

Quantock Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Annual Report 2021 – 2022

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HILLS
One of the
AONB Family

Funded by:



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and Taunton



Chairmans Foreword

The major event for the AONB this year was the retirement of Chris Edwards after more than 32 years service. Chris joined Tim Russell as the deputy warden and then rose to be the AONB Manager. So he had a very well rounded understanding of how the AONB worked. Which was just as well as during his time the team grew from 2 to 13, he had to write 5 management plans and the CROW Act was passed.

His only time away from the Quantock Hills was when he was dragged into county hall to fill a very hard to fill vacancy but he returned as soon as he could.

Personally I wish to thank Chris for his unwavering advice and support during my time as AONB chairman. I am sure we all wish him a long and happy retirement and eagerly await the book he is planning to write.

We are very lucky that Iain Porter has been appointed to the post of AONB Manager. Iain has been serving as the AONB Development Officer and stood in for Chris when he was in county hall. So he is well qualified and there has been a seamless handover.

I am sure everyone is heartily glad that covid restrictions are over and life is getting back to something like normal. But nobody will be more pleased than Bill Jenman. His plans for the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme were totally disrupted. But Bill managed to appoint his team and is now fast delivering the projects for which the National Lottery is providing the funds.

Central government has provided a new source of funding in the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme (FiPL).



As usual the first year was challenging as it was expected that a whole year's funding be spent in well less than a year. But Iain managed to persuade the Treasury and DEFRA to allow some of the first year's funding to be moved to years two and three. Katie Read has done an excellent job getting the scheme up and running from a standing start.

I decided, as I will have been a county or district councillor for 22 years next year, not to stand in the County/Unitary election in the beginning of May. That means a new chairman for the JAC will have to be elected next year. I will have been chairman for 22 years, so the time for change is long overdue.

I would like to thank all my fellow councillors and other partners, some of whom are no longer with us, who have served on the JAC and made it a very easy committee to chair. But most of all I owe the members of the Quantock Hills AONB team, especially Chris and Iain, an enormous debt of gratitude for all their support over my time as chairman.

Anthony Trollope-Bellew



Highlights

The metrics below were delivered either by the direct action of the AONB Team, including , initiated via grants, directly engaged contractors or volunteers or delivered as part of a project / partnership where the AONB is a key partner.

Attendance on events or engagement activities may include those who attended more than one event.

- Area of land conserved or enhanced for biodiversity - 526Ha
- Number of Scheduled Monuments where condition / setting have been conserved or enhanced - 55
- Number of individual volunteers - 315
- Number of days volunteered - 959
- Value of volunteering - £70,405
- Number of young people engaged - 2,479
- Attendance at AONB / QLPS Events - 1,313
- Number of farmers / land managers engaged with - 148
- Number of people engaged with via health and wellbeing activities - 381
- Number of non-major 'development schemes' appraised - 120



Delivering for Nature Recovery

2021/22 continued to follow the reducing trend for wildlife. A number of organisations including some of our partner local authorities declared Nature Emergencies alongside the Climate emergencies already declared in 2020. The AONB Partnership is able to deliver outcomes for nature recovery through direct delivery by its team and volunteers, through project delivery and through the provision of grant aiding. During the year the following outcomes were delivered -

Levels Up (Green Recovery Challenge Fund).

A partnership project including Blackdown Hills AONB, Somerset Wildlife Trust, South West Heritage Trust, Somerset West and Taunton Council and administered by the Mendip Hills AONB, Levels Up consisted of 12 sub-projects that aimed to enhance areas of priority habitat including woodland, grassland and mire / riparian habitats. The Quantock Hills AONB led 4 of the sub-projects delivering the following outcomes -

- 58.4Ha of woodland enhanced through the planting of 6,250 trees including the linking of 2 existing woodlands.
- 16Ha of acidic mire habitats enhanced through the removal of scrub and removal of drainage features
- 309Ha of priority oak woodland enhanced through the thinning of holly allowing the regeneration of the woodland floor flora
- Enabling Stowey Green Spaces Group to undertake selective felling of conifer in Stowey Woods allowing nature regeneration of woodland flora and native tree species.



Nature Recovery Assistant Danny (Levels Up) undertaking plant ID on Quantock acidic Mires



Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.

In July 2021 Defra launched the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. The programme aims to provide outcomes for nature, climate and people through the provision of capital and revenue funding. During the first year (part-year) of the programme outcomes delivered for nature recovery include -

- 420m of Native hedge planting
- 7.8Ha species rich grassland created
- 64Ha of improved habitat connectivity
- 2 orchards created with 74 fruit trees planted

The **AONB Service** also undertakes direct management of 37.51Ha of priority species rich grassland / scrubland on behalf of South West Heritage Trust at Cothelstone Hill and works in partnership with the Quantock Commoners Association in the delivery of the Moorland Implementation Plan for Quantock Common Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. This included the direct delivery of the swaling programme.

During 2021/22 the AONB Service secured funding to undertake research with farmers / land managers into their understanding of nature recovery and what tools and training is necessary to allow them to build nature recovery into their farming systems.



Overall the research was positive with a high degree of understanding of the concepts of nature recovery.

There was also a high degree of confidence that on a farm holding scale farmers / land managers have access to the tools and with some advice / guidance are able to build nature recovery into their farming systems.

Feedback though did indicate a need for advice / guidance on how to view nature recovery at a landscape scale.



Delivering for Climate Change

Farming in Protected Landscapes.

One of the outcomes for FiPL is that of climate mitigation / adaptation. This can be achieved by enabling farmers / land managers to manage land differently with the aim of carbon sequestration (increasing soil health, tree planting and management), reducing inputs and reducing flood risk.

Outputs from year 1 include -

- 0.5Ha of woodland creation
- 255Ha of land being managed with regenerative farming techniques
- 4 projects to improve soil quality
- 2 projects helping to reduce flood risk
- 7 projects increasing carbon sequestration
- 74Ha of woodland brought into management

Levels Up.

As well as delivering for nature recovery 2 of the sub-projects delivered by the AONB Service included works to increase the resilience of woodlands. This included the underplanting of existing woodland dominated by ash, beech and sycamore to increase species diversity and the felling of sitka spruce by Stowey Green Spaces Group in Stowey Woods to allow native broadleaved regeneration.

The AONB Service supported partners QuantockEco, WWT and FWAG-SW in a small natural flood management (NFM) scheme in Bicknoller Combe. This was delivered under the Two Valleys: Slow the Flow Project (Green Recovery Challenge Fund). This is one of a number of small NFM schemes in and around the Quantock Hills and the AONB Service is developing further schemes.





Delivering for People

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme.



One of the main outcomes of the Scheme is reducing barriers, both physical and social, to accessing the Quantock Hills and during 2021/22 the LPS was able to really step-up activity after the covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions of its first year of delivery in 2020/21.. Highlights of delivery from the year include (see www.qlps.org for full details including upcoming events) –

- Events engaging 1,650 people over 50% from disadvantaged communities.
- Archaeological 'dig' at Cothelstone Hill providing opportunity for engaging general public (c.250) and volunteering opportunities for 33 participants with prehistory day engaging with 296 people
- Test pitting in Bicknoller with 10 test pits 50 beneficiaries age range 9 to 90
- Lidar training for 20 volunteers. As of March 2022 c.1300 potential new archaeological features being identified across the scheme area.
- Start of the Young Ranger programme with young people being engaged.
- Two significant pieces of work took place with women-only groups. The first, a poetry project, led by a local poet and BAME group activist, which resulted in a new anthology of poetry inspired by the Quantock Hills, with 57 new poems created in response to the hills and its waterways. This concluded with a women's poetry evening. Secondly, 210 Jubilee shrubs were planted by women overcoming trauma or drug and alcohol abuse, from Nelson Trust, which was acknowledged by the Queen's Green Canopy with a plaque.

Somerset Nature Connections.

This partnership project with partners Mendip Hills AONB, Blackdown Hills AONB and Somerset Wildlife Trust (who also host the project) builds on the AONBs Nature & Wellbeing project which ran from 2016 – 2020.



The project delivers 6-week blocks of weekly self-care courses for people experiencing mental health issues. People can be referred or self-refer and are able to undertake 3 blocks of 6 weeks (up to 18 weeks of engagement) undertaking activities building on the five pathways to nature connectedness. During the year 20 participants took part in over 36 sessions with a number going onto further volunteering or employment opportunities.

The project has also worked with 9 community groups delivering 39 sessions. Of these 4 community groups are within the Quantock Hills 'catchment' delivering 18 sessions. These sessions work with clients and train staff (9) to be able to run nature connectivity activities themselves, thereby sustaining the activity beyond the project life.

AONB Service Volunteer Opportunities.

The AONB Service has a long history of volunteer engagement, starting in the early 1980s with the development of Volunteer Wardens. Now the AONB has a number of volunteer opportunities including:

- Volunteer Ranger
- Conservation Volunteers (shared group with National Trust)
- Estates Team
- Community Engagement Volunteers
- Historic Heritage Monitoring Volunteers
- Wildlife Monitoring Volunteers
- Working Well



During 2021/22 the various volunteer groups were able to increase activity, which had largely ceased during 2020/21. All wildlife survey groups were able to engage fully allowing for collection of valuable species data and with the increase in engagement activity with Volunteer Rangers and Community Engagement volunteers were able to undertake activities and support other projects / schemes such as the Somerset Nature Connections Project.

Quantock Hills AONB Partnership



Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) members as at 31st March 2022:

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

Quantock Hills AONB Service Team as at 31st March 2022:

Iain Porter	Manager
Amanda Sampson	Communications & Support Officer
Alex Meletiou	Landscape Planning Officer
Andy Stevenson	Ranger
Owen Jones	Partnership Ranger - Quantock Hills & Forestry England
Vacant	Volunteer Coordinator - Quantock & Blackdown AONB's
Katie Read	Landscape Project Officer
Vickie Sellick	Landscape Project Support Officer

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS) as at 31st March 2022:

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

Staff Changes



Farewell

Chris Edwards - Quantock Hills AONB Manager

Chris left us to retire at the end of March 2022 after an impressive 32 years working for the Quantock Hills starting as an Assistant Warden for 4 years, a Warden for 5 years, an AONB Officer for 6 years and the AONB Manager for 18 years.

Chris's wealth of knowledge will be sorely missed but we wish Chris all the very best in his well earned retirement.



Verity Jones - Quantock Hills AONB Volunteer Coordinator

After two years working as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Quantock and Blackdown Hills AONBs Verity accepted a new role as an Environmental Youth Worker and left us in December 2021. We wish Verity all the very best and look forward to continuing to work with her in her new position with Young Somerset in the future.



Welcome



Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Wildlife Officer - Jem Gibson

Jem joined the Quantock Landscape Partnership Team in June 2021 as the Wildlife Officer. The Wildlife Officer is responsible for delivering practical conservation works and nature-based events and activities, to explore and celebrate the natural heritage of the QLPS area. Jem grew up in North Yorkshire but has recently moved to Somerset fresh from completing a degree in Environmental Science at the University of Plymouth.



Quantock Hills Landscape Project Officer - Katie Read

Katie joined the Quantock Hills team in September 2021 as our Landscape Project Officer and is responsible for delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the Greater Quantocks Landscape Development Fund. This includes promoting the schemes, working with farmers and land managers to develop projects, supporting the Local Assessment Panel, and delivering landscape projects.



Quantock Hills Landscape Project Support Officer - Vickie Sellick

Vickie joined the Quantock Hills Team in August 2021 as our Landscape Project Support Officer working part time along side her current part time role within the QLPS team as the Project Support Officer. Vickie is responsible for the administration and communications for the grants and funds delivered through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and Greater Quantock Landscapes Development Fund.

Financial Statement



Summary

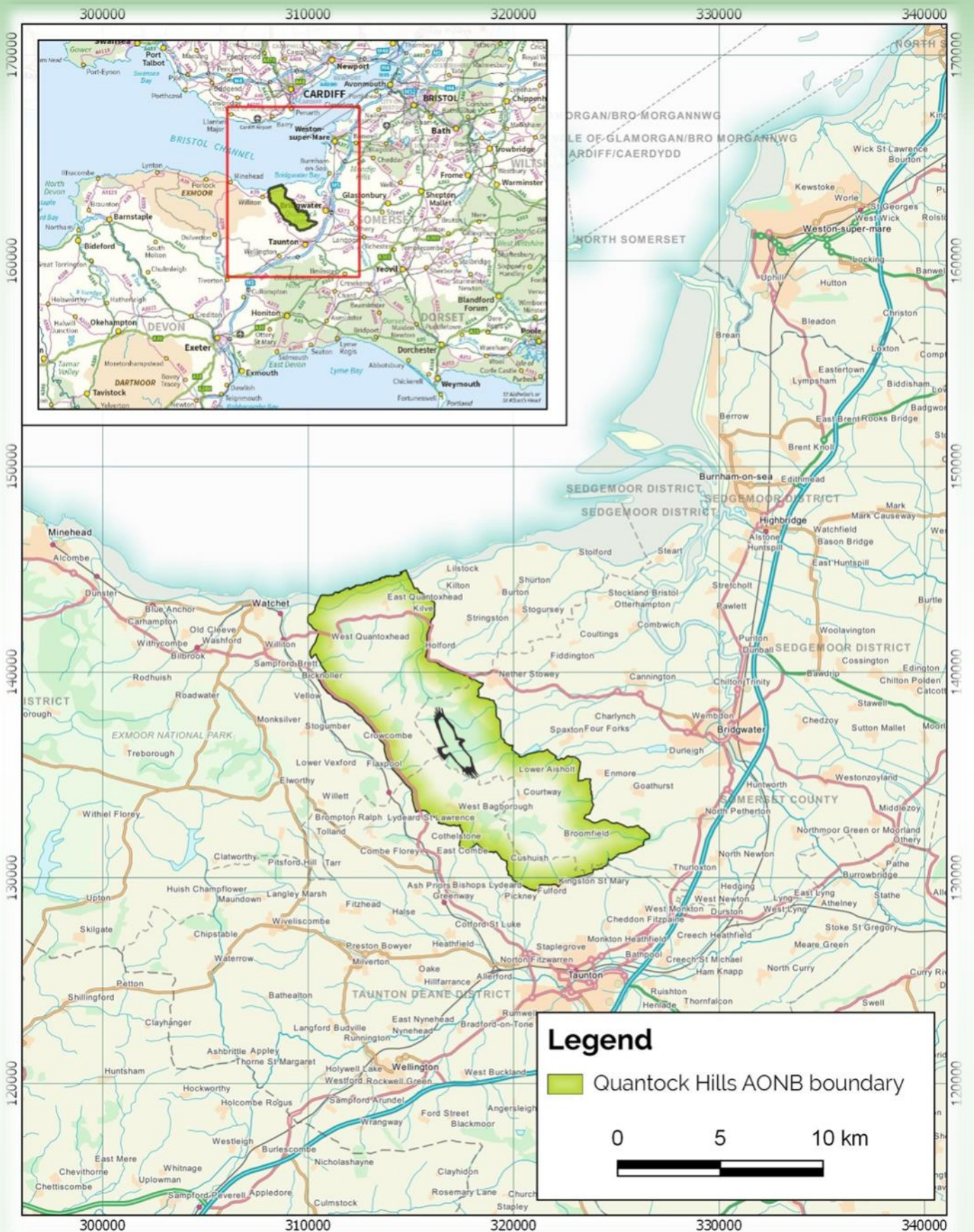
<i>Balance brought forward</i>	<i>£50,171</i>		
Gross income	883,874		Net Expenditure 862,624
Core	278,994		Core 309,452
Project	129,081		Project 129,010
Landscape Projects	91,243		Landscape Projects 89,101
Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme	331,523		Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme 332,139
Land Management	21,220		Land Management 11,922
RIA	31,815		
			<i>Fund Balance carry forward 71,422</i>
			<i>Less allocated carry forward 25,156</i>
			<i>Less earmarked reserves 16,000</i>
			<i>Unallocated reserves 30,266</i>

AONB Partnership Core Budget

Core Income £278, 994		Core Expenditure £309,452	
Defra	191,239	Salaries	229,775
Somerset County Council	22,753	Training	2,427
Sedgemoor District Council	12,240	Accommodation	12,545
Somerset West & Taunton	12,240	Stationary / post / phones	2,604
Friends of Quantock	1,220	Travel & vehicles	34,681
Cost Recovery (contracts)	6,129	Equipment, materials	4,353
Recharges	31,970	Literature & publications	5,478
Income	1,203	Meeting costs / Hospitality	662
		Hosting costs / insurances	8,928
		Memberships	2,885
		Research & Development	5,112

AONB Partnership Project Budgets

Projects	ELMS Test & Trials	1,700
	Levels Up	64,162
	Somerset Nature Connections	43,333
	Land Management Skills Scheme	2,338
	Nature Recovery	4,850
	Seriously Not Boring walk book	3,500
Landscape Projects	Farming In Protected Landscapes	81,498
	Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund	5,000
	Landscape Improvement Scheme	2,730



Quantock Hills AONB Service
Fyne Court, Broomfield, Bridgwater,
Somerset, TA5 2EQ
Telephone: 01823 451884
Email: quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk

Website: www.quantockhills.com
Facebook: facebook.com/quantock.hills
Twitter: twitter.com/Quantockhills
Instagram: instagram.com/quantockhillsaonb
YouTube: youtube.com/quantockhillsaonb