



QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday 18th April 2023

2.15pm, Crowcombe Village Hall, Crowcombe, TA4 4AQ

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.	Annual election of the JAC Chair and Vice-Chair
2.	Apologies for absence
3.	Declarations of interest - Members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting (see Sc 5 page 2).
4.	Accuracy of the previous minutes (copy appended) and to consider any matters arising.
5.	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.
6.	Presentation – Wilstock Hub (Lucinda Spelman-Ives)
7.	Paper A – Constitution, Roles & Responsibilities of the JAC (Iain Porter)
8.	Paper B – Partnership Update (Iain Porter)
9.	Paper C – National Landscape Rebrand (Iain Porter)
10.	Paper D – Planning Report (Alex Meletiou)
11.	Paper E – Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (Bill Jenman)
12.	Paper F – Quantock Hills Business Plan 2023/24 (Iain Porter)
13.	AOB
	<p>Future JAC meeting dates:</p> <p>Tuesday 18th July 2023</p> <p>(All start at 2.15pm venues TBC)</p>
	<p>Note:</p> <p>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.	<p>Inspection of Papers</p> <p>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</p>
2.	<p>Notes of the Meeting</p> <p>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</p>
3.	<p>Public Question Time</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>You must direct your questions and comments through the Chairman. You may not take direct part in the debate.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
4.	<p>Substitutions</p> <p>Committee members can appoint substitutes if they are unable to attend the meeting.</p>
5.	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>It is a member of the JACs responsibility to declare a personal or prejudicial interest at all meetings where matters being discussed or to be discussed affect their interests. Full guidance can be found in appendix 3 of the JAC Constitution.</p>

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (JAC)

Minutes of a meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held on:

Tuesday 24th January 2023 at 2.15pm

Enmore Memorial Hall

Present:

Members:

Mike Caswell - JAC Vice Chair (MC)	- Sedgemoor District Council
Fran Smith (FS)	- Somerset County Council
Dixie Darch (DD)	- Somerset West & Taunton Council
Alan Bradford (AB)	- Sedgemoor District Council
Phillip Comer (PC)	- Friends of the Quantocks
Hugh Warmington (HW)	- Country Land & Business Association
Nicola Sampson (NS)	- Natural England
Julian Taylor (JT)	- North Petherton Town Council
Emily Heckscher (EH)	- Holford Parish Council
Martin Jones (MJ)	- West Bagborough Parish Council
Alicia Aras (AA)	- Somerset Local Access Forum
Tommie Muncie (TM)	- National Trust

Officers:

Iain Porter (IP)	- Quantock Hills AONB Service
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Also present:

Quantock Hills AONB Service - Amanda Sampson (AS), Andy Stevenson (AST), Abby Wilkinson (AW), Mark Baker (MB).

Jon Doyle (JD) Somerset County Council, Alex Underwood (AU) Forestry Commission, John Andrews (JA) Friends of the Quantocks, David Stripp (DS) Kingston St Mary Parish Council, Mark Philipson (MP) West Quantoxhead Parish Council, Josh Schweiso (JS) Spaxton Parish Council, Julie Cooper (JC) Sedgemoor District Council, Paul Trolley (PT) AONB volunteer/member of the public and Wendy Philipson (WP) member of the public.

MC gave a tribute for Anthony Trollope-Bellew after his tragic death on 28th October 2022 and the group held a minute of silence in Anthony's memory.

1. Apologies

Over Stowey Parish Council, Councillor Lee Baker (SCC), John Ebsary (Forestry England).

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were given.

3. Accuracy and matters arising from the previous minutes

Two amendments noted, (1) removal of non-allocated comment and (2) date of local elections from 2023 to 2027. With these amendments the minutes of Tuesday 18th October 2022 were signed as a true representation of the meeting.

4. Public Question Time

PT regarding the makeup of the new JAC committee, feels more landowners should be on the JAC to be able to put forward more ideas from a landowner perspective. IP added that another partnership review will be going ahead, likely later in 2023 or early 2024. Would be useful to have more representation and may look to other groups for a new pool of people. HW agrees with the idea and liaising with Farmers and landowners can be done through other channels also, the main challenge is getting farmers into a room, but this does need to happen.

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

5.1 IP gave an update on the Partnership Report (Paper A). Abby Wilkinson the Quantock and Blackdown Hills Community Engagement Ranger has asked to reduce her hours from 5 days to 4 which has been agreed and will be reviewed going forward. Alex Meletiou the Quantock Hills Planning Officer's hours proposed to be increased from 15 to 19 hours per week depending on funding.

5.2 Rebranding of the AONB's to National Landscapes still ongoing as soon as anything is confirmed IP will bring this to the JAC. Natural England producing target and outcome framework for AONB's and National Parks. Environment Strategy Defra apportioning targets to landscapes.

5.3 All England strategic landscape map which was launched in October 2022. The map came from the Landscape Review, there is some concern within AONB's and National Parks over the methodology and the fact it was done very quickly, quite a blunt tool as working at such a large scale. Meetings coming up with NE's leads to try and make it more user friendly.

DD unsure of level of funding, do you know when we may find this out. IP expected any time around the start of April, would hope for more notice from Defra if funding due to be less.

DD given concerns about the landscape mapping tool, it would be good if Alex could have the increase in hours to support this as is an area which is not decreasing.

HW surely the Quantock people should have a view on tree planting and not just be told by the government how many trees we should be planting. IP all AONB's and NP have individual targets and outcomes so may find we have different outcomes to the national set.

Paper A Recommendation(s):

1) The JAC noted the report.

6. Paper B – Rangers Report (Andy Stevenson)

- 6.1 AST gave an update and summary on the Rangers Report which included a presentation about the work that has been done over the past 6 months.

EH - no mention of vehicles on the hills in presentation and there has been quite a lot of talk about vehicles off roading on the hills around at the moment, are the AONB doing anything about this? AST - we are working very closely with the police, but the difficulty is catching people in the act, having good enough evidence to take forward to the police and being able to identify if the individuals actually have permission to be there or not. Patrols are carried out regularly with the police but if anyone see this happening please notify the police with as much detail as possible.

AA - some people can become very volatile when approached about things. Are the AONB able to use drones to monitor this. IP we are investigating getting a drone, but this would not be its primary purpose.

DD - always enjoys the Rangers Report the balance seems to be really positive. Would be interested in the tick survey results, will this cold snap effect the tick numbers for this year. AST our ticks on the Quantocks seem to carry a smaller percentage of Lyme Disease than in other places approx. 0.5% compared to places like Exmoor where it ranges from 3-5%.

There were no further comments or questions.

Paper B Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report

7. Paper C – Volunteers Update (Abby Wilkinson)

- 7.1 AW gave an update including a presentation on the volunteers and how the volunteers time and activities are monitored. The volunteers Rangers meet once a month but do regular patrols across the Quantocks.

There were no comments or questions.

Paper C Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report

8. Paper D – Nature Recovery Plan Update (Mark Baker)

- 8.1 MB gave an update on the Nature Recovery Plan which included a presentation.

JA - the Quantocks are the best area for biodiversity, has concerns that lots of farmer are doing things because are being paid to, would like to see more people doing things because they want to. Feels there is enormous potential within this project.

JT - flood prevention how are you preventing flooding. MB is all about slowing down the flow of water.

AB - more money is needed the importance of working with farmers is essential.

MJ - Yellow Hammer comment very valid, let's have more indicators.

HW - important we have more time to discuss this another time. IP – Will be conveying additional partnership events will be held in future to discuss this in more detail.

There were no further comments or questions.

Paper D Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

9. Paper E – Partnership Constitution & Membership (Iain Porter)

MC noted that there would be a requirement for a vote at the end of this update with a proposer and seconder needed.

- 9.1 IP presented the final draft Constitution. All received comments have been considered noted amendments made and agreed by Somerset County Council Democratic Services.

DD - 4.5 and 4.9 there seems to be a repetition. There are a lot more parish councils than those elected, will there be a vote for the parish councils elected in future. IP as in appendix 2, when the parish councils term come to an end SALC run an election process to elect the new parish councils.

DD - proposed

JA - seconded

In favour - Unanimous

There were no further comments or questions.

Paper E Recommendations(s):

- 1) The JAC approved the constitution and membership.
- 2) The JAC agreed for the AONB Manager to approach Somerset County Councils democratic services prior to vestment date to appoint members to the committee.
- 3) The JAC Noted the report.

10. Paper F - Business Plan Report (Iain Porter)

- 10.1 IP gave an update on the Business Plan. AONB Management Plan 23/24 review will start in the spring to align with Natural England's Management Plan guidance due out at the same time.

There were no comments of questions.

Paper F Recommendation(s):

- 1) The JAC Noted the report.

11. AOB -

MC some truly excellent reports today, but we need more updates on the Nature Recovery Plan. IP – With significant amounts of business for upcoming JAC meetings will not be able to allocate enough time. As recommended earlier the Team will be setting up separate meetings.

Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 18th April 2023 at 2.15pm

Meeting was closed at 4.30pm.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER A
Subject	Constitution, roles & responsibilities of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	18/04/2023	

1. Attached to the papers are the updated Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee Constitution. The constitution was agreed by the JAC in January 2023 and democratic services in February 2023 as being fit for purpose for the new Somerset Council.
2. The JAC brings together representatives from various bodies who have a statutory and non-statutory interest in the Quantock Hills AONB. They will work together to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Quantock Hills. It has a formal role in the production, implementation and review of the statutory AONB Management Plan – with the next review due to be completed by March 2025.
3. The JAC forms part of the governance structure of the Quantock Hills AONB. The term ‘wider partnership’ is also used which refers to the JAC but also those individuals or organisations who have an interest in the AONB but are not members of the JAC. The wider partnership includes 20 additional organisations, 8 landowners and a number of interested individuals.

Joint Advisory Committee

AIM: To coordinate the management of the AONB and implementation of the AONB Management Plan

STRUCTURE: 17 representatives from a variety of public, private and voluntary sector bodies

Steering Group

AIM: To provide guidance, advice and support to the JAC and staff unit

STRUCTURE: Officers from Somerset Council, Forestry England and Friends of Quantock

Staff Unit

AIM: To assist the JAC in fulfilling its duties and to administer and oversee the management of the staff unit, coordinate and direct delivery of the AONB Management Plan

STRUCTURE (April 2023): AONB Manager, Landscape Planner, Ranger, Partnership Ranger, Community Engagement Ranger, Comms & Admin Support Officer + Project teams

4. The JAC and Steering Group meet four times a year, usually in January, April, July and October. Additional meetings can be arranged for specific items, such as the Nature Recovery Plan development of Management Plan review.

5. A recommendation from the Landscapes Review was to reform governance of AONBs and National Parks to inspire and secure ambition in national landscapes and better reflect society. Defra are expected to include governance of AONBs in the new AONB Management Plan guidance which is due out summer 2023. There may be a requirement for Quantock Hills JAC to review its constitution and membership in light of the new guidance.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER B
Subject	Team and Partnership Update	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	18/04/2023	

1. Staffing

- a. With the confirmation of the Defra core grant I have increased the Landscape Planner hours from 2 days / week to 2 ½ days / week. It was recognised that the current resource was only allowing the AONB Service to react to planning applications that would impact the AONB. There was no resource available to undertake forward looking work such as preparation of position statements, engagement with local plans, neighbourhood plans etc.
- b. We are currently looking at the legacy of the Somerset Nature Connections Project, which is due to end in October 2023. The project is a partnership between the 3 main Somerset AONBs and Somerset Wildlife Trust with the project team hosted by Somerset Wildlife Trust. SWT has stated it will not be looking to continue engagement work such as covered by the SNC project once the project ends. The AONBs are keen to continue the work and are currently investigating the best way of achieving this. In the short-term I am looking at whether the AONB can fund the project officer on a part-time basis to continue this engagement work.

2. Defra Grant Agreement

- a. Defra have confirmed grant amount for 2023/24 through a change control notice (CCN). This has extended the 2022/23 grant agreement to 31st March 2024 and confirmed our core grant at £190,604.46 – same level as 2022/23 with £155,510.63 for FiPL. As you may have seen FiPL has been extended by 12 months to 31st March 2025. Defra have been in contact to assess our ability to spend a higher FiPL allocation for FY 2023/24 and 2024/25. We have requested £225,000 per year (£450,000 total) with a request for early notice to allow the Landscapes Project team to work up applications. We are very encouraged with both the extension and proposed uplift in FiPL. This shows the value Defra have placed on the scheme and is a credit to the team. There is no Capital Access Grant for 2023/24 but we will be developing projects for 2024/25 when the second tranche of funding is available.

3. Landscape Review response.

- a. In 2018 Government commissioned a review of protected landscapes (AONBs and National Parks) to look at their role for nature, climate and society. The review was led by Julian Glover – and is sometimes referred to as the Glover Review. The Review reported back to Government in 2019 with a number of recommendations.
- b. In January 2022 Defra launched a consultation on their proposed response to the Landscape Review. While setting out some aspects of Government thinking the consultation asked more questions of the role of protected landscapes. The response to the consultation was due autumn 2022 but with the changes in government this has been delayed.

- c. Defra are hoping to publish the Government's response soon. Some elements of the review are already being taken forward (below), while others such as statutory consultee status are still being assessed as to the best vehicle to deliver.
4. Landscapes Parks and Trails Partnership
 - a. One of the recommendations from the Landscape Review was the creation of a National Landscape Service, which would oversee AONBs and National Parks, administer funding, build collaboration and private sector financing e.g. Green financing. The Government did not want to create another arms length body to manage the protected landscapes but recognised there was a requirement for a body to increase the partnership working, especially between national parks and AONBs.
 - b. In January the business case was approved for the Landscapes Parks and Trails Partnership. The partnership will be hosted by Natural England who have recently undertaken the recruitment for the Partnerships manager. The partnership is looking to develop a number of workstreams to allow greater collaboration across the protected landscapes. The most developed of these is the Green Finance which has been allocated funding for FY 23/24. The Nature Recovery and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion workstreams are currently being developed.
5. Targets & Outcome Framework
 - a. Coming out of the [Environment Act](#) the Government has developed national targets that will tackle climate change, restore natural capital and protect landscapes and green spaces. In January they published the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) setting out how the targets will be met. Defra looking to embed targets for protected landscapes in the core grant agreements and within the Statutory AONB and National Park Management Plans.
 - b. AONBs had already 'set' targets for themselves in 2018 through the [Colchester Declaration](#) which set collective targets for tree planting, priority habitat restoration / creation and species recovery. It is expected that the national targets and Colchester targets will closely align.
 - c. Defra is developing the targets to refine them for protected landscapes though there is no further detail at present.
6. Forestry Commission – Consultation on Protected Landscapes
 - a. In January the Forestry Commission notified protected landscapes that they were looking to reform forestry consultation processes. The aim is to streamline consultation and decision-making process to make it quicker, especially in relation to woodland creation schemes.
 - b. As AONBs are not statutory consultees the Forestry Commission has agreed to enter into Memorandum of Understandings. The Quantock Hills AONB team has a positive working relationship with Forestry Commission with the majority of felling, woodland creation and woodland management plans being sent to the AONB for consideration. However we are aware that this situation is not the same across the country. The MoU should bring a level of consistency. I have been feeding into the NAAONB response and engaged with Forestry Commission direct and at present there are a number of proposals that cause concerns.

- i. Proposal that FC will not consult AONB if the proposer has already engaged the AONB. Concern – not all proposers will take note of comments from the AONB and amend their proposals. In those examples where concerns have been raised by an AONB team prior to an application to the Forestry Commission, the onus should be on the Forestry Commission to ensure that these concerns are appropriately considered and assessed as part of the process.
 - ii. Procedural weakness – absence of a response from an AONB team being treated as ‘no objection’
 - iii. Procedural weakness – Final agreed proposal by FC not seen by AONB team to see if their comments have been taken on board.
- c. The next round of consultations including draft MoUs is due mid May as Forestry Commission are impacted by the pre-election period.

7. 2022/23 Budget overrun

- a. Due to the switch over to a new finance system with Somerset Council budget figures have been drafted but not approved by finance colleagues.
- b. Core / Revenue. Salaries are overspent due to the inflationary increase applied in November 2022 and the Landscape Project Manager post expenditure being mis-coded to the core budget which accounts for the majority of the apparent overspend on the salary line. The overspend of £13,518 is being covered by the underspend in the Project (FiPL / HPV LV) budget.
- c. Projects. Projects are showing an overspend due to income from Somerset County Council (preventing demand to improve lives fund) not being applied to budget line at year end. The income will be applied in 2023/24 once the new finance system is operational at Somerset Council.
- d. Landscape Projects. This includes the HPC Landscape & Visual Projects and Farming in Protected Landscapes Program. (FiPL). Showing an underspend as the project manager salary and on-costs miscoded to core budget.
- e. Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. Significant delivery and ramping up of expenditure during year 3 of the scheme. The scheme is showing an overspend, which will be covered through the AONB reserves and accounted for in a debtor accrual. A claim will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in late April, once the NLHF portal is back online.
- f. Land Management. Reduced expenditure which was due to uncertainties over income from RPA (Agri-Environment Schemes and Basic Payment). The AONB Service has extended the HLS agreement for a further 5-years and is currently revising the woodland management plan with the aim of applying for countryside stewardship next year. All significant tree works due to ash dieback have been completed though there is on-going tree safety works which will need to be completed annually.
- g. Overall the amount held in reserve appears to have significantly reduced from approximately £52,000 to £21,000 however once the SCC ILPD funding has been paid and the debtor accrual from the QLPS accounted for the reserves return to £62,000. At present the 2023/24 budget is showing an overspend on the Landscape Projects budget line of £12,000. This is due to the amount of funding from FiPL the AONB is able to claim for the FiPL staff and admin being less than the cost of employment. Taking this

into account the reserves will reduce to £50,000. Defra is currently assessing the amounts allocated to staff from FiPL with the aim of increasing the proportion that can be used to pay for staff and administration of the scheme.

Quantock Hills AONB – 2022/23 Summary finance position				
Budget	Income	Expenditure	Balance	Comment
Core	£277,126	£290,644	£13,518	Miscoding of project manager to core.
Projects	£83,813	£69,257	£14,556	£13,300 SCC ILPD funding not applied. Will be applied in 2023/24.
Landscape Ptn Scheme	£458,322	£486,278	£27,957	NLHF claim to be submitted end of April 2023 to bring balance back to zero
Landscape Projects	£216,829	£190,933	£25,896	Miscoding of project manager to core.
Land Management	£8,237	£3,928	£4,309	
RiA	£71,507	£0	£71,507	
Total	£1,101,277	£1,055,596	£45,682	
<i>Allocated carry forward</i>		£24,500	£24,500	<i>Inc carry forward for projects (LMSS) and Land Management</i>
<i>Reserves</i>			£21,182	

Core Budget (expenditure)				
Measure	Original Budget	Performance (end of yr)	Comments	RAG
£/% [salaries, NI, SA]	£187,748	£230,876 / 123%	Expenditure higher due to mis-coding 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	£1,598 / 64%		😊
£/% [rent, rates, electricity, water, premise insurance]	£12,380	£10,777 / 87%	Last rent payment of office did not go through due to late invoicing from NT	😊
£/% [stationary, post, phones, printing]	£3,700	£2,158 / 58%	Low. Via unallocated into other core budgets	😊
£/% [travel, vehicle costs]	£21,280	£21,159 / 99%		😊

£/% [Equipment, maintenance, clothing, uniform]	£2,500	£2,967 / 119%		😊
£/% [Literature, publications, publicity]	£2,700	£3,401 / 126%	High due to publication of SNB walk book,	😐
£/% [Meeting costs, hospitality]	£600	£2,605 / 434%	High, use underspend from training to cover	😐
£/% [Management fee, insurance]	£8,890	£9,137 / 102%	Management fee (hosting costs). Full expenditure	😊
£/% [Memberships]	£2,775	£5,967 / 215%	Membership of National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) and Europarc Atlantic Isles. NAAONB element higher due to project charge being included in subscription invoice & 2023/24 change coming out.	😐
£/% [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.	😊

Core Budget (income)				
£ / % Grant – Defra	£172,200	£190,604 / 111%	Full Defra core grant received, includes uplift	😊
£ / % Contributions – Local Authorities	£47,094	£47,082 / 100%	SDC & SWT contributions received. SCC contribution applied at year end.	😊
£ / % Cost Recovery - Contracts	£300	£3,627 / 1209%		😊
£ / % Recharge – Contributions to staff posts	£35,162	£34,013 / 97%	Forestry England contribution received. Blackdown Hills due March 2023.	😊
£ / % Income – AONB led events	£300	£1,799 / 600%		😊

Project (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance	Comments	RAG
£ spend to date [Somerset Nature Connections]	£43,300	£43,333	Contribution to project. Project due to end October 2023. Currently assessing legacy	😊

£ spend to date [Land Management Skills Scheme]	£17,712	£1,550	Project start delayed due to recruitment of Project Manager. Expenditure only started in Feb / March with limited uptake. Underspend carried forward. Total budget £60,000. Budget shown only 1 st tranche received.	☹️
£ spend to date [Nature Recovery]	£19,404	£6,003	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	£32,927	NEW – 25/08/2022. Capital access grant (in-year). 3 projects delivered. Additional income from Discovery grant.	😊
Landscape Project (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance	Comments	
£ spend to date [Landscape Projects salaries, travel, on-costs]	£79,457	£42,112	Expenditure low due to longer recruitment time for Project Manager and mis-coding of salary expenditure into core	😊
£ spend to date [HPC - GQLDF]	£15,000	£4,155	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	£21,100	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	£123,565		😊

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance	Comments	RAG
£ Salaries, training and travel	£157,558	£171,179	Higher due to inflationary increases in salary payments and higher staff travel costs than anticipated.	☹️
£ Running costs – rent, phones, printing etc	£13,918	£8,863		😊

£ Contractor / consultant costs	£193,800	£295,478	Higher as work brought forward. Income through increasing NLHF claims	😊
£ Project Transport costs	£7,000	£5,714		😊
£ Equipment, materials	£42,500	£5,714		😊
£ National Lottery Heritage Fund	£338,831	£406,084	Increase in NLHF claims as projects brought forward	😊
£ HPC S106/DCO	£46,445	£46,445	All HPC S106/DCO funding received	😊
£ Friends of Quantock	£25,000	£5,000	£20,000 income associated with CPG car park project which did not go ahead.	😊
£ AONB	£4,000	£0	Income received previous year	😊
£ Events	£500	£792		😊

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme is a ring-fenced budget line. The scheme started in April 2020 and is due to complete March 2025.

Project (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance	Comments	RAG
£ Contractors	£10,350	£3,359	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	£569		😊
£ Income	£11,950	£8,237	RPA disputing claim for CS / HLS so this has not been paid. Likely to be 2023 until payment agreed. BPS due January 2023.	😐

Recommendation(s) - 1) The JAC notes the report

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER C
Subject	National Landscapes Rebrand	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	18/04/2023	

1. While many acknowledged that the name 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' clearly articulated what these special landscapes are there has been an issue in public perception. The name 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' is long and very often abbreviated to 'AONB', which has even less awareness by the wider public and even those within the landscape world. The issue is further compounded by the fact that AONB partnerships have very different brands and marketing. The lack of a cohesive brand / message is seen as a barrier to increasing national awareness of what AONB's are.
2. The Landscape Review panel were asked to look at this issue and responded with proposal 24 that - 'AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes'. Defra is currently looking at how to achieve new purposes, powers and resources but has committed resources, through a grant to the National Association of AONBs (NAAONB), to develop a national brand to allow a name change to 'National Landscapes'. Any change in name will be public facing only as to change the name of designation would require a statutory change.
3. The NAAONB has been developing the brand over the previous 4 months, with a steering group consisting of AONB lead officers and communication officers, creative consultants and a Creative Council (people from underrepresented backgrounds) taking the work forward. There has been limited wider consultation due to the timescales imposed by the grant funding.
4. Version 2, attached, of the 'tone of voice and visual identity' was released on 28th March. There is a lot of positive elements to the proposed brand including:
 - a. Name 'National Landscape' – increases the sense of the national importance of these landscapes. Harder to shorten or abbreviate, while being short enough to be useable in branding and communications
 - b. A cohesive national brand will increase recognition allowing AONBs to talk with one voice (where appropriate). This will be particularly relevant in discussions with government.
 - c. Agree with the brand principles and strategic overview. Having this allow a common approach and understanding allowing the building of key messages.
 - d. Retention of the tagline Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty retains the descriptive element and allows for another element of commonality.
 - e. Tone of voice provides principles to allow greater engagement.
5. The NAAONB were looking for feedback from each AONB on which logo to use, which colour palette (from a choice of eight) and which 2 icons best represented their AONB, with an unrealistic response deadline of 30th March. I responded to NAAONB with the following:
 - a. I am very supportive of the brand strategy and tone of voice.

- b. 3 days at the end of financial year was far too short to be able to provide comprehensive response, especially given that we have not had sight of v1 or anything previously.
 - c. The buzzard logo needed to be retained.
 - d. The Quantock Hills uses a colour palette of green, grey and purple. This represents the coast, heath and combes and it is this mix of different landscapes that makes the Quantock Hills special. To choose just one colour palette would be very difficult. Other AONBs, such as the Lincolnshire Wolds, which are predominately grassland, may find this easier to achieve.
 - e. There is a requirement to consult the steering group and JAC, which cannot be achieved in 3 days.
6. A number of other AONBs have responded along similar lines and the rebrand is to be discussed at a lead officer meeting on 27th April. I am looking to discuss the rebrand with the JAC to be able to help inform the discussions at the lead officer meeting.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER D
Subject	Planning Report	
Author	Alex Meletiou, Landscape Planning Officer	
Date	18/04/2023	

1. Planning applications

From 1st October 2022 to 15th March 2023 the AONB received 40 planning applications for consideration and 2 applications for timber felling licences, which have been followed up from the published lists or by direct invitation to comment. The level of applications remains reasonably consistent but as before, the high level of property prices continues to be a driving force. The distribution between the two LPA's is listed below together with the number of applications within each Parish.

Sedgemoor		Somerset West and Taunton	
Broomfield	3	Cothelstone	1
Enmore	1	Crowcombe	2
Nether Stowey	6	Holford	2
North Petherton	4	Kilve	3
Over Stowey	4	Staplegrove	1
Spaxton	4	Stogumber	1
Thurloxtton	1	Washford	3
Total	23	West Bagborough	3
		West Quantoxhead	1
		Total	17

Applications by type

Agricultural buildings	2
Agricultural conversions	6
Caravans – site extension	1
Caravans/camping	2
Conversion to holiday lets	1
Domestic extensions	11
Equestrian/stables	2
Holiday lodge	1
Major residential	1
Mast and aerials	1
Minor works	1
New dwellings	2
Power generation	4
Solar – PV panels	1
Store/shed	3
Village hall	1
Total	40

8 applications were either objected to or comments made raising some concerns.

2. Current issues

A decision on the proposed solar park at Washford has still not been made, with further details being supplied by the applicant. Following their submission, an extension of time was given for public responses, and these were then 'countered' by the applicant, thus further extending the process. The AONB's comments however remain unchanged.

3. Consultations

- 1) Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, there has been a Government consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the AONB Service's response reflected that of the National Association (NAAONB). A copy of the response is attached to this report at [Appendix 1](#).
- 2) A further consultation has recently been announced on changes to permitted development rights supporting temporary recreational campsites, renewable energy and filmmaking. These have yet to be considered as the closing date for responses is 25th April.
- 3) Somerset County Council have issued a consultation document on the draft Statement of Community Involvement for Planning under the new Somerset Council.

The AONB Service's response was to highlight the Protected Landscapes within the County and ask for early consultation on the formulation of Local Plans and automatic receipt of planning applications within the AONB boundary and its setting.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER E
Subject	Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme	
Author	Bill Jenman, QLPS Manager	
Date	18/04/2023	

1. Team update

We continue to regularly meet every Monday and Thursday as a team in the Nether Stowey office. The diversity of backgrounds and interests amongst the team continues to be a strength.

2. Delivery

The programme is grouped into three themes, "Inspire", "Live", and "Learn".

2.1 Inspire

The "A view to a Hill" project has continued with further research on the viewpoints being undertaken by volunteers and the contractor and a report and guide being prepared. We're on track to complete this project this spring.

There has also been good progress with the poetry trail, and we're now working on the virtual platform with Ralph Hoyte ready for a formal launch in September.

The events and activities programme has been as busy as usual, with regular photo walks etc and some special one-off events for Christmas. We've made a link with Hamp Food Pantry - a good way to reach disadvantaged families on the Estate. We also used the Christmas period to raise funds supporting local food pantries (in Hamp and Sydenham, both important community connections for the QLPS) during a one-off Quantock Hills AONBbingo evening at the local pop-up pub in Broomfield. A quintessentially Somerset evening, the event not only helped us gain recognition in the local parish, but also raised over £260 to give essential food supplies to these community lifelines during the Christmas period.

We had a very successful mural project at a local residential care home in Taunton, our first piece of bespoke work in a nursing home. The large mural painted a scene of events in nature across the Quantocks over the seasons, including actual scenes from the hills (photographs taken from our View to a Hill project), which can be updated to reflect the changing seasons.

The mural was a really fun and wholesome way of working in a nursing home, alongside the residents, sharing stories and experiences along the way. A few other nursing homes have been suggested to us, so we may be able to replicate the project, and engagement, elsewhere (including nursing homes in Hamp and Bridgwater).

QLPS sponsored several events this quarter including Stogumber Community Apple Day and 2BU Family Day at the Woodland Play Centre. Each of these events engaged a unique audience in different elements of the QLPS wildlife work. Our relationships with 2BU and the Woodland Play Centre are continuing to grow and constantly creating new opportunities.

The Young Rangers programme has continued successfully, but it is the new Apprentice scheme that has really shone with some lovely feedback from landowners and the public about their work. The three apprentices are gaining skills, qualifications and confidence and proving a very handy workforce for a variety of smaller tasks that would have been very hard to get contractors in to do.

2.2 Live

As members will know, the tragic death of Anthony Trollope Bellew, the landowner, will prevent us from being able to undertake the car park replacement as we had planned. This is a bitter disappointment but one possible bit of good news to offset this is that larger scale repairs to the other main car park at Withyman's pool next winter (23/24) now seem like a real possibility. These will build on the running repair work to the track carried out this winter by the AONB and should not raise the same consent issues as the replacement CPG project did.

We sponsored the Somerset hedge laying competition which completed 216m of hedge laid and a training day. We also sponsored Stogumber Apple Day.

Wildlife monitoring and engagement activities have continued. At the end of October, we hosted Cothelstone Tree Day; an event split in two parts. Firstly, we commissioned a local artist to teach the group how to use charcoal and watercolours to paint landscapes in the Park, followed by a tree survey, recording many notable and ancient trees.

We also hosted a Fungi Photo walk as part of Jon's regular photo walk program. This was run at Durborough Farm with Pete Baker and was very well received.

In association with Somerset Wildlife Trust, we ran a rocky shore ecology survey at Kilve Beach. Working in partnership with the existing SWT Shoresearch volunteers, we are aiming to gather more survey data about the Quantock stretch of the coast in 2023.

We have also been running a series of Harvest Mice surveys contributing to Somerset Mammal Group's county-wide effort to assess the presence of Harvest Mice and other small mammals.

The Historic Building Recording element also got underway with the first survey taking place at the Alfoxton barn and a further training event scheduled at Raswell House Broomfield in February.

The apprentices, with their supervisor Matt Beedle, spent a day at Holford to open up the view from the bridge, felling some trees and clearing shrubbery from around the waterfall and restoring the view written about by the romantic poets. There was immediate and very thankful local feedback both personal and on Facebook following this work.

2.3 Learn

The Stories of the Hills project is now complete, our first "finished" project of the 23.

The Understanding the Archives project has continued apace, with regular “Document of the month” postings on social media.

Our second Village Test-pitting event took place at Crowcombe in October. Despite the previously reported worries about lack of take up from villagers, we were able to run a successful weekend with the support of existing volunteers who were able to take advantage of the opportunity to gain further practical experience. The majority of pits were located in public areas including the grounds of Church House and the beer garden of the Carew Arms, along with a handful in private gardens. In addition to the volunteers, the weekend engaged an estimated 36 local beneficiaries, who either actively took part in the digging or who visited us over the weekend to find out more about the project. We await the finds report but several sherds of what is believed to be either Bronze Age or Saxon period pottery were recovered which is potentially exciting for helping understand the development of the village. A further opportunity for volunteer training was provided in the form of a subsequent finds-processing session supported by Dr Hayley Roberts of Past Participate CIC.

Also, this quarter, after an initial delay, fieldwalking in the numerous fields of interest west of Thurloxtan finally got underway.

3. Mid Project External Evaluation and Budget

I undertook a complete budget revision taking account of anticipated inflation in staff and other costs. It sought to “catch up” where we were behind, particularly on practical outputs. However the Mid Project External Evaluation by our evaluation consultants, Heritage Insider, made some far more radical proposals than we were expecting which rather rendered the interlinked set of new spreadsheets moot!

In essence the recommendation, which both the Board and the NLHF are supportive of, is that rather than trying to “catch up” on projects that have been more difficult to deliver, we reinforce the success of our engagement and inclusion work and ensure that as much legacy as possible is embedded with the AONB and other partners before the QLPS ends. In particular, they recommended redirecting budget to increase the staff resources available – not least because we’re already working at capacity so additional legacy planning would be a challenge. In conjunction with the AONB Manager, we’re currently working on how best to structure this, but we’re sure it is do-able within the overall budget.

I can report that we’ve received copy invoices etc for the work done by the National Trust at Fyne Court. These need to be set into a project plan before NLHF will sign off in accepting them as match funding, but we are making significant progress at last.

We have received the final tranche of S106 funding from Hinkley Point C to complete the full £250,000 of match funding.

Our regular meetings with the National Lottery Heritage Fund continue to go well and they have been very supportive and flexible. A copy of the slide pack presented to the Board by Heritage Insider at the February meeting is included for JAC members’ reference.

4. Board membership

John Ebsary of Forestry England has been consistently unable to attend Board meetings so the Board agreed that he should cease to be a Board member. We have approached an alternative officer who has a good knowledge of the forestry interests locally as a potential replacement.

5. Looking Forward

This report was written just before the end of the Quarter and of the financial year, so some complete full year figures etc will be given at the JAC meeting itself in April. However, overall, the Evaluation consultants confirmed that all is going well as we pass the halfway mark (we end in March 2025) and we can focus on ensuring we leave the best possible legacy.



Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.

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

1. 2023/24 Business Plan.

- 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 2023/24 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 draft Business Plan was presented at the January 2023 JAC meeting. Feedback from the JAC has been incorporated into the latest version of the Business Plan. The plan prioritises:
 - 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 to 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 have been investigating which legacy elements to continue and appropriateness for further projects.
- d. Version 1.4 has updated:
 - i. Confirmation of Defra grant amount
 - ii. Removal of scenario 2 – scenario 2 provided work plan and budgets if Defra reduced funding to 2021/22 levels. With confirmation of Defra grant amount scenario 2 is redundant.
 - iii. Landscape Planning Officer at 2.5 days (19 hours) per week
 - iv. Budget updated to include expected inflationary increases.
 - v. Not included – potential Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme funding. Defra looking to confirm FiPL amount in early Mary.

2. 2023/24 Budget

- a. Detailed budget can be found in the business plan included as a separate attachment.
- b. Due to the change of financial systems associated with the local government reorganisation the AONB Service has only just received end of year figures for 2022/23. This has identified that transfer of the Improving Lives to Prevent Demand grant (£13,300) had not been made. This will be paid in 2023/24. Due to the National Lottery Heritage Fund – which provides the majority of funding for the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme – changing claiming portal the QLPS was unable to submit a claim at the end of the financial year. This led to a £28,000 overspend which has been covered by a debtor accrual.
- c. The forward budget includes a inflationary increase on staff costs as recommended by HR at Somerset Council. This may change depending upon national negotiations.
- d. Defra recently informed protected landscapes that they are looking to increase the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25. These figures have not been included in the Business Plan budgets at present. Defra hope to confirm the FiPL budget by late April / beginning of May at which point the budget will be amended.

Table 4: 2023/24 Quantock Hills AONB summary budget

Budget line		(round to nearest 100)	
CORE	Expenditure	279,900	
	Income	-277,100	
	<i>Balance</i>	2,800	
PROJECTs	Expenditure	55,400	
	Income	-55,400	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
LANDSCAPE	Expenditure	368,000	
	Income	-354,900	
	<i>Balance</i>	13,000	
QLPS	Expenditure	572,500	
	Income	-572,500	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
LAND MANAGEMENT	Expenditure	7,000	
	Income	-7,000	
	<i>Balance</i>	0	
RIA	Expenditure	24,500	Carry forward for LMSS Project, SVF and land management. Income includes reserves and accrual from QLPS and ILPD grant (late payment)
	Income	-86,900	
	<i>Balance</i>	-62,400	
	Total Expenditure	1,307,200	
	Total Income	-1353,800	
	Overall Balance	-46,600	
	<i>Earmarked reserves (redundancy)</i>	16,000	
	<i>Surplus / deficit</i>	-30,600	

Defra % of core expenditure -68%

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.