24 Budget

- a. Detailed budget can be found in the business plan to be tabled at the meeting. The AONB Service is currently working budgets through two scenarios.
 - i. Scenario 1 – Defra grant at 2022/23 level with local authority (Somerset Council) equal to 2022/23 combined contributions from local authority partners. Table 4. Defra indicated that the funding settlement would be at this higher level in April 2022 and should be confirming this in February.
 - ii. Scenario 2 – Defra grant at 2021/22 level (without 14.7% increase) with local authority (Somerset Council) equal to 2022/23 combined contributions from local authority partners. Table 5
- b. The scenarios are based on the current core and Landscapes Project staffing with the only change being an increase of 0.5 days per week allocated to the Landscape Planning post. Other core costs (accommodation, vehicle & travel) are based on current year cost with inflation built in.
- c. Scenario 1 is showing £2,152 surplus whereas scenario 2 is showing a £19,209 deficit. The deficit will be met through reduction of research & development budget allocated to the AONB Management Plan review and by recharging AONB time against externally funded projects. The budget required to undertake the Management Plan review will be easier to assess once guidance has been produced by Defra.

Table 4: 2023/24 Quantock Hills AONB draft budget (scenario 1)

CORE	Expenditure	273,402	
	Income	-273,461	
	<i>Balance</i>	-59	
PROJECTs	Expenditure	43,104	
	Income	-43,104	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
LANDSCAPE	Expenditure	355,761	
	Income	-344,454	
	<i>Balance</i>	11,307	
QLPS	Expenditure	0	<i>QLPS currently undertake mid-point review. This will be presented to QLPS Board in early February and incorporated into final business plan. QLPS operates a zero balance budget and therefore there will be no impact on AONB Service budgets.</i>
	Income	0	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
LAND MANAGEMENT	Expenditure	7,000	
	Income	-7,000	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
RIA	Expenditure	0	
	Income	-29,400	
	<i>Balance</i>	-29,400	
	Total Expenditure	679,267	
	Total Income	-697,419	
	Overall Balance	-18,152	
	<i>Earmarked reserves (redundancy)</i>	16,000	
	<i>Surplus / deficit</i>	-2,152	

Defra % of core expenditure

-69%

Table 5: 2023/24 Quantock Hills AONB draft budget (scenario 2)

CORE	Expenditure	273,402	
	Income	-252,100	
	<i>Balance</i>	21,302	
PROJECTs	Expenditure	40,000	
	Income	-40,000	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
LANDSCAPE	Expenditure	355,761	
	Income	-344,454	
	<i>Balance</i>	11,307	
QLPS	Expenditure	0	
	Income	0	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
Amenity	Expenditure	7,000	
	Income	-7,000	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
RIA	Expenditure	0	
	Income	-29,400	
	<i>Balance</i>	-29,400	
	Total Expenditure	676,163	
	Total Income	-672,954	
	Overall Balance	3,209	

Earmarked reserves (redundancy) 16,000

Surplus / deficit 19,209

Defra % of expenditure

-61%

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.