



**Quantock
Hills**
National
Landscape

Annual Report
2024—2025

Chairs Forward

As another year passes, it gives me great pleasure to once again introduce the Annual Report. Whilst not quite the smallest National Landscape, we are blessed with a remarkably beautiful, diverse and special place, rich in history and wildlife. This takes management, and this report highlights the work that goes on, day by day, largely behind the scenes, to ensure that the special qualities of our hills are understood, protected, and where possible enhanced.

As I said in last year's forward, the strength of the partnership is again evident in all aspects of the year's work, and it is this common cause, embraced and supported by a wide range of individuals and organisations, which is so evident and important.



What perhaps is missing, though, is tribute to the farmers who day in day out work the land and produce our food. The Quantock Hills is a farmed landscape, and whilst the pastoral fringe may not be a priority habitat, it provides the finest green frame to the purple hills. It would be tragic if the exigencies of the current economic climate drove land use change in an unfavourable direction. I would particularly like to thank the commoners for their continued commitment to and management of the heathland. Grazing livestock is the key component of this, and it would be hard to replace the knowledge and dedication of those few key commoners.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to Iain Porter and his excellent team. It is not an easy job, but I think this report is a fitting tribute to everyone working so hard for the Quantock Hills.

Hugh Warmington

Delivering for Nature

Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan

In April 2024 the Quantock Hills Partnership adopted the Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan. The plan had been developed over the preceding two years with the partnership, relevant stakeholders and organisations with the aim of:

- furthering understanding of the habitats and nature of the Quantock Hills.
- agreeing the vision for a nature-rich Quantock Hills we want to see.
- Identifying the priorities and opportunities for nature recovery.

The Quantock Hills is relatively nature-rich when compared to England. However issues such as loss of good quality habitat, fragmentation, development and recreation pressures have increased significantly over the last fifty years. The plan has identified that the Quantock Hills is nationally important for heathland, woodland and species-rich grassland habitats and the priorities should be to:

- Ensure core areas of these habitats are in good condition.
- Deliver the Lawton principles of creation of more areas of these habitats that link existing core areas.
- Develop networks beyond the National Landscape boundary to ensure the Quantock Hills is not an 'island' thereby increasing species and climate resilience.

Quantock Hills key nature figures



28% woodland cover within the Quantock Hills NL



33% priority habitat cover within the Quantock Hills NL



32% Site of Scientific Interest cover within the Quantock Hills NL



37km of beech hedgebank within the Quantock Hills NL

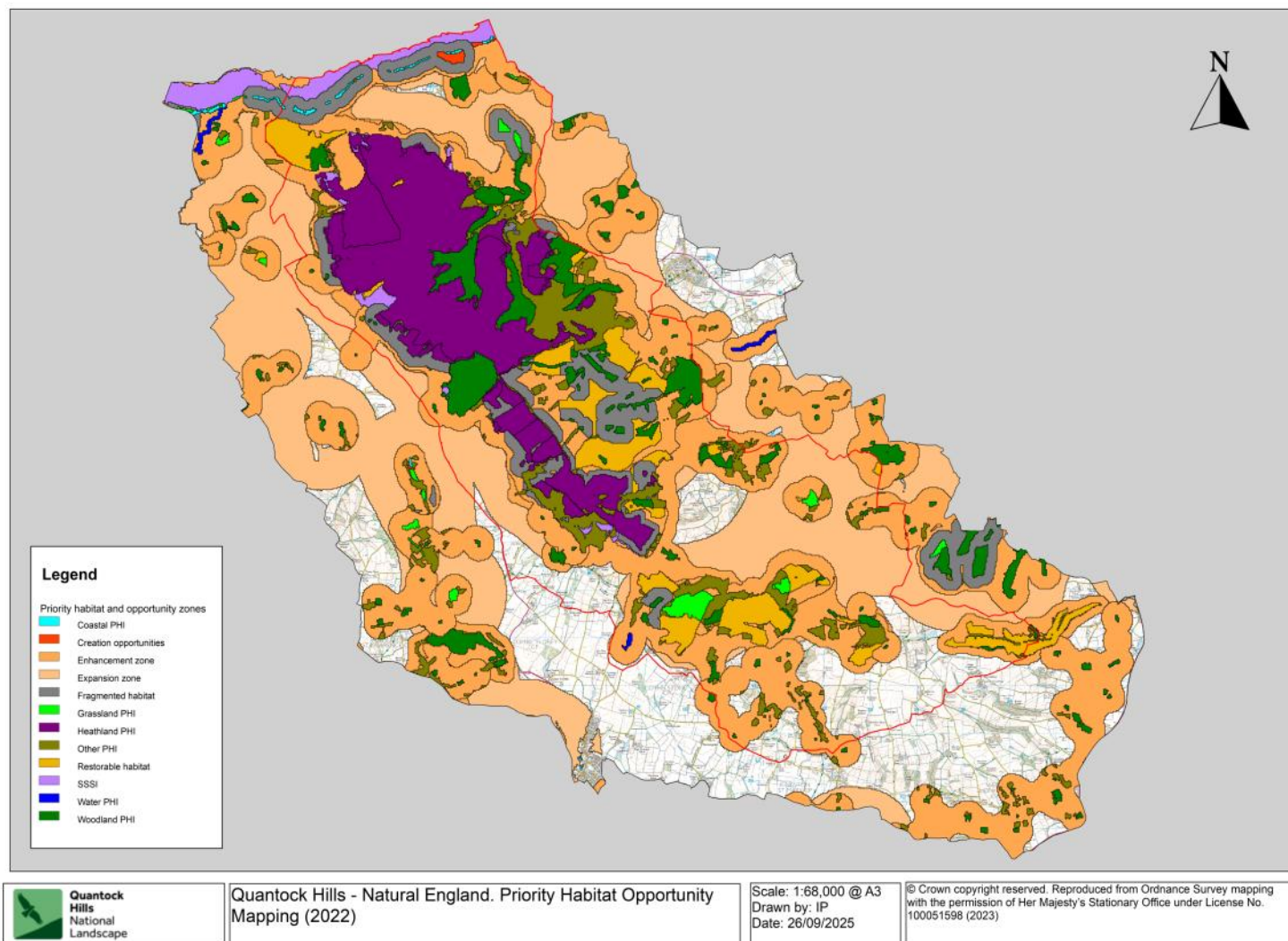


Over 2,000Ha of the Quantock Hills is identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA)

Delivering for Nature

"By 2050 the Quantock Hills National Landscape will be a place where landuse, communities and nature thrive together. The mosaics of habitats will be strengthened through seamless integration with sustainable landuse providing homes for robust wildlife populations"

Utilising national and local ecological modelling the plan has identified opportunity areas. For habitat restoration and creation. This allows the Team and partners to target funding and actions to achieve the best outcomes for nature...



As part of the plan development, consultation was undertaken with stakeholders and the wider public to choose a number of 'Champion Species'. These were species which are key indicator species in the priority habitats of the Quantock Hills and that can be used to drive forward actions or engagement. These species include:

- Yellowhammer
- Barbastelle bat
- Adder
- Brown hairstreak
- Nightjar
- Lesser-spotted woodpecker



For more information— [Nature Recovery](#)

Delivering for Nature

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team delivers nature recovery through three main mechanisms, direct delivery of habitat improvements works, provision of grants to allow landowners to undertake habitat improvement and research and monitoring ensuring land management decisions are well informed and have the best outcomes for habitats and species.

Direct land management.

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team is unusual nationally in that it has staff and volunteers that undertake direct land management. This includes two sites, Cothelstone Hill and New Stowey Farm, where the team have management control, as well as private landholdings where the team will support landowners to enhance or create priority habitat.

Over the past 12 months the team - staff and volunteers - have undertaken coppicing, scrub control, hedge management and tree planting across a number of sites. Much of this work is required to be undertaken on an annual basis to ensure the habitat e.g. woodland, remains in good condition. Other land management this year has included:

Adder hibernaculum - During the spring and summer two hibernaculum were built on Cothelstone Hill. Hibernaculum are structures consisting of ash logs, two tonnes of stone, covered with earth. These provide hibernation space and shelter for reptiles and amphibians. The primary species of interest are adders and common lizards through these structures. As well as construction a team of volunteers have been monitoring the hibernaculum for the presence of reptiles with a number of common lizards and adders been seen near the structures.

The design of the hibernaculum followed a pilot project by the Mendip Hills National Landscape Team showing great partnership working between the protected landscapes.



Photo: Ranger and volunteers constructing a reptile hibernaculum

New Stowey Farm - Owned by Somerset Council and near Nether Stowey, this 45Ha farm came back in hand in 2023 with Somerset Council breaking the farm up to sell some for development.

The National Landscape Team submitted a business plan with the aim of creating a demonstrator farm showcasing economically sustainable regenerative agriculture.

In April 2024 the Team took over management of the farm, which had been quite intensively sheep grazed previously. Partnering with a grazier cattle were grazed on site during the summer and autumn of 2024 and infrastructure work such as stock fencing and water infrastructure were undertaken to allow the site to be managed appropriately.



Photo: cattle at New Stowey Farm

Over the coming years works will include tree planting, orchard and wood pasture creation, grassland enhancement, stream restoration, hedge management and grassland enhancement. In 2025 the farm will also host the Land Management Skills Scheme, which will provide training and experience in land management, such as fencing, tree planting, hedge laying to young people and those who are unemployed.

Delivering for Nature

Swaling - The National Landscape Team support the Quantock Commoners Association and landowners in the delivery of the swaling programme for Quantock Common. Swaling is the traditional management of heath and moorland habitats by burning in the winter.

This management technique removes derelict habitat and invasive species and allows for regeneration of the grasses, plants and heathers while protecting the soils. In more recent years the importance of being able to manage potential summer wildfires, which can have devastating impacts on heathland ecosystems, has become more apparent. The swaling programme is one of a suite of land management techniques, that includes cutting, cut & collect and grazing. It is planned through the Moorland Implementation Plan and each seasons plans are approved by Natural England.

Over the 2024-25 season just over 20Ha of scrub was swaled with a further 6.5Ha cut. Additionally the Quantock Commoners Association cut further fire breaks across Quantock Common to reduce the wildfire risk .



Photo: Rangers and volunteers undertaking heather burning

Habitat and species monitoring.

The Quantock Hills National Landscape Team and volunteers lead on a number of monitoring programmes including butterfly, bat, dormice, pied flycatcher, nightjar and deer. Other site specific surveys, usually to support the development of land management plans, have included bat, butterfly and flora, e.g. grassland species.

This monitoring work would not be possible without the immense support of our volunteers who put in hundreds of hours each season, often at unsocial hours, supporting or leading on the various surveys that are undertaken.

Summer Heathland Bird Survey - The Quantock Hills supports a range of breeding birds whose populations are under threat, including red and amber listed species.

These populations are monitored by the National Landscape Team, supported by a dedicated group of volunteers and organisations, as part of the Partnership's work managing priority habitats and wildlife within the area. A total of 43 1km squares across the Quantock Hills were surveyed for sixteen target species, replicating the survey undertaken in 2018 and elements of previous surveys from 2012, 2006 & 2000. The survey area included all of the heathland and acidic grassland habitats within the National Landscape and any associated scrub and woodland edge habitats.

The monitoring of the heathland breeding birds has been undertaken within the National Landscape since 1992, with a summer survey every six years since 2000. The information from these surveys has been previously used to identify changes in the numbers and distribution of heathland breeding birds, feeding into the Moorland Implementation Plans, Nature Recovery and Quantock Hills Management Plan.

Two surveys were completed, undertaken by suitably trained volunteers who covered as much of the km square as possible by walking within 50m of suitable habitat. Sightings were then recorded noting breeding species and behaviour to ensure a consistent methodology with previous reports.



Photo: Dartford Warbler, Credit REPB-images. Chris Gomersall

Delivering for Nature

The survey concentrated on 16 key bird species and on the whole the Quantock Hills remains a strong hold for many species. The varied habitats and mixed age structure of the vegetation allows for some species to thrive. Dartford Warblers are the key species which has grown significantly since the last survey with territories increasing from 2 to 68. Other successes include Lesser Redpoll, Meadow Pipit, Stonechat and Wheatear. Small increases to Cuckoo and Linnet are also encouraging but these species remain vulnerable to factors outside the Quantock Hills as nationally, the species are declining.

The news isn't all positive though as other species are struggling especially Whinchat (decrease 75%), Tree Pipit (decrease 60%) and Yellowhammer (decrease 50%) when compared to the previous survey undertaken in 2018. These all follow national trends along with the decreases in Whitethroat and Redstarts.

The report concludes that the Quantock Hills remains an important key location for heathland birds as the National Landscape contains varied and mixed habitats, allowing species to find spaces to breed and establish. While the Quantock Hills is an important area for heathland birds, species remain vulnerable to climate change and disturbance by people and their associated activities, requiring vigilance by land managers and others.

For more information—[Summer heathland breeding birds](#)

Hedgerow Surveys - 2024/25 saw the last season of hedgerow surveys by the **Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme**.

The surveys assess the biological value and condition of hedgerows throughout the wider Quantock Hills area. In total 691 hedgerows have been surveyed across 36 sites, totalling 13.9km. 83 species of plant have been found including 40 native species. The average number of species per hedge was 14, though there was a significant range with the lowest at 6 species and the highest at 17.

An important feature in the Quantock Hills is that of hedgerow trees. The project surveyed a total of 2,398 mature trees, an average of 3.5 trees per hedgerow. As would be expected, given the woodland types of the Quantock Hills, the most common mature tree species were Ash, Oak and Maple though there were 32 species recorded in total, including some more exotic species such as Fig and Medler.

An interesting discovery was the relative lack of young trees present in hedgerows. Less than half of the hedgerows surveyed contained young trees, with no sites having no young trees at all. As mature trees die and breakdown or are removed there is potential significant landscape impact from a lack of replacement trees in the landscape.



Photo: Hedgerow surveyors assessing species present

For more information - [2025-QLPS-Hedgerow-survey-report-final.pdf](#)

Delivering for Nature

Barbastelle Bat Project—The summer of 2024 was the last bat monitoring season for the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. The project was looking for the presence of Barbastelle bats across the wider Quantock Hills landscape. Barbastelle bats are a species that thrive in woodlands but that use the wider landscape to commute and feed, sometimes travelling up to 12km in a night. Nationally Barbastelle bats are classed as Vulnerable, and within the Quantock Hills there is a known maternity colony in the northern area but little was known. By understanding where Barbastelles are present and how they use the landscape we can then prioritise actions that retain or enhance connectivity such as hedgerow planting.

The project undertook surveys using static bat detectors during the summers of 2022, 2023 and 2024. These surveys highlighted the extensive use of the Quantock Hills by barbastelle bats, with calls recorded throughout most areas. There were lower levels of activity noted in the centre of the area which is possibly associated with the elevation, the open heath habitat and density of conifer woodlands.

Limited trapping surveys were undertaken at key locations identified as potential hotspots through the static surveys. As bats are a protected species trapping is undertaken under license and was limited in the species targeted. Through the trapping a number of maternity colonies were identified, ensuring these are protected into the future.

The static and trapping surveys identified other important species such as greater and lesser horseshoe bats, Bechstein bats and Leisler's. A number of breeding females were found, including Barbastelle, Bechstein and Greater Horseshow, indicating that the survey areas are associated with maternity colonies.

The project was a great opportunity for the apprentices, staff and volunteers to learn new skills, including use of static detectors and to be involved in the bat trapping surveys. It has also allowed the main Quantock Hills Bat Monitoring Programme to prioritise locations for future surveys and with the final report suggesting a number of future workstreams as well as recommendations for habitat enhancements.

For more information visit - [QLPS Barbastelle Bat Project](https://qlps.org/live-2-9-batty-quantocks) (<https://qlps.org/live-2-9-batty-quantocks>)



Photo:
Radiotracking near
Crowcombe



Photo: QLPS apprentices, Ella, Lewis and
Tom installing a static bat detector

Farming in Protected Landscapes

The fourth year of FiPL saw the delivery of not only the main FiPL programme but also the national Historic Building grant, with two Quantock Hills applications developed and delivered within the year. Following the pattern of previous years FiPL applications delivered primarily for nature and climate with many developing regenerative agricultural grazing patterns and tree / hedge planting.



Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

Summary

- ♦ £500,383 awarded to local farmers and land managers.
- ♦ Historic Building Restoration Grants, 2 projects delivered restoring one Grade 1 listed building and one Grade II listed building.
- ♦ 26 projects supported, 22 different applicants, 10 farms / landowners.
- ♦ 18 projects contributing to enhancing nature.
- ♦ 12 projects contributing to climate actions.
- ♦ Projects cover 2,926Ha of land delivering benefits for Climate, Nature, People and Place.

During the year Defra secured funding specifically to restore or repair historically significant agricultural buildings with the aim that they are brought back into use. The process was slightly different to the main FiPL programme with an initial assessment by the Local Assessment Panel, with successful applications then being assessed by the National Panel.

Two projects came forward to the Quantock Hills, a Grade I listed building at Cothelstone and the Grade II listed Tithe Barn at East Quantoxhead. The applicants had to work fast to secure the listed building consent, the specialist contractors and to deliver significant works within the timescale. The successful completion of both projects means that these significant historic buildings are now protected and usable ensuring their long term sustainability.

Photo - East Quantoxhead Tithe Barn.

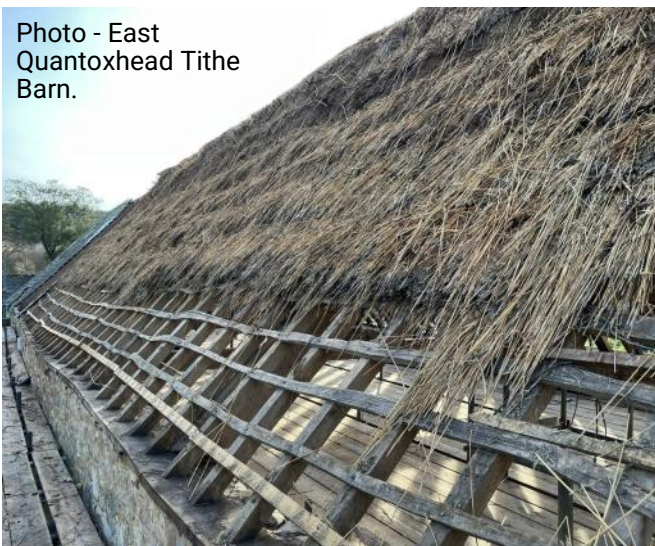


Photo - The restored thatch roof at East Quantoxhead



Farming in Protected Landscapes

Case Study 1 - Agroforestry project with organic free-range chickens

Stream Farm, Broomfield

QH4072: FiPL Year 5

Stream Farm is a 100-hectare organic farm made up of several small businesses—all working together under a share farming setup. They produce beef, lamb, pork, chicken, eggs, apple juice, honey, trout, and even sheepskins. Each farmer gets a cut of the income, and the rest goes back into running the farm and buying equipment.

Farmer, Will Caldwell, is no stranger to regenerative farming practices, having worked with the FiPL Team to secure funding for several projects over the last four project years. The scope for this particular project was to plant 625 top fruit and nut trees across an organic chicken field to create a diverse habitat and beneficial environment for the birds. Agroforestry, the integration of trees with livestock and arable production, has been identified as a sustainable way to increase the productivity of land and to provide a number of ecosystem services and environmental benefits compared to the more common disaggregated agricultural and woodland systems common in the UK. Stream Farm has a long history of apple orchards on the farm that would likely have been grazed with sheep and perhaps even chickens for eggs and meat, so Will was keen to re-establish this integration of livestock production and fruit trees on the farm.



Photo - Wood pasture with chickens, Stream Farm

Stream Farm rears approximately 10,000 organic free-range meat chickens each year sold direct to local customers, restaurants, shops and butchers in the South West. The birds are kept in flocks of 400 chickens, housed in mobile sheds with a range of approximately 1,250m² of pasture per flock: this set up gives the chickens ample opportunity to roam around the full extent of the ranges.

As descendants of jungle fowl the birds naturally exhibit diurnal behavioural rhythms, foraging on the forest floor in the early morning and late afternoon, resting in the middle of the day and at night, perching in trees. However, Will observed the majority of the birds in the flocks were choosing to stay close to the sheds and not using the full range: the most likely explanation was due to potential aerial predators, lack of shelter from the sun and wind and little environmental motivation to exhibit their natural behaviours. Their field did not contain any natural shelter or enrichment bar the diverse pasture, hedgerows and mature trees on the field perimeter. Will also found that by staying close to the sheds in dense populations the chickens had started to cause depletion of the soil, which could have resulted in the easier transfer of diseases among the flock.

Enhancing overall range use in the flocks by moving to an agroforestry system is widely understood to bring many welfare and health benefits for the birds, as well as the clear benefits to the local and wider environment of planting and maintaining a diverse range of trees. Having seen these beneficial impacts elsewhere on the farm in their flock of laying hens which live in an organic apple orchard, Will was keen to realise the same benefits of this symbiotic relationship in the meat chickens.

In 2024, a successful FiPL application enabled Will to plant 625 locally sourced trees (125/ha), consisting mainly of apples, but also pear, plum, crab apple and walnut to create a diverse, rich habitat with cross-pollinating species to improve pollination. The planting scheme ensured each chicken range had a sufficient and diverse number and type of trees to provide the required shelter and safety for the chickens, enabling the birds to move confidently between the mobile sheds and the trees. Will was also able to engage the local community – working with the National landscape Team to organise a team of willing volunteers for several tree planting days.

Overall, the project is expected to meet FiPL outcomes across the four themes of Nature (creating greater areas of wildlife rich habitat and increasing biodiversity), Climate (by sequestering more carbon and reducing flood risk through tree planting), People (local groups helping with tree planting and attending farm open days) and Place (by supporting sustainable land management and improving the welfare of livestock to increase resilience of sustainable farm business).

Farming in Protected Landscapes

Case Study 2 Elm and Hairstreak Project (Combe Florey to Crowcombe)

Friends of the Quantocks

QH4070: FiPL Year 5

Over the past 75 years, the Quantock Hills have experienced a marked decline in butterfly diversity, with species numbers falling from 40 to 34 and several now at risk of local extinction. Two species of particular concern are the White Letter Hairstreak (WLH) and the Brown Hairstreak (BH) butterflies. Both are listed as Section 41 priority species under the NERC Act (2006), are nationally Red Listed as Vulnerable, and identified by Butterfly Conservation as high priorities for action.

The White-letter Hairstreak has declined by 78% since 1976 and is heavily dependent on mature elm trees for its survival. The spread of Dutch Elm Disease in the 1960s decimated these trees across the UK leaving only isolated survivors. WLH sightings in the Quantock Hills area have been scarce since 2000, suggesting possible local extinction. However, the species is easily under-recorded due to its small size and canopy-dwelling behaviour, highlighting the need for improved monitoring alongside habitat restoration.



Photo: Brown Hairstreak (c) Friends of the Quantocks / Robin Stamp.

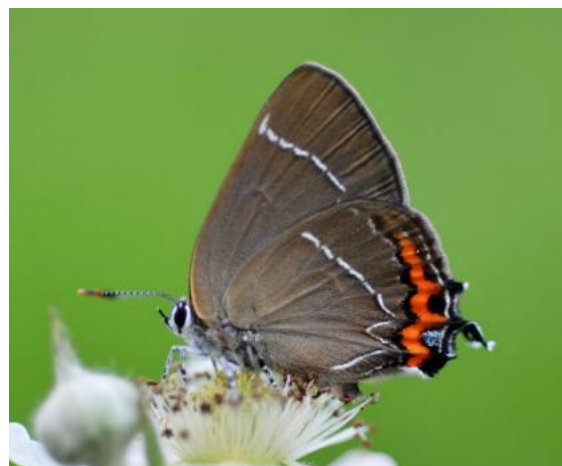


Photo: White-letter Hairstreak (c) Butterfly Conservation / Gilles San Martin.

The Brown Hairstreak also faces long-term decline, relying on young blackthorn growth in proximity to master trees, usually Ash. While sightings in the Quantock Hills area are limited, the species has been recorded more widely in the region, indicating potential for population recovery if habitat is expanded.

Led by Chair of FotQ, Robin Stamp, this project aimed to directly address these challenges by:

- Restoring habitats through the re-establishment of disease-resistant elm for WLH and planting blackthorn near ash trees for BH.
- Improving monitoring capacity via training in species identification and systematic data collection.
- Strengthening resilience of local biodiversity by reintroducing key features of the landscape that support wider ecological networks.

The first step was to train volunteers to identify Elm trees, WLH and BH eggs, caterpillars and butterflies: FiPL funded the training costs, venue hire and purchase of UV torches (needed to locate WLH caterpillars!). Following training, a program of surveys was carried out during November to March for eggs and across the spring for WLH caterpillars and summer for both species of butterfly. This was supported by establishing the occurrence (and loss) of sexually mature elm within the area as well as the prevalence of blackthorn within the vicinity of ash trees.

A geospatial data collection schema was established, capturing key fields around the location and condition of the identified species. This supports a more complete baseline of the current presence of these species (or lack thereof), facilitates monitoring of these species over time and will allow the success of this and other projects to be measured more tangibly in future.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

The third step was to plant 140 disease resistant elm trees and 60 blackthorn bushes (all funded through FiPL). Local landowners were engaged for permission to plant in carefully selected location based on historic observations of the butterflies. FotQ members were assisted by a small team of willing volunteers (and local MP Rachel Gilmour!) whose hard work ensured all trees were in the ground before the spring.

Crucially, the project is strongly aligned with the Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan, responding to identified pressures including:

- The historic loss of elm and associated decline of WLH.
- Decline in hedgerow wildlife, including BH, due to intensive management.
- The need for targeted habitat creation.



Photo: Rachel Gilmour MP, Trudi Mansfield (FotQ) and Annabelle Trollope Bellew (landowner) - planting a young disease-resistant Elm tree.

Given the historical presence of both species in the Quantocks, the suitability of the proposed sites, and the urgency of halting further declines, this project represents a timely and necessary intervention to support species recovery and enhance the ecological resilience of the Quantock Hills landscape.

Post-project UPDATE – Exciting News!

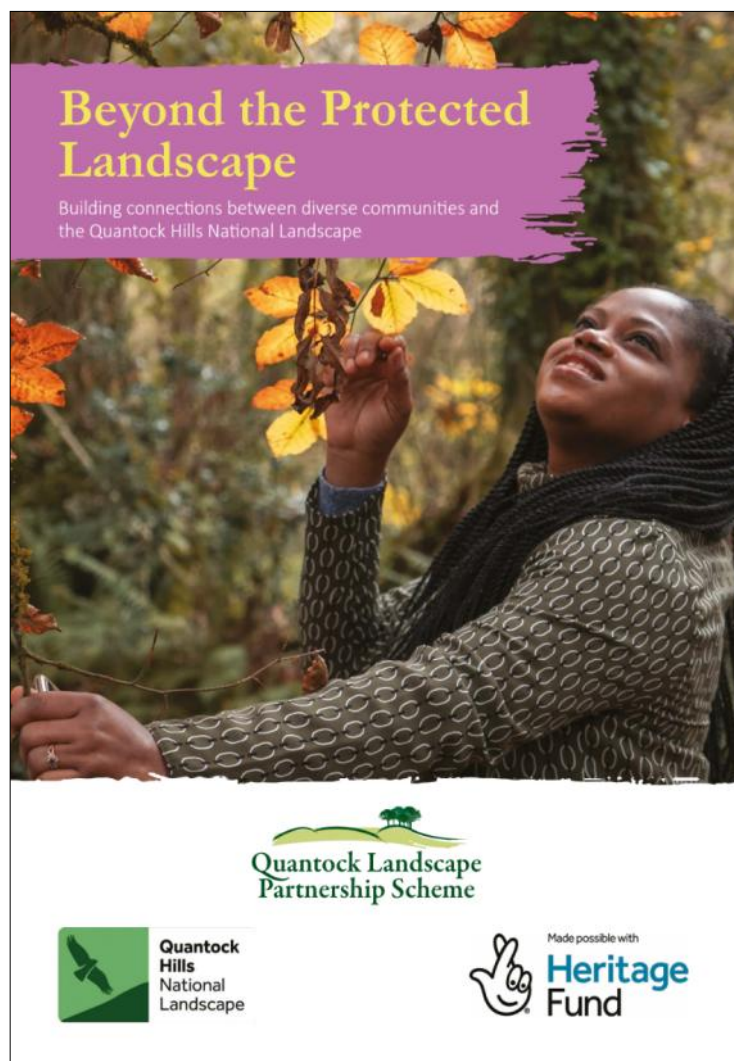
In the 75 years prior to 2025, only 5 sightings of the WLH butterfly have been made within the QHNL area and low 10s within the wider QLPS area. Phase 1 of this project has led to the discovery of three WLH caterpillars and 11 WLH butterflies during 2025. Whether this increase in sightings can be explained by the existence of higher numbers of the caterpillars and butterflies, or by the great number of surveyors actively searching for them, either way it is certainly a very encouraging figure.

The project is now set to start a Phase 2 Elm planting plan, working with 25 landowners to plant in excess of 250 disease resistant Elm over a wider area, including areas where new WLH sightings were made during Phase 1.

Delivering for People

As well as the core work of the National Landscape Team, including an events programme promoting the special qualities of the Quantock Hills, and volunteering opportunities including conservation tasks, community engagement opportunities and wildlife monitoring, the hosted and supported projects have been delivering a significant programme of engagement activities.

2024 continued the significant delivery of events and activities by the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. This National Lottery Heritage Fund funded scheme has led to a step change in engagement of communities, not only the number of people engaging with the protected landscape but also the diversity and type of engagement leading to a more lasting relationship with the Quantock Hills.



"It's not easy but it can be done; we hope this booklet will help you on your own journey as we celebrate all the people who've made the last four years such a privilege and a joy for us".

Like many traditional rural areas the Quantock Hills, in Somerset, are facing challenges. Agricultural changes, the climate crisis, and ever-growing recreational pressure will be familiar issues for everyone involved in the countryside. Even before Covid hit in our first year, the importance of access to nature for wellbeing was becoming a pressing policy issue, and from the start we saw better management of the access pressures, and doing so in an inclusive way, as two sides of the same coin. Our National Landscape sits next to some of the most deprived wards in England. The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme ('the Scheme') was created to help to address some of these issues, with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and local partners. This exciting Scheme is hosted by the Quantock Hills National Landscape.

Working together with a wide range of other organisations, groups and individuals has been essential for reaching new people and communities, building trust quickly, making sure what's on offer was relevant and making the programme richer through the passion, expertise and generosity of others.

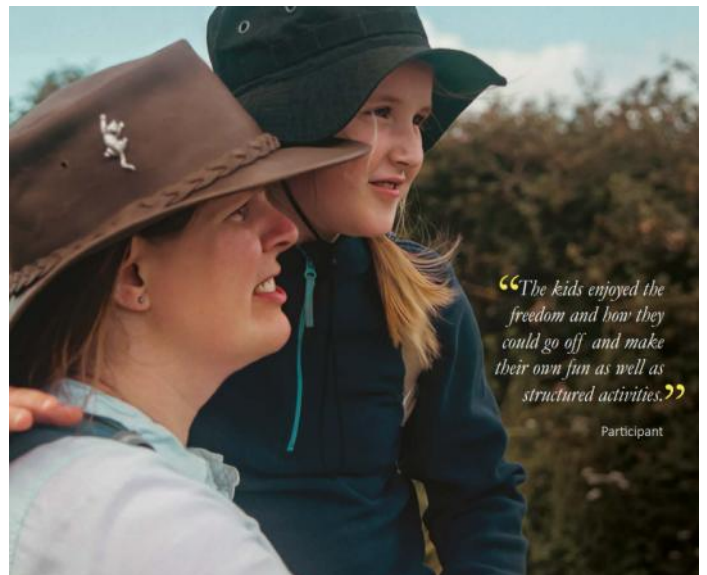
As well as increasing the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging with the natural world, the Scheme has provided opportunities in gaining skills, self-confidence, access, participation, and much more. It was our intention to make these opportunities as inclusive and accessible as possible – if we couldn't bring you to the countryside, then we would bring the principles of the countryside down to you – our work with nursing homes and social housing estates being a few examples of this. We tried to make this as fun and unpretentious as possible, to instil the freedom and virtues of being outdoors across all our events. Messy play and tactile crafts that speak of the sensations of jumping through muddy puddles, or feeling your way through a woodland, for example. Activities that tell us about our local wildlife and unique history, instead of borrowing activities from elsewhere.

Delivering for People

As much as possible we tried to make our events inherently about the Hills, by the people who authentically experience the locations – a shared sense of ownership and connection, like planting a tree and allowing it to flourish into the future. There were many ways to get involved and our work made links with lots of groups who worked in partnership with us, as well as with other like-minded organisations including:

- LGBTQ+ support groups.
- Migrant communities.
- AfriQuan communities (African families living on or around the Quantock Hills).
- Disability support groups.
- Nursing homes and care settings.
- Green social prescribing initiatives.
- Social housing communities, including those without access to a car.
- An established Bulgarian community.
- Rural local residents.

“We wanted to get involved in the project to give young people the opportunity to enjoy the environment and wildlife around them. Most of the young people live in deprived areas and haven’t even left their town. This project has provided camping trips and agricultural shows which they would have never have experienced. The young people looked forward to the camping trips and displayed their gratitude explaining this will be the only holiday they get this year. Personally, growing up one of my best memories is visiting the Quantock Hills during the summer for days on end, so being able to provide these experiences to young people who normally wouldn’t be able to access this has been a truly amazing experience. As well as their physical health being helped by walking along the Quantocks, it gave some of the young people the opportunity to open up about their mental health which resulted in them being able to access the professional help they needed. This project has helped children and young people have fun and be themselves creating lifelong memories!”



“The kids enjoyed the freedom and how they could go off and make their own fun as well as structured activities.”

Participant

We wanted to embody our approach in the way we evaluated and shared our experiences of working with new audiences. **Beyond the Protected Landscape** has therefore been created collaboratively by community members, partners, Scheme staff and the External Evaluators; Heritage Insider. Those who participated and collaborated with the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme have chosen the pictures and contributed their thoughts and words, as well as helped to curate the design. Contributors to Beyond the Protected Landscape have come from both participants and organisations who have been key stakeholders in the Scheme’s engagement programme. Contributions which are represented by organisations have come from Somerset Nature Connections, Youth Unlimited CIC, Wilstock Hub, 2BUSomerset, and Migrant Communities Inspired Together. A HUGE THANK YOU to everyone who has been involved.

To read the full report visit—qlps.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Beyond-the-Protected-Landscape.pdf

Delivering for People



Photo: NIT Summer Party

In its final year, the QLPS has made significant progress in its audience inclusivity with both its community engagement work and facilitation of the Quantock Hills National Landscape match-funded Nature Calling project.

The ongoing work of the scheme continues to reach under represented groups across the National Landscape and beyond its boundaries. Most prominently this has come to include communities living in central hubs of Taunton and Bridgwater, however, the scheme has reached further beyond these areas in both geography, scope, and ambition.

The freedom of the scheme has allowed its engagement programme to reach not just those communities on the fringes of the hills, but also those people for whom living here is entirely new, whether that's African families relocating for greater job opportunities, or people that have had the decision made for them; refugees, migrant communities, or people seeking asylum.

Through its networks and connections made throughout the scheme there has been a significant uplift in these groups attending and contributing to opportunities on the hills this year. Thanks to renewed partnerships with community groups, such as Migrant Communities Inspired Together, and Somerset Diverse Communities, the scheme has built trust and fostered regular outings with communities that need these opportunities most. Something that has become commonplace and not the exception.

Its event programme of Photo Walks have provided a lifeline for some of these groups – whether as a way to socialise, or to provide a safe space outdoors – and they continue to grow year-on-year with demand from diverse community groups.



Photo: NIT Summer Party



Photo: NIT Summer Party

This year has also seen the introduction of Nature Calling, a national initiative to connect under represented groups with the outdoors through arts opportunities.

The Quantock Hills National Landscape were one of the spoke organisations to lead on this work for the south west area. The initiative allowed the Quantock Hills National Landscape to gain ground in building relationships with the groups that QLPS had reached and grow that audience with a new and exciting programme. It also created a legacy from the QLPS engagement work, providing a summer of activities that wouldn't otherwise have been possible at that scale without QLPS.

Delivering for Place

Case Study: Community Excavation Cothelstone, 2024

In late early summer 2024, The QLPS undertook its fourth and final major community excavation, as part of the 'Understanding the Landscape' project. The excavation followed three previous QLPS community digs: a Late Bronze Age enclosure on Cothelstone Hill in 2021, the medieval manor at Crowcombe in 2022, and a Late Bronze Age ringwork at Broomfield in 2023.



The site for the 2024 dig, on land which is part of the Cothelstone Estate, was of interest due to the presence of a group of cropmarks in a single field, observed from aerial photography. A geophysical survey confirmed the presence of a ring ditch and other features. Interest in the site was further heightened by findings from previous excavations, carried out in 2000, at Stone age Barton, close to the Cothelstone site, which revealed a Romano-British enclosure and a 7th-century cemetery.

The Cothelstone excavation was led by archaeologists from Dig Ventures, and over the course of the two week dig, a total of 71 adults and 61 children took part, opening four trenches across the site. The results proved to be beyond our expectations.

At the heart of the site was the circular ring ditch measuring over three metres wide, more than a metre deep, and almost 40m in diameter. This ditch contained a remarkable deposit at its base: three Late Bronze Age ceramic vessels, intentionally placed and partially intact. Radiocarbon dating of associated charcoal confirmed a date range between the late 11th and 9th centuries BC. These vessels, interpreted as domestic in function, were likely deposited as part of a ceremonial act marking the completion of the enclosure. The ditch was later recut in the Early Iron Age and filled with domestic waste, including pottery, animal bone, and charcoal, suggesting intermittent occupation and use of the site over several centuries.



The area of the ring ditch was then later reused as a cemetery. The excavation revealed nine east-west aligned graves, forming part of an organised cemetery, bounded by two shallow ditches. Although no skeletal remains survived due to the acidic soil, the layout of the graves indicated a structured burial ground. Two of the graves contained iron knives and a possible awl or tang, suggesting burial in the Late Roman or Early Post-Roman period.

This reuse of prehistoric monuments for burial is a known phenomenon in this period, particularly in southern and eastern England, though less common in the southwest. The findings of the Cothelstone dig, therefore, contribute significantly to understandings of Late Bronze Age settlement, Iron Age land use, and Early Post-Roman burial practices in the region.



Delivering for Place

Charcoal Production Research Project

As part of the extension of the scheme, the QLPS undertook a programme of research into historic charcoal production on the Quantock Hills. Charcoal burning was once a major rural industry across the Quantock Hills, as evidenced by the remains of scores of charcoal-burning platforms (CBPs) which can still be found, particularly in the various eastern combes. Relatively little is known about the origins of this industry. Through a combination of archaeological excavation, experimental archaeology and archive research, the project aimed to further that understanding.

Excavations

In the spring of 2025, excavations took place at three charcoal burning platforms in Cockercombe.

Specific objectives were to recover residual charcoal from historic CBPs suitable for C-14 dating, which might help identify the duration of the industry. It was also hoped to help identify what species were being used to make charcoal and to begin to identify what proportion of the identified platforms were used for charcoal burning. It has been argued that a proportion of those features identified as CBPs on the hills might, in reality, have been sites of temporary shelters for charcoal burners, or stores for bark used in the tanning industry.



Photo: Volunteers working on the excavation

The Cockercombe platforms were part of a cluster of at least 14 platforms identified from the QLPS's own LiDAR survey.

Ground truthing of these features identified three with the potential for excavation based on considerations such as accessibility and level of preservation.

The excavation was led by Dan Broadbent and undertaken by long-term volunteers of previous QLPS excavations.

Of the three platforms excavated, one was found to be very badly disturbed by subsequent tree growth but all three platforms showed evidence of having been used to make charcoal, with one clearly having been used on multiple occasions. In one platform, a circular depression in the very centre offered evidence for a method of kiln-making involving stacking of wood around a central pole which is then removed to form a flue. This is in contrast to the method of constructing a flue, around which the kiln is constructed. Charcoal fragments were recovered from all three platforms and have been sent to Queen's University Belfast for C-14 dating.

Delivering for Place

Experimental Charcoal burn

In August 2024, an experimental charcoal burn was conducted at Cothelstone Hill. It is believed that this is the first time a traditional Earth-clamp method of charcoal production had been attempted on the Quantock Hills since the end of the historic charcoal making industry. The project was led by local charcoal maker Chris Silverwood with the assistance of staff and volunteers of the QLPS and Quantock Hills National Landscape Teams.

Across four days, the clamp was constructed with wood coppiced specifically for the purpose ten months previously. It was then tended day and night before being opened to reveal an almost 100% charcoal conversion. The experiment also provided a genuine insight into the realities of life as a Quantock charcoal burner and helped to aid understanding of the formation of the historic CBPs. The archaeological footprint left by the burn was almost identically mirrored by the findings of the excavations. A small public open day was attended by 40 people



Photos: The charcoal burn in progress

Legacy – The Quantock Heritage Group

The QLPS demonstrated that huge enthusiasm exists amongst local people to contribute to research into the history and heritage of the area in which they live. As the scheme comes to a close, a substantial number of our volunteer group have expressed the desire to carry on and further develop the skills and experience they have acquired.

To that end, we have helped the volunteers to establish, and are continuing to offer practical support to, an ongoing community archaeology and heritage project. The Quantock Heritage Group has now formally launched, with the stated aim of building upon the work of the QLPS. The new group will aim to develop and deliver a range of research projects related to the historic heritage of the Quantock Hills and the surrounding areas, with the expressed support of a number of the partner organisations with whom they have worked over the last four years, including Past Participate, Context One and GeoFlo.

Although born out of the QLPS, the new group will be seeking to grow its membership, offering opportunities for participation to anyone with an interest in acquiring new skills and contributing to new research into the history and prehistory of the Quantock Hills and their surrounding landscape.

The group's first major project is born directly from the volunteers' experiences of test pitting with the QLPS. The group have secured funding from North Petherton Town Council to begin a long-term test-pitting project in the town which will take place over the next five years. The group are also seeking funding from Oxford Archaeology to support an analysis of existing flint finds from the Quantock Hills.

The National Landscape Team

Starters



Joanna Hicks

Joanna joined us briefly as our Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer working across the Quantock Hills NL and the QLPS Teams. Joanna continues to work with the team delivering wellbeing wanders.



Sally Pheasant

Sally joined the team taking on the Farming Engagement Support Officer role, supporting the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and Landscape Schemes.



Paddon

Paddon joined the QLPS team as the Wildlife Officer delivering the natural heritage elements of the QLPS.



Helen Richardson

Helen joined as the Landscape Projects Officer, taking a lead role in the delivery of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.

Leavers



Jem Gibson

Jem, QLPS Wildlife Officer, left to take part in a work stay programme in Panama with some time afterwards experiencing the life of work and travelling abroad.



Mark Baker

Mark, Projects Manager, leading the FiPL and Landscape Schemes programmes.

Mark continues to work along side us on a freelance consultancy basis and as a volunteer.



Ella Bedford

Ella, QLPS Level 4 Countryside Ranger Apprentice, left to continue her studying at University.



Katie Read

Katie, Landscape Projects Officer, left to take a full-time position with West Dorset Wildling Landscape Recovery Scheme.

Quantock Hills National Landscape Partnership

Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) members as at 31st March 2025:

Hugh Warmington	(Chair) The Countryside Landowners & Business Association
Bill Revans	Somerset Council
Alan Bradford	Somerset Council
Fran Smith	Somerset Council
Mike Caswell	Somerset Council
Tom Deakin	Somerset Council
Lee Baker	Somerset Council
Tim Whittingham	Friends of the Quantocks
Tommy Muncie	National Trust
John Ebsary	Forestry England
Standing rep	DEFRA
Laura Daniells	Natural England
Bob Croft	South West Heritage Trust
Mike Rawle	Quantock Commoners Association
Alicia Aras	Somerset Local Access Forum
Dr Martin Jones	Parish Rep - West Bagborough
Julian Taylor	Parish Rep - North Petherton
Mark Philipson	Parish Rep - West Quantoxhead
Vacant	Parish Rep - Holford

Quantock Hills National Landscape Team as at 31st March 2025:

Iain Porter	Manager
Alex Meletiou	Landscape Planning Officer
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>Development Officer</i>
Andy Stevenson	Ranger
Owen Jones	Partnership Ranger (Quantock Hills & Forestry England)
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>Community Engagement Ranger</i>
Amanda Sampson	Communications & Support Officer
Helen Richardson	Landscape Projects Officer
Sally Pheasant	Farming Engagement Support Officer
Bill Jenman	QLPS Manager
Lisa Whittle	QLPS Project Support Officer
Jon Barrett	QLPS Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer
Dan Broadbent	QLPS Historic Heritage Officer
Bethany Paddon	QLPS Wildlife Officer

Key Performance Indicators

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are collated by all National Landscapes and reported to Defra. As such some KPIs are not workstreams currently being delivered by the Quantock Hills National Landscape Partnership and identified by a nil return.

1. Land where natural beauty has been conserved or enhanced through the work of the National Landscape Team:

- a. Hectares of habitat conserved or enhanced for biodiversity = 545Ha
- b. Hectares of land conserved for geodiversity = 0Ha
- c. Hectares of land where the heritage asset condition has been conserved or enhanced = 2Ha
- d. Hectares of land enhanced via the removal of overhead cables = 0

2. Heritage assets where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced:

- a. Number of Scheduled Monuments where setting has been conserved or enhanced = 54
- b. Number of other designated sites e.g. listed buildings where condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced = 4
- c. Number of non-designated heritage assets where the condition or setting has been conserved or enhanced = 4

3. People directly engaged through the work of the National Landscape Team:

- a. Number of volunteers = 116
- b. Attendees at events convened / organised by National Landscape Teams = 4,846
- c. Number of young people (<18yo) engaged = 616
- d. Number of farmers / land managers engaged with = 70
- e. Number of people engaged with via activities linked to the health & wellbeing agenda = 95
- f. Number of members of the public engaged with during the Management Plan review = 156
- g. Number of people engaged with via National Landscape promotional publications e-newsletters, mailchimp etc = 3,608
- h. Number of people engaged with via social media - engagement rate = 2,100

4. Partnerships / initiatives influences by the National Landscape Team to deliver Management Plan objectives:

- a. Number of partnerships where the National Landscape Team is part of the project / team / steering group lead = 5
- b. Number of partnerships where the National Landscape Team is a supporting partner = 6

5. Strategies, plans, policy, guidance documents, development:

- a. Number of strategies, plans, policies or guidance documents appraised or developed by the National Landscape Team = 5
- b. Number of Major development schemes appraised = 5
- c. Number of non-Major development schemes appraised = 79
- d. Number of other development schemes appraised – (Highways England, Environment Agency, etc) = 1
- e. Number of National Infrastructure Projects appraised = 0
- f. Number of land management schemes appraised (WMP, WCS, CS, NFM, CSF) = 8

Financial Statement (summary)

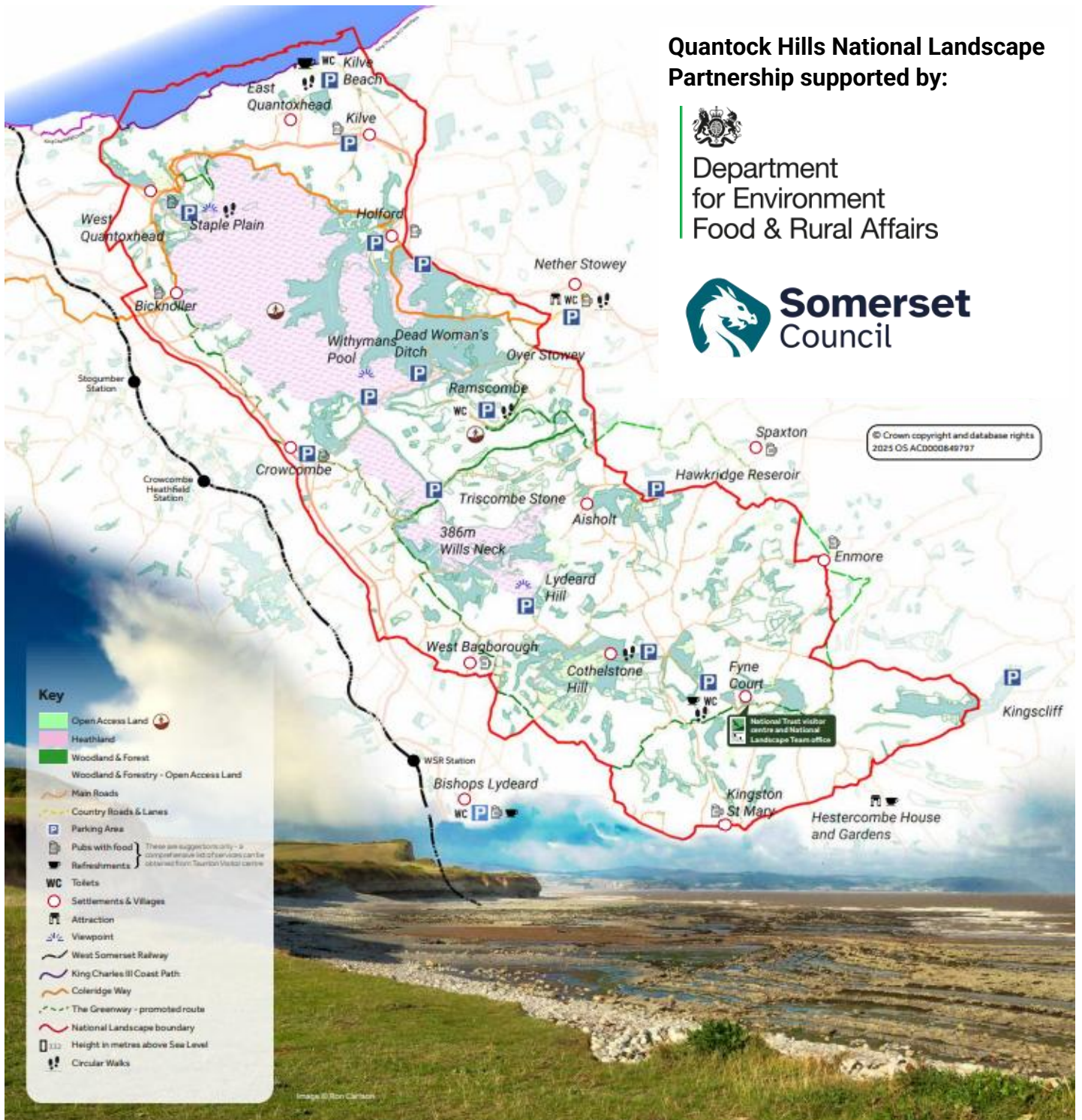
		Opening balance 01/04/2024#	275,779
Income	£	Expenditure	£
Core (revenue)	289,235	Core	320,980
Project	73,176	Project	55,090
Landscape Projects	654,612	Landscape Projects	627,809
Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme	614,789	Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme	615,473
Land Management	20,034	Land Management	43,285
Reserves*	33,121	Reserves	1,225
Income	£1,684,967	Expenditure	1,663,861
*Includes contribution from Somerset Council to cover the element that was previously contributed by the district councils. This element of the contribution had been lost in 2023/24. Includes accruals for FTFE / WMP #Includes missing Defra income from 2023.		<i>Fund Balance carry forward</i>	296,885
		<i>Less allocated carry forward</i>	118,166
		<i>Less earmarked reserves</i>	43,000
		<i>Unallocated reserves</i>	135,719

National Landscape Partnership Core (Revenue) Budget

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Defra	168,376	Salaries	241,228
Somerset Council	46,200	Training	3,879
Sales / income	405	Accommodation	16,446
Cost Recovery (contracts)	10,455	Stationary / post / phones	1,163
Recharges	62,800	Travel & vehicles	36,676
Contribution—FotQ	1,000	Equipment, materials	6,087
Total Core Income	289,235	Literature & publications	3,272
		Meeting costs / hospitality	1,283
		Management fee & memberships	10,446
		Research & Development	500
		Total Core Expenditure	£320,980

National Landscape Partnership Project Budgets

Projects Expenditure	£	Projects Expenditure (cont)	£
Removing Barriers (Access4All)	22,481	Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme	615,473
Monument Management Scheme (carry forward)	4,146	Total Project Expenditure	£1,298,372
Summer Heathland Bird Survey	14,600	Project Income	£
Nature Recovery	935	Defra (FiPL)	636,799
Land Management Skills Scheme	917	Defra (Project)	53,276
Interpretation & Engagement	4,373	Monument Management Scheme (HE)	4,800
Village Signs	7,638	HPC recharges (LDF, LIS & LMSS)	32,913
Farming in Protected Landscapes	614,885	National Lottery Heritage Fund (QLPS)	593,564
Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund	8,100	Friends of the Quantocks (£20k) + income (£1.2k) (QLPS)	21,225
Landscape Improvement Scheme	4,824	Total Project Income	£1,342,577



Quantock Hills National Landscape Partnership supported by:



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Somerset
Council

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