

Quantock Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday 18th October 2022

2.15pm, Kingston St Mary Village Hall
Church Lane, Kingston St Mary, Taunton, TA2 8HR

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.	Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman.
2.	Apologies for absence
3.	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.
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.	Paper A – Partnership activity report (Iain Porter)
7.	Paper B – National Activity (Iain Porter)
8.	Review of draft partnership constitution (Iain Porter) – paper to be tabled at meeting
9.	Paper D – QLPS Progress Report (Bill Jenman)
10.	Paper E – Landscape Planning Report (Iain Porter)
11.	Paper F – Business Plan Progress Report (Iain Porter)
12.	AOB
	<p>Future JAC meeting dates:</p> <p>Tuesday 24th January 2023 Tuesday 18th April 2023 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>

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (JAC)

Minutes of a Meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held on
Tuesday 19th July at 2.15pm at Halsway Manor, Crowcombe

Present:

Members:

Dixie Darch (DD) - Chair	- Somerset West & Taunton Council
Philip Comer (PC)	- Friends of Quantock
Hugh Warmington (HW)	- CLA
Dr Martin Jones (MJ)	- Parish Rep – West Bagborough
Emily Heckscher (EH)	- Parish Rep - Holford
Tommy Muncie (TM)	- National Trust
Julian Taylor (JT)	- Parish Rep - North Petherton
Alan Bradford (AB)	- Sedgemoor District Council

Officers:

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

Amanda Sampson (AS) Quantock Hills AONB Comms & Support Officer, Alex Meletiou (AM) Quantock Hills AONB Planning Officer, Katie Read (KR) Quantock Hills AONB Project Officer, Mark Baker (MB) Quantock Hills AONB Projects Manager, Abby Wilkinson (AW) Quantock Hills AONB Community Engagement Ranger, Dan Broadbent (DB) Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Historic Heritage Officer, David Stripp (Kingston St Mary PC), Robin Stamp (Friends of Quantock),

1. Apologies

Anthony Trollope-Bellew (JAC Chairman), Mike Caswell (JAC Vice Chair), Patrick Markey-Bell (Natural England), Paul Bryan (Somerset West & Taunton), John Andrews (Friends of Quantock Chairman), Lee Baker (Somerset County Councillor for Taunton North Division), Joshua Schweiso (Spaxton Parish Council), Alicia Aras (Somerset Local Access Forum) and Francesca Smith (Somerset County Council).

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations.

3. Accuracy and matters arising from the previous minutes (26th April 2022)

The minutes of 26th April 2022 were agreed as a true representation of the meeting.

4. Public Question Time

No public questions.

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

- 5.1 IP gave an update on the Team and partnership. Welcomed Amanda back to work after a period of sickness. Welcomed Abby Wilkinson to the team as the Community Engagement Ranger, Mark Baker as the new Landscapes Projects Manager.
- 5.2 Defra have set out expectations for the next round of AONB Management Plan reviews. In a letter from Lord Benyon (7th July 2022) it confirmed that a light touch review could be undertaken prior to March 2024 with the expectation that a full review would be completed by March 2025.
- 5.3 Defra consulted on Governments response to the Landscape Review. The Quantock Hills AONB responded with main points being a welcome to a change of name and purposes but that it should come with resources to allow AONBs to take the required step change in activity.
- 5.4 DD - would Government be looking for continual improvement, what point does this become untenable. IP – Felt Defra took this on board at the subsequent workshop.
- 5.5 AM - what is the issues with AONB's becoming National Landscapes from the National Parks perspective. IP - There is concern over resources and funding.
- 5.6 HW - to achieve any of this is going to require a huge amount of money. IP – AONB teams / partnerships aware of implications. Government also aware and are looking at more innovative funding solutions, though concern has to be whether these will be viable.

No further comments or questions.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

6. iNaturalist Presentation (Robin Stamp)

- 6.1 RS gave a presentation on behalf of Friends of Quantock about Wildlife Watch and iNaturalist. iNaturalist is a nature app which helps to identify the plants and animals around you. You can take photographs and upload them to identify them. The initiative aims to encourage people visiting the Quantocks to use the app and upload their findings in order to collect more data. The main project is the Quantock Wildlife Watch but sub projects have been created for butterflies ect, this is to increase awareness about the species and wildlife we have on the Quantocks. More information about this will be promoted on social media and the Quantock Hills AONB newsletter soon.
- 6.2 JT - how dependant on network signal is the app? RS - you can take the photos whilst you are out and then upload the photos when you are back within signal as most iphones now save data of the location that the photograph was taken. You can drop a pin on the map for an accurate location.
- 6.3 AB - do we know the reason that there is a noticeable reduction in butterflies this year? No confirmed reason through weather is spring may have had impact.

No further comments or questions.

7. Paper B – Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme (FiPL) – Year 1 2021/2022

- 7.1 Time limited program which ends in March 2024. Each Protected Landscapes received a sum of money proportionate to their size. Approx £60,000 for year 1 with approx. £125,000 each year for years 2 and 3. In year 1, 17 projects approved, 1 cancelled and 5 applications pending.
- 7.2 DD - is there a follow up to track how effective the project has been? KR will visit the projects throughout the scheme. Issue is monitoring outcomes after FiPL funding ends as we do not know what resources the AONB will have. IP - Defra understand that output monitoring is possible but outcome monitoring will be harder to achieve.
- 7.3 AB - is this programme connected to FWAG-SW? KR - yes we have good connections with FWAG-SW via Thomas Mansfield. IP - signposting is being done between the two organisations.
- 7.4 JT – Raised concerns about soil erosion, especially around the southern part of the AONB. KR - we try and keep the monitoring proportionate to the grant size but certainly particulate in water could be included. The new ELMs will require soil risk assessments. This is certainly a priority for Defra.
- 7.5 HW - wanted to commend KR and the work FiPL is doing, having advisors like KR to talk is fantastic.
- 7.6 TM - had never heard of the FiPL programme until recently even though has been working with farmers for years. Have you found farmers to be receptive to the programme because of the potential funding? KR there has been a mixture of people who are interested to hear some new ideas.

No further comments or questions.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

8. QLPS Historic Heritage work Presentation (Dan Broadbent)

- 8.1 DB gave a presentation about the Historic Heritage work of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme.
- 8.2 Folies and Features is a heritage conservation project which has so far carried out works at Castle Mount in Nether Stowey and Dowsborough Hillfort.
- 8.3 Unlocking the Archives project involves cataloguing and researching previously unexplored historic archives.
- 8.4 Trees in the Landscapes project is understanding the changing use of trees and hedgerows on the Quantocks.
- 8.5 Understanding the Landscape is a community archaeology project including the LiDAR and community excavations on Cothelstone Hill and Crowcombe Court.
- 8.6 TM - asked for a copy of the Drove LiDAR image via email.

No further comments or questions.

9. Paper C – Landscape Planning Report (Alex Meletiou)

- 9.1 AM gave an update on the Landscape Planning Report.
- 9.2 AB - the building for Hinkley Point workers has no easy answer as local people are being forced out of housing to accommodate the workers needed for the project.
- 9.3 AB any update on the potential development at the Pines Café (Broomfield). AM - the application for a residential building has been approved.

No further comments or questions.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

10. Paper D – Business Plan Progress Report (Iain Porter)

- 10.1 IP gave an update on the Business Plan Progress Report.
- DD - what are the plans for enhancing Lydeard Hill Carpark. IP - the repairs won't be ground breaking but will be reinforcing what is already there without expanding it and ensuring the maintenance is less going forward. The carpark is owned by SCC.

No further comments or questions.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC noted the report.

11. AOB

DS - when the issue of unitary was raised a consideration was put forward for a Quantock Local Community Network.

MJ - this has been discussed with local representatives. Lots of differing views about best approach.

IP - do we know a timeline for decisions for this?

DD – aware that proposals on areas and functions are imminent.

EH - has received something from Somerset County Council mentioning a meeting on the 5th September regarding this.

MJ - concerns about location in relation to the Quantocks. IP – agree concerns if the AONB is on the fringe of lots of LCNs.

No further comments or questions.

Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 18th October 2022 (venue TBC).

Meeting was closed at 4.08pm

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER A
Subject	Partnership activity report	
Author	Iain Porter, Quantock Hills AONB Manager	
Date	18 / 10 / 2022	

1. Staffing

- a) Support and Communications Officer – Amanda has now returned from a period of unplanned leave. Amanda’s workstreams were put on hold or picked up by other staff members.
- b) Community Engagement Ranger – Abby Wilkinson has been confirmed in post. Work streams are moving from initial engagement with volunteers and community groups to development of volunteer offer and increasing promotion of value of volunteering.
- c) Project Manager – Mark Baker has started to take over the project work from Iain with the first main contract for rhododendron removal at Ramscombe as part of the Landscape Improvement Scheme (LIS) being delivered during this period. Mark is also prioritising delivery of the Land Management and Skills Scheme Project and Nature Recovery Plan during the next 3 months.

2. Partnership

- a) Natural England has recruited to the Lead Advisor Role previously held by Jo Chesworth (who has moved to a new role within the organisation). Nicola Sampson and Laura Daniells are based in the role on a job-share basis. They have already met many of the stakeholders including the main Commoners and have been feedback on plans for future schemes.
- b) In a change to the report in July Somerset County Council have appointed Fran Smith (Lib Dem, Taunton South) and Lee Baker (Lib Dem, Taunton North) to the JAC.
- c) I have been in contact with Democratic Services at Somerset County Council to revise the JAC constitution and ToR to take account of the move to a new unitary authority next April. Unfortunately due to staff illness the production of the draft constitution has been delayed and will be sent to members as soon as it is available for discussion at the meeting.
- d) Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman. The JAC is due to elect a Chairman and Vice-Chairman at this JAC meeting. I propose that Anthony Trollope-Bellew continues as Chairman of the JAC with Mike Caswell continuing as Vice-Chairman until the new partnership come into being on 1st April 2023. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall then be elected from the membership of the partnership inline with the new constitution and terms of reference.

3. Defra Grant Agreement

- a) On 15th March Defra informed AONBs of the approved protected landscapes budget for 2022/23. There has been a 14.7% increase on the 2021/22 base budget - which excludes FiPL and the in-year top-up – and this will form the indicative budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Grant Agreement was signed on 26 July.
- b) A new set of clauses involved working with the National Landscapes Partnership (NLP). There has been no progress on the development and launch of the NLP and it is assumed that this will have very limited impact on the working of the AONB Partnership and Service for the 2022/23 financial year.
- c) Defra have confirmed an Access Capital Grant for 2022/23 and 2024/25 (note no grant in 2023/24). For the current financial year, the grant is £31,257 and for 2024/25 £37,138, totalling £68,395. Detailed guidance on eligible expenditure items has not been received however we are aware that research and development is included. We are currently assessing projects / works to take forward this year. There are challenges due to the lack of contractors locally and the tight timeframes but we are confident we can spend all the grant.

Recommendation(s)

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

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER B
Subject	National Activity	
Author	Iain Porter	
Date	18 / 10 / 2022	

1. Rebranding of AONBs

- a) As the JAC will be aware one of the proposals from the 2019 Landscape Review was that AONBs be renamed as National Landscapes. Defra appear committed to the rebrand of AONBs to National Landscapes. As reported at the July OWG / JAC this would not be legislative change to the name, rather a public facing rebrand. Legally Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) would remain as such however outward facing branding would have the National Landscape name.
- b) To facilitate the rebrand Defra have provisionally offered the NAAONB a grant during the remainder of 2022/23. While the grant is welcome I have expressed concern that the re-brand could be 'rushed' without full buy-in from teams, partnerships and stakeholders.
- c) We, along with a number of other AONBs, have challenged Defra that a rebrand alone is not sufficient to deliver the proposal (see below) and that the other elements need to be actioned and a clear timetable produced for implementation.
- d) Proposal 24: AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources and renamed as National Landscapes. (Landscape Review, 2019)

2. NAAONB Conference

- a) The NAAONB Conference occurred in September at Lancaster University with the theme 'The Nation's Landscapes? Peoples and Places'. This is the first in person conference since the pandemic and it was very well supported. Myself, Andy, Mark, Katie, Vickie, Bill and Jon attended (the best attendance from the Quantock Hills to a conference). We were wonderfully hosted by Arnside and Silverdale, Howardian Hills, North Pennines, Forest of Bowland and Solway Coast AONBs.
- b) The conference challenged the AONBs on engagement and how can we ensure our landscapes are accessible and open for all communities. Some interesting projects and initiatives showed has this has happened in protected landscapes and also in other sectors, such as museums. The conference provided opportunity to discuss other areas of interest such as communication, climate change and funding opportunities.

3. Investment Zones announcement

- a) On 2nd October the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) released guidance on application for Investment Zones in England. Investment Zones will be designated areas in England designed to drive growth and unlock houses.
- b) There was significant interest in the media, especially over implications related to the 'planning liberalisation' that will come as part of an Investment Zone.
- c) 38 local authorities are named in the Growth Plan as expressing interest in Investment Zones, including Somerset County Council. These authorities are now able to submit an Expression of Interest

- d) Since the announcement AONBs and National Parks have sought clarification from Defra and DLUHC on potential implications for protected landscapes. On 5th October we received the following from Sion McGeever, Deputy Director at Defra
- e) "Can you please pass this message on to your NAAONB networks. I'm simply keen to reassure that we are working with DLUHC colleagues to make the messaging as clear as it needs to be. You are aware of the guidance published over the weekend by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on expressions of interest for Investment Zones and related articles in the media. I recognise that this announcement may raise questions for you around the ambition and implementation of Investment Zones, specifically if the proposed development would be in a National Park or AONB and associated implications. At this stage I wanted to let you know that we are continuing to engage closely with colleagues across Government to make sure that Protected Landscapes and delivering on our ambitions for them are front and centre in this discussion."

4. MOU with Arts Council

- a) On 23rd September Philip Hygate, Chair of the NAAONB and Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England signed a Memorandum of Understanding, representing their commitment to working together to nurture new links between arts and cultural organisations and AONBs.
- b) Working in partnership under the MOU means both organisations (and individual AONBs) deliver on their own priorities, underpinned by joint ambitions to see more people engaging with culture and landscape, promoting opportunities, prosperity and wellbeing for rural communities, and contributing to conversations around tackling the climate emergency.
- c) The Quantock Hills AONB have commissioned and engaged with art installations and activities over many years from the ACE funded Romantic Poets inspired Project in 2007 to the Big Draw event in 2010, the work of the Nature & Wellbeing Project from 2015-19 and more recently a huge amount of work is being delivered and commissioned by the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. Through the MOU Arts Council England have signalled their ambitions to engage with the protected landscapes and surrounding communities and this commitment will be built into the Management Plan review to develop the new phase of art based work.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER C
Subject	Draft Partnership Constitution	
Author	Iain Porter, Quantock Hills AONB Manager	
Date	18 / 10 / 2022	

- 1) As discussed at the JAC meeting (26 April 2022) with the change from a two-tier local authority to a single unitary council there is a requirement for changes to the Quantock Hills JAC Constitution and terms of reference. The review is to be 'light touch' to ensure the move from three local authority partners to one ensures a fair and equitable standing on the new committee / partnership.
- 2) Natural England will be producing new guidance for AONB Governance, likely to be produced later in 2023 along with the new guidance for review of AONB Management Plans. Once the new guidance has been issued a more in-depth review will be conducted to ensure the committee / partnership governance is fit for purpose.
- 3) Support has been given by Democratic Services at Somerset County Council. Unfortunately due to staff illness it has not be possible to have a draft Constitution / Terms of Reference ready to send out with the papers. It is anticipated that we will be able to table the draft at the meeting.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER D
Subject	Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Progress Report	
Author	Bill Jenman, Quantock LPS Manager	
Date	18 / 10 / 2022	

1. Team update

The new office in the Thomas Poole Community Library is now fully open; we meet there regularly every Monday and Thursday as a team but also use it on an ad hoc basis on other days as needed. The option to work from home a couple of days a week has been particularly welcome in terms both of saving commuting costs, time, and carbon for staff who live further away and because it helps work/life balance given how many evenings and weekends we all spend on community engagement.

2. Delivery

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

2.1 "Inspire"

We have had another very busy and successful summer season, including four camping weekends – there was demand for twice that number, but staff time and campsite availability are limiting factors. NLHF remain very pleased with our outreach programme and the impressively diverse range of audiences we are working with. We have engaged with over 4500 people so far in 2022, the majority of that being in their home communities and so not adding significantly to visitor pressures in the AONB proper. *[note that there will be double counting where a person has come to more than one event or been involved over more than one quarter, but I'm confident this represents over 2000 individuals]*

The "A View to a Hill" project, cataloguing the most significant views of the Quantocks from outside the area, is now well underway, as is the Poetry Trail – both had been delayed by Covid.

The education programme has had another successful spring and summer season, with class presentations, visits to 2 cultural partners by three schools and a full programme of Quantock site visits.

As noted above, the engagement programme with disadvantaged communities and individuals has continued to flourish. In this quarter we have involved BAME audiences, Bulgarian community groups, people suffering from mental health difficulties, wheelchair users, people recovering from trauma or drug and alcohol abuse, youth groups, women's groups, and LGBTQ+ young people. New engagement from community members in the very disadvantaged Hamp estate in Bridgwater is particularly welcome as we've been trying to gain traction there for 2 years. A promising development is the willingness of individuals from these target groups to be involved in our other volunteering opportunities, such as archaeological excavations, wildlife conservation etc.

We have also begun to add a new volunteer role, Wild Workout volunteers, which will act as an entry-level community engagement role for our community groups to get involved in a menu of light volunteering duties, as well as helping at our public events. Sustaining this legacy for the AONB, once the LPS has finished in 2 years, will require additional AONB staff time though, something I know that the AONB is well aware of.

Our 4 camping weekends were all very successful. These have included one with the 2BU LGBTQ+ support group based out of Taunton, a weekend with children from Sydenham nr Bridgwater, and Stogursey youth club. All have expressed a change in behaviour and confidence in children who have attended. The final weekend was for families who we've been working with from Priorswood in August.

The Young Rangers project finally got underway in February – it had a late start because of Covid and there have been issues with retention, despite having a waiting list, so the participant cadre has not yet stabilised as hoped. In very simple terms we (the LPS/AONB) had thought about it as being like the regular YR schemes run by other protected areas but for disadvantaged kids rather than middle class ones looking for pre-university experience. A few months in it is clear that this is not a realistic expectation, especially as we have quite a neurodiverse group, rather than just young people lacking money and access to transport. We have therefore decided to meet with the Young Somerset staff involved and recalibrate what success will look like – we always intended that the personal and social development of the participants would be a key measure, but practical skills and physical task outputs will probably be less significant than we had envisaged.

The second Quantock Future workshop was postponed until October, the first good slot due to Covid and then the busy farming season. Despite this, the lack of farmer involvement has remained very disappointing. The second workshop will happen after the time of writing but before the JAC meeting so I will report back verbally as part of my presentation.

The Apprentices scheme has just started, with three apprentices taken on by Young Somerset with our support. At least initially this will involve us in more work than we had planned for, as YS was unable to recruit a supervisor at the first attempt, but they are currently re-advertising.

2.2 Live

The Car park saga will be the main topic of the presentation to the meeting, but in summary the footpath diversion has been completed, and we are working our way through the planning conditions. Procurement is underway for a contractor to build the new car park next spring, with the restoration of the existing site to follow in autumn.

The refencing of Nether Stowey Castle Mount has been completed and the site will shortly be taken off the Heritage At Risk register.

Most practical hedgerow restoration last year was by FiPL, but we've funded several smaller projects. The total length of hedges surveyed has reached 6.2km. At last, we're now also making progress on the meadow and orchard projects which had stalled.

Most exciting is the progress being made at Alfoxton which includes the creation of a new orchard with restoration of the walled garden ready to start any day now. The purchase of an alpine tractor with mower and winch means we will now be able to help Alfoxton manage bracken within the park as well as elsewhere in the AONB. QLPS funded training for 4 staff members and 4 volunteers.

The Partnership Board has agreed not to continue with the verges project – after literally years of trying, we did eventually get a response from Highways by submitting a formal FOI request, but the minimalist answers raised more questions than they addressed.

The Partnership Board has agreed not to continue with the verges project – after literally years of trying, we did eventually get a response from Highways by submitting a formal FOI request, but the minimalist answers raised more questions than they addressed. Instead we have agreed with NLHF to offer grants for small-scale wildflower meadow creation - similarly scaled outcomes but not necessarily on roadsides.

Over the winter months QLPS and the AONB have hosted a significant number of tree planting events across the two community woodlands, planting more than seven thousand trees and shrubs across the LPS/AONB area.

The Monitoring Volunteers project has had its first full season; bat and adder monitoring has expanded significantly, but other planned threads (birds, butterflies) have not yet succeeded in expanding much beyond the existing AONB programme. Training for historic building surveying, another Covid delayed workstream, went ahead in early Autumn and was very successful so that workstream should now make good progress at last.

The Barbastelle Radio tracking project was awarded to Geckoella. Early attempts to trap Barbastelles to radio track were frustrating, but at last 2 females were caught enabling us to home in on a new maternity roost. Another rare woodland species, the Bechsteins bat, was caught revealing a previously unknown population. Berchstein's are known to roost in the Quantock Hills though this is a new population. We believe the project has recorded / trapped all 17 species of bat known to be present in Somerset.

We supported the Quantock Walking Festival which was once again very successful, with 3 QLPS walks including a four day challenge walk around the LPS boundary.

2.3 Learn

The Parkland and Trees archive volunteers continue to research the history of changing tree and hedgerow use across the LPS area. The LiDAR results have also proved very useful in identifying the location of lost hedgerows. The most fruitful parish and estate records relevant to the project have been identified and the information is being imported and digitally mapped into a dedicated GIS layer within the Somerset Historic Environment Record.

The Stories of the Hills folk project has run a successful series of community events over summer and completed the archival and cataloguing work. This one-year project by Halsway Manor is now nearing completion.

The general Quantock archive project is also now fully up and running. The QLPS is funding archivists at the SWHT to catalogue various collections and have so far completed cataloguing of the archive of the Friends of Quantocks; Papers Concerning Thomas Poole of Nether Stowey, and Records Relating to Grove Farm, Pickney, Kingston St Mary, the Esdaile Family Archive, and the Archive of Edwin Hellard of Stogumber.

LiDAR interpretation continues apace. Currently c.1400 potential new sites identified, and the process of sifting these and integrating them into the HER is underway. Sites identified include numerous charcoal burning platforms and quarry sites along with previously unrecorded farm labourer's cottages and prehistoric cairns. The LiDAR is also adding to knowledge of previously recorded sites, including, for example, relic field systems and an enclosure at Claybury Cast, Spaxton.

Context One Archaeological Services delivered a very successful, if enjoyably frustrating, dig at Crowcombe Court. We were looking for the medieval manor, found the Georgian walled garden instead, and then on the very last day found what may be a bit of the manor after all – we seem to have dug about 10m too far west!

3. Budget

We are on track with the revised (post Covid) budget, but that budget has been rather overtaken by events as prices are rising rapidly. A fresh version will be prepared for the February Board meeting, taking account of anticipated inflation in staff and other costs. I'm confident we still have enough funding to last the planned project duration, but I no longer think that we'll be able to afford an extension over summer 2025 as I had hoped. Volunteer time continues to be a concern – we are not going to meet the target amount of hours/cash equivalent by some margin. However NLHF are very understanding about this so this is a challenge rather than a threat.

More of an issue is the ever-slipping timetable for the National Trust's restoration work at Fyne Court. This is an important part of the overall package, to be delivered by NT as a project partner, and represents £128k of match funding that has not yet started to be delivered. Some works were undertaken this summer, around £50k worth, but these weren't flagged up in advance so we may have missed the opportunity to have them count. I'm hoping that we can insert them into the funding retrospectively if NLHF agrees, and more NT staff are now aware of the situation, but there do seem to be a lot of different staff involved and delivering on our funding package is incidental to NT's programme from their point of view.

Our regular meetings with the National Lottery Heritage Fund continue to go well and they have been very supportive and flexible.

4. Board membership

At the next Board meeting we will be reviewing membership in light of the new Unitary Authority. Any suggestions from the JAC for new potential members would be welcome.

5. Looking Forward

We will have a review of progress and budget over this winter, but overall, I am very happy with where we are on the “people” and historic heritage aspects of the project. However, the delivery of practical outcomes, like hedgerow and traditional orchard management and restoration, is still behind and will be harder to catch up on. Practical details of the planned work to The Drove are still being worked on, and while we will get the Car Park done eventually it has been a very slow and frustrating planning process to navigate.

Recommendations

1 The JAC notes the report



Reimagining the Manor



Made possible with

**Heritage
Fund**

Quantock Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER E
Subject	Landscape Planners Report	
Author	Alex Meletiou, Landscape Planning Officer	
Date	18 / 10 / 2022	

1. Planning applications

From 1st July to 30th September 2022 the AONB received 27 planning applications for consideration and 3 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 the high level of property prices continues to be a driving force.

The distribution between the two LPA's are listed below together with the number of applications within each Parish.

Sedgemoor		Somerset West & Taunton	
Aisholt	1	Bicknoller	1
Broomfield	2	Crowcombe	3
Goathurst	2	East Quantoxhead	1
Hinkley	1	Holford	2
Merridge	1	Triscombe	1
Nether Stowey	1	Washford	1
North Petherton	1	West Bagborough	3
Over Stowey	1	Total	12
Spaxton	3		
Taunton	1		
Thurloxtton	1		
Total	15		

Application by type	
Access	1
Agricultural buildings	4
Agricultural dwellings	2
Battery Energy Storage	1
Caravans – site extension	1
Conversion to holiday lets	1
Domestic extensions	6
Garages	1
Major residential	1
Mast and aerals	1
New dwellings	2
Power generation	2
Residential conversion	2
Solar / PV panels	2
Total	27

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

2. Current issues

The application for the proposed solar park at Washford has still not been determined as the LPA requested further details from the applicant on landscape and visual impact in the form of photomontages from important viewpoints, including Beacon Hill. The AONB's comments however remain unchanged as it is still considered that the impact from the

Hills will be significant. By virtue of their nature, the appearance of solar panels will be affected by the time of day, weather conditions and seasonal variations and these changes can be quite dramatic.

It is anticipated that household PV panels may become more popular and there have been two applications within the last three months. The first was for conventionally fitted roof panels to an existing dwelling but the second was for a group of stand-alone panels to be shared by two adjoining households. I think this situation might be rare and maybe an indication of things to come.

An application for the conversion of the Blue Ball Inn at Triscombe into holiday accommodation is currently in the planning system. The intention is to cater for groups of up to 16 people and provide a self-service bar for the residents. There are no planned alterations to the appearance of the buildings involved, so the landscape impact is likely to be small but the impact on the character of the area may be significant, considering the effects of noise on tranquillity, lighting on dark skies and the loss of a 400 year old inn and its value to the community.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (apparently known as LURB) is still going through the Committee stage in the House Of Commons, which have so far had 21 sittings.

Recommendation

The JAC notes the report.

To	Quantock Hills JAC	PAPER F
Subject	AONB Business Plan 2022/23 Qu2 progress report	
Author	Iain Porter, Quantock Hills AONB Manager	
Date	18 / 10 / 2022	

1. Introduction

- 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 Qu2. A separate attachment reports on progress on all actions from the AONB Business Plan for quarter 2 (April – September).

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%)	70 (82%)	16 (16%)	2 (2%)

Table 2: Qu1 progress on headline workstreams

Work area	Brief Description	Targets	Progress (Qu1)
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 autumn / winter 2022/23.
Health and Wellbeing HPC Community Fund / NLCF / SCC	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.	36 participants on SNC course 3 community group sessions through SNC 12 Working Well sessions run with ave 8 participants	18 participants (some repeat) on 6 sessions. 1 community group session. SNC to provide update 6 Working Well sessions run with 48 participants (ave 8 participants / session)

	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.		
Rural Skills Training HPC S106 Funded	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.	16 young people undertaking introductory course 24 young people undertaking further qualifications 16 people undertaking introductory course 24 people undertaking further qualifications / training	Project plan updated with courses reprofiled to allow for lower numbers of participants per course. Anticipate first NEETS course January 2023 with unemployed running February. Ticketed courses due to start February.

2. 2022-23 Budget Quarter 2 (April – September) position

- Overall budgets are 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.
- Core budget expenditure is largely on track though some budget lines are slightly overspent or higher than where they should be. Salaries is higher due to miscoding of the Project Manager salary and on-costs. 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 (equipment / materials). Meeting costs is higher than anticipated and will need to be monitored during the rest of the financial year. Overall core budget is within tolerance.
- 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 2)

Budget heading	Budget £	Expenditure £	Balance	Comment
Core	£255,073	£142,346	£112,727	
Projects	£145,623	£43,333	£102,290	Increased budget with Defra's Capital Access Grant
Landscape Ptn Scheme	£414,776	£206,357	£208,419	
Projects [FiPL / HPC]	£267,804	£75,793	£192,011	
Land Management	£11,950	£1,190	£10,760	
Total	£1,095,226	£469,019	£626,207	
<i>RIA (b/f 2020/21)</i>	£71,422	£0	£71,422	
<i>Earmarked Reserves</i>	£19,000			
<i>Allocated carry forward</i>	£23,019			
<i>Reserves</i>	£29,402			Predicted figure based on full spend on commitments

Table 3: Budget Position (Qu 2): Core Budget

Measure	Budget	Performance (50% of yr)	Comments	RAG
£ / % Core Budget	£255,073	£142,346 / 56%		
£/% [salaries, NI, SA]	£187,748	£103,983 / 55%	Expenditure higher due to mis-coding of Project Manager post	😊
£/% [training]	£2,500	£1,316 / 53%	On track	😊
£/% [rent, rates, electricity, water, premise insurance]	£12,380	£3,333 / 27%	On track. Rent for office due out September and January	😊
£/% [stationary, post, phones, printing]	£3,700	£883 / 24%	On track.	😊
£/% [travel, vehicle costs]	£21,280	£16,561 / 78%	High due to lease costs coming out July 2022	😊
£/% [Equipment, maintenance, clothing, uniform]	£2,500	£809 / 32%	On track	😊
£/% [Literature, publications, publicity]	£2,700	£2,907 / 108%	High due to publication of SNB walk book	😊
£/% [Meeting costs, hospitality]	£600	£574 / 96%	High - monitor	😐
£/% [Management fee, insurance]	£8,890	£9,066 / 102%	Management fee (hosting costs)	😊
£/% [Memberships]	£2,775	£2,914 / 105%	Membership of National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) and Europarc Atlantic Isles.	😐
£/% [Research & Development]	£10,000	£0 / 0%		😊
£ / % Grant – Defra	£172,200	£0 / 0%	Claims submitted Sep	😊
£ / % Contributions – Local Authorities	£47,094	£24,970 / 56%	SDC & SWT contribution received. SCC contribution applied at year end	😊
£ / % Cost Recovery - Contracts	£300	£0 / 0%	Behind schedule issuing invoices	😐
£ / % Recharge – Contributions to staff posts	£35,162	£0 / 0%	Due December and March	😊
£ / % Income – AONB led events	£300	£0 / 0%	Income coming in but needs to be move from bank account to SCC budgets	😊

Table 4: Budget Position (Qu 2): Projects

Measure (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance (50% of yr)	Comments	RAG
£ / % [Somerset Nature Connections]	£43,300	£43,333 / 100%		😊
£ / % spend to date [Land Management Skills Scheme]	£51,662	£0 / 0%	Project start delayed due to recruitment of Project Manager. Expenditure due to start October	😐
£ / % spend to date [Nature Recovery]	£19,404	£0 / 0%	Budget reprofiled (reduced) with Defra confirmation of grant. Projects to be developed during autumn with works undertaken winter	😊
£ / % spend to date [Capital Access Grant]	£31,257	£0 / 0%	NEW – 25/08/22. Capital access grant (in-year)	😊
£ / % spend to date [Landscape Projects salaries,	£79,457	£19,261 / 24%	Expenditure low due to longer recruitment time for Project	😊

travel, on-costs]			Manager and mis-coding 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	£0 / 0%	One contract due for delivery October	😊
£ / % spend to date [FiPL]	£125,347	£17,024 / 14%	Claims due in autumn / winter	😊
£ / % spend to date [Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme]	£414,776	£206,357 / 50%	On track	😊
£ / % [Land Management: Contractors]	£10,350	£1,050 / 10%	Contractor costs from summer work programme due out October. Winter works programme due March	😊
£ / % [Land Management: Materials / equipment]	£1,600	£140 / 9%		😊

Recommendation(s)

- 1) The JAC notes the report.