



**QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**2.00pm, Holford Village Hall, Holford**

To: The members of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

For further information about the meeting, please contact the Quantock Hills AONB Communications and Support Officer Amanda Sampson on email [quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk](mailto: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.

<b>Agenda:</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies for absence</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Declarations of interest</b> - Members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting (see Sc 5 page 2).
<b>3</b>	<b>Accuracy of the previous minutes</b> (copy appended) <b>and to consider any matters arising.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Public question time</b> - 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.
<b>5</b>	<b>Paper A - Partnership Update</b> (Iain Porter)
<b>6</b>	<b>Paper B - Management Plan Review</b> (Iain Porter)
<b>7</b>	<b>Paper C - Planning Update</b> (Alex Meletiou)
<b>8</b>	<b>Paper D - Dark Skies Position Statement</b> (Alex Meletiou)
<b>9</b>	<b>Paper E - Nature, Heritage &amp; Engagement Update</b> (Owen Jones)
<b>10</b>	<b>Paper F - Nature Recovery Plan – Stage of Nature Report</b> (Mark Baker)
<b>11</b>	<b>Paper G - Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Update</b> (Bill Jenman)
<b>12</b>	<b>AOB</b>
	<p><b>Future JAC meeting dates:</b></p> <p>Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024  Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024  Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024</p> <p>(All start at 2.00pm venues TBC)</p>
	<p><b>Note:</b></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: <a href="mailto:quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk">quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk</a></p>

<b>Meeting Guidance Notes:</b>	
<b>1.</b>	<p><b>Inspection of Papers</b></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 <a href="mailto:quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk">quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk</a></p>
<b>2.</b>	<p><b>Notes of the Meeting</b></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 <a href="mailto:quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk">quantockhills@somerset.gov.uk</a></p>
<b>3.</b>	<p><b>Public Question Time</b></p> <p>At the Chairman's invitation you may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about <b>any matter on the Committee's agenda</b>. You may also present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit. <b>The length of public question time will be no more than 20 minutes in total.</b></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, <b>before the meeting</b>.</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. <b>Remember that the amount of time you speak will be restricted, normally to two minutes only.</b></p>
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Substitutions</b></p> <p>Committee members can appoint substitutes if they are unable to attend the meeting.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>It is a member of the JACs responsibility to declare a personal or prejudicial interest at all meetings where matters being discussed or to be discussed affect their interests. Full guidance can be found in appendix 3 of the JAC Constitution.</p>

## **QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (JAC)**

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

**Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at 2.15pm**

Spaxton Village Hall, Spaxton

### **Present:**

#### **Members:**

Hugh Warmington (HW) JAC Chair	- Country Land & Business Association
Dixie Darch (DD) JAC Vice Chair	- Somerset Council
Mike Caswell (MC)	- Somerset Council
Philip Comer (PC)	- Friends of the Quantocks
Alan Bradford (AB)	- Somerset Council
Bill Revans (BR)	- Somerset Council
Fran Smith (FS)	- Somerset Council
John Ebsary (JE)	- Forestry England
Mike Rawle (MR)	- Quantock Commoners Association
Alicia Aras (AA)	- Somerset Local Access Forum
Julian Taylor (JT)	- North Petherton Town Council
Sarah Nason	- Holford Parish Council
Mark Philipson (MP)	- West Quantoxhead Parish Council
Martin Jones (MJ)	- West Bagborough Parish Council

#### **AONB Officers:**

Iain Porter (IP), Amanda Sampson (AS), Katie Read (KR), Mark Baker (MB)

#### **Also present:**

Paul Trolley (PT) AONB Volunteer, Julie Cooper (JC) Somerset Council, Fiona Jackson, Enmore Parish Council and Colin Falla (CF) Nether Stowey Parish Council, Wendy Philipson.

### **1. Apologies**

Laura Daniels (LD) Natural England, Tommy Muncie (TM) National Trust, Gwil Wren (GW) Somerset Council, John Andrews (JA) Friends of the Quantocks, John Acland-Hood (JAH) Fairfield Estate and David Stripp (DS) Kingston St Mary PC.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

HW declared himself as a Quantock Hills landowner, a member of CLA (Country Land & Business Association), Friends of the Quantocks, Falcon and Rural Housing, Somerset Local Access Forum and the Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group. No other declarations were given.

### **3. Accuracy and matters arising from the previous minutes**

AB nominated DD as Vice Chair via email before the meeting. No other amendments noted. The minutes of Tuesday 18 April 2023 were signed off as a true representation of the meeting.

MC seconded the nominations from the previous meeting (as was not quorate) for HW to be the new JAC Chair and DD to be the new JAC Vice Chair.

### **4. Public Question Time**

No public questions.

### **5. Paper A - Partnership Update** (Iain Porter)

IP gave an update on the Partnership paper A.

Vickie Sellick our joint FiPL & QLPS Project Support Officer is leaving the team to join Exmoor National Park as their FiPL Support Officer. Both roles will be advertised separately as we are increasing the hours for the FiPL role from 12 to 22 hours per week. The QLPS post will remain the same.

Number for JAC members quorate to be reduced from 11 down to 8. MC proposed, seconded by FS, unanimously agreed.

There were no comments or questions to note.

### **Paper A Recommendation(s):**

#### **1) The JAC noted the report.**

### **6. Paper B – Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** (Katie Read)

KR gave a brief overview of the FiPL Programme for the benefit of the new members in attendance at the JAC. More information and case studies can be found on our website.

AA asked for an example of a successful project. KR provided an example of an arable farm introducing more regenerative agricultural methods to reduce inputs and provide greater biodiversity benefits.

CF asked how projects were assessed. KR ran through appraisal process including role of panel.

AB very important to have a hands on approach with farmer engagement.

HW one of the exciting aspects of this is the younger farmers coming through who are driving modern farming in the Quantock Hills in a very environmentally friendly way and future farming is very exciting. Effectiveness of many schemes may have long timescales and may take years.

DD do the framers have to come up with the idea, how much support do they have. KR project conception, the most successful projects usually come from the farmers own ideas. Suggestions can be made from the team, but the best way is to get farmers talking to each other. Once there is an idea in place it is easier to add things to that idea.

There were no further comments or questions to note.

### **Paper B Recommendation(s):**

#### **1) The JAC noted the report.**

### **7. Paper C – Landscape Recovery Fund** (Iain Porter)

IP – Good funding opportunity to work at landscape scale across core area of the Quantock Hills. However there is significant resource implications to taking forward an application.

FS what would be the true impact on the time of the AONB staff. IP would be approximately 5-7 days' worth of admin time but ball park figure is 10 days. Some other workstreams will be delayed.

DD pleased that there is the get up and go to push for these projects even though they create more work.

JT an exciting project and this impacts areas outside of the Quantock Hills and the far and wide community.

HW – does JAC have any concerns? AB feels the need to be cautious. IP you have to do impact assessments on applications, this is the first time this has been done. AB the world is a very unstable place at the moment.

HW sought agreement from the JAC to process with an application. Unanimous agreement.

There were no further comments or questions to note.

### **Paper C Recommendation(s):**

#### **1) The JAC noted the report and**

#### **2) The JAC agreed to proceeding with a Landscape Recovery application.**

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

Mark asked if anyone has any questions regarding paper D.

HW is the project being pinned down. MB there is always so many unknowns and a lot we do and don't know, but a lot of work that has already been done over a number of years. IP by doing this we are feeding in to a number of other strategies and plans.

SN the Quantocks are so important for the SSSI, the birds and wildlife, unless we understand our insect fauna in our woodlands and heathlands, so the quality of the SSSI are retained or made better. How are you judging the state of nature currently in the Quantocks? MB we access lots of data, such as through a service level agreement with SERC (Somerset Environmental Record Centre), which provides a baseline. This informs land management, which is aimed at managing the habitat holistically rather than on a species level.

SN do you think the AONB knows enough about it. MB monitoring has been going on for many years, but we can always know a lot more. One level of grazing would suit certain wildlife and not others, is very much a balancing act and we are monitoring as much as we possibly can.

IP SSSI are monitored by Natural England which do have gaps, but more detailed data is available from FoQ Acidic Mires Assessments.

HW it is endlessly complex and there are many things beyond our control, there is a limit to what we can achieve.

There were no further comments or questions to note.

**Paper D Recommendation(s):**

**1) The JAC noted the report.**

**9. Paper E – National Landscapes Rebrand** (Iain Porter)

The main discussion was on the proposed new logo and colour pallet for the Quantock Hills National Landscape.

IP asked the group for their thoughts on the proposed logos.

FS is this a follow on from the previous meeting. IP version 1 logo was presented to the July meeting, version 2 logo is a new proposal.

AA doesn't understand why we cannot keep our original buzzard. IP after the last meeting, took the comments back to the NAAONB and this is how version 2 came about.

MP they look very much like cartoon characters. The current Quantock Hills buzzard will look good for a long time to come like the National Trusts acorn, we should be looking to keep the buzzard, neither of these logos sell the Quantock Hills.

SN proposed logos look like a crested eagle or a cockatoo. Likes the idea of both 2 colours.

JC how easy has it been to have direct conversations over the new logo. IP very difficult and has been a very frustrating process.

JT do the logo's really suit the Quantocks.

HW seems that will have something bright and trendy which will age in time and be outdated. Cost of rebranding hasn't been discussed. Will cost a lot of money to replace all of the village signs alone.

DD would be terrible to have to change the signs. Doesn't like the proposed buzzard, the first design seems less offensive.

BR would go back and state we want a buzzard in flight and that's what we will accept or no thanks.

HW would also choose version 1 if had to choose between these 2 designs.

The JAC agreed that neither of the current versions were acceptable. The preference would be to keep a soaring buzzard to reflect the tradition of the current logo.

IP to go back to NAAONB and ask for more options, including a soaring buzzard.

There were no further comments or questions to note.

**Paper E Recommendation(s):**

**1) The JAC noted the report.**

**10. Paper F - Quantock Hills Business Plan 2023/24 (Iain Porter)**

Income error on the paper will be amended. Dynamics 365 finance system has prevented downloading the expenditure records which is why the report is not full this time around but should be available for the next meeting.

IP asked for any questions.

There we no comments or questions to note.

**Paper F Recommendation(s):**

**1) The JAC Noted the report.**

**11. AOB –**



AB some finger posts around the area are looking in a poor state or repair. IP can be reported via the Somerset Council website.

**Date of next meeting:**

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October at 2pm

Holford Village Hall

**Meeting was closed at 4.20pm.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER</b> <b>A</b>
Subject	Partnership Update	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	25 October 2023	

## 1) Team

- a. Community Engagement & Volunteering Officer recruitment. The recruitment for a part-time 18-month contract for a new Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer was unsuccessful. While a good number of applicants came forward and we interviewed three it was felt that none of the candidates were right for the post. Rather than recruit at this time we have reviewed the post and will look to recruit at the beginning of 2024 with the aim of offering a full-time 12-month contract that may be more attractive to potential candidates. This post will work jointly across the core AONB Team and the QLPS Team.
- b. Farming Engagement Support Officer. Vickie Sellick left her post in August having been offered a full-time FiPL Support Officer role with Exmoor National Park Authority. In reviewing the post I have increased the hours per week to 22.2 from 12 to allow additional resource needed to ensure the promotion and reporting of the increased FiPL programme. I am pleased to say we held a successful recruitment process and that Ann Guilding started in role on 25<sup>th</sup> September.
- c. QLPS Project Support Officer. As Steering Group members will be aware Vickie Sellick held two roles within the team. The QLPS have also recently undertaken a recruitment process and have appointed a preferred candidate who is currently going through the pre-employment checks and due to start in mid-October.
- d. Community Engagement Development Officer. As reported at the last meeting I have updated and enhanced the QLPS Community Engagement & Volunteering role description to increase the development element of the role. The role description is currently with HR at Somerset Council for grading.
- e. Somerset Nature Connections. The project, which had been due to finish in October, has been extended to the end of March 2024 utilising underspend from the Community Heritage Lottery Fund and additional funding from the AONBs. Legacy planning has been delayed and all AONB partners are pressing Somerset Wildlife Trust to prioritise this in the coming months.

## 2) Defra Grant Agreement / Funding Formula

- a. We are waiting for Somerset Council to be correctly set up on the Defra portal to allow claiming and payment of our grant. Initial discussions have started about the Defra grant for 2024/25 which is likely to be an extension of the current core grant. The FiPL and Capital Access Grant elements for 2024/25 have already been confirmed.
- b. 2024 /25 is the end of the current spending review period with Secretary of State at Defra committing to reviewing the funding formula for protected landscapes. Senior officials at Defra have committed to no-one losing out in any new funding formula however no further details have been forthcoming.

### **3) Landscape Review Response.**

- a. I am aware that I have reported for the last few months that Defra hope to issue their response to the Landscape Review soon. With the Ministerial Statement (13<sup>th</sup> September) Defra have committed, again, to respond to the Landscape Review.
- b. A significant element of the review which is being taken forward is the strengthening of Management Plans which has been included through an amendment in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) [Amendment Text](#) Duty of relevant authorities. Currently, section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000 states under general duty of public bodies etc "In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty, a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty." This is to be amended to: "In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty (in England), a relevant authority...must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty." The Government's plan is to have this in place by 7<sup>th</sup> January 2024.
- c. In a recent meeting between Secretary of State and chairs of AONBs it was apparent that there is not much appetite for pursuing statutory consultee status for AONB Partnerships at this time, though this is due to the lack of legislative vehicles able to take this forward.

### **4) Protected Landscapes Partnership (formerly called the Landscapes Parks & Trails Partnership).**

- a. In J the business case was approved for the Protected Landscapes Partnership including a budget of £1.5m for 2023/24 and approximately £1.4m for 2023/25. The funding will be used to cover:
  - Partnership administration, including costs for the chair, EDI champion and partnership manager
  - Development of workstreams for nature recovery and EDI (this includes a programme of training on EDI for staff and partnerships in protected landscapes).
  - Project developing including Big Chalk and Art in the Landscape.
  - Evaluating activity.
- b. The Quantock Hills AONB has engaged the partnership through the green / private finance workstream.

### **5) National Landscape Rebranding**

- a. At the last JAC the new branding was presented with general agreement on the vision, objectives, use of language and photographs and cohesiveness of visuals. As you will be aware the Team, Steering Group and Partnership were not happy with the specific visuals for the Quantock Hills.
- b. After feedback the AONB Team produced a draft logo which was 'tidied up' by the NAAONB designers to produce the third version of the Quantock Hills National Landscape logo. The new logo retains the buzzard, which has long been associated with the Quantock Hills, while fitting with the over arching National Landscape

brand. The AONB have also opted for the 'woodland' colour palette. The new logo will be shown at the meeting

- c. The launch of the National Landscapes is planned for late November. The NAAONB is currently developing the launch plans and resources and it is expected that there will be a coordinated county or regional approach alongside the national messaging. The AONB Team are currently developing the branding for the new panel van and uniform and awaiting confirmation from the NAAONB on the additional funding from Defra, expected at £5,000 per AONB.

## **6) Targets & Outcome Framework**

- a. The Target and Outcome Framework has been included in the new draft Protected Landscape Management Plan Guidance. However there is no detail within the guidance and no timescale from Natural England when this will be available.

## **7) Partnership**

- a. In July the partnership agreed to the lowering of the number of members required for the partnership to be quorate from 11 to 8, inline with advice from Somerset Council. With the recent result of the Somerton & Frome by-election we are expecting that Sarah Dyke will be replaced on the Partnership.

## **8) National Association of AONBs Conference**

- a. In September the National Association of AONBs Conference took place at Bath University. The Quantock Hills AONB was one of six AONB hosts and provided two field trips and led workshop sessions. The theme was invested in and investing in Landscape and included elements about engagement and also finance and funding in protected landscapes. Feedback on the field trips was very positive. Eight members of the team and vice-chair Dixie attended (3 core, 2 Landscapes and 3 from the QLPS) with five assisting in the running of the conference, either field trips or activities at the conference. The Quantock Hills was well presented and able to show off its wonderful landscape to good effect.

## **9) 2023/24 Business Plan**

- a. Please see **attachment A** Quantock Hills AONB Business Plan 2023/24 mid-point review. 79% of the actions are on target with 16% behind schedule. 5% (four) actions are not expected to deliver to target or deliver expected outputs.
- b. Overall progress is positive though some key priorities are behind schedule, such as the Nature Recovery Plan. The plan review will look to increase the priority of these elements through dropping some actions which are not time critical.

## **10) 2023/24 Budget – Qu2**

- a. Budget monitoring reports are now available from D365 (Somerset Councils finance system). However these are not as comprehensive as previous versions and have required a lot of follow up. Since the move to the new finance system the following issues has impacted the AONB Team:
  - i. being able to raise purchase orders,
  - ii. Ability to pay invoices and grants.
  - iii. Ability to view and run reports on budgets.

- iv. Non allocation of carry forward from 2022/23. This includes the AONB reserves and project income for projects running across financial years.
  - v. Budgets (cost codes) not being replicated meaning expenditure is either not showing or allocation to wrong cost code
  - vi. Unable to use appropriate account names (new term for ledger codes) meaning all expenditure being shown as 'other supplies & services'.
  - vii. Some expenditure that is showing as having gone through in 2022/23 is shown in the 2023/24 budgets. This is being queried with finance colleagues.
- b. Summary. The table below shows the budgeted expenditure and income with the actuals. As stated above the confidence levels in these are low.

<b>Budget Heading</b>	<b>Budget Exp</b>	<b>Budget Income</b>	<b>Actual Expenditure</b>	<b>Actual Income</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Core	297,701	-287,781	152,974	0	152,974
Projects	55,400	-55,400	4,334	0	4,334
Landscape Projects	450,202	-450,183	47,858	0	47,858
Quantock Landscape Ptn Scheme	562,739	-562,739	183,021	-5,000	178,021
Land Management	7,000	-7,000	108	0	108
RIA	24,500	-86,939	0	-2	-2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,397,542</b>	<b>-1,450,042</b>	<b>388,296</b>	<b>-5002</b>	<b>383,294</b>
<i>Earmarked Reserves</i>	<i>17,000</i>	<i>0</i>			<i>16,500</i>
<i>Surplus / deficit</i>		<i>-35,500</i>			<i>399,794</i>

- c. Core Budget. The table below shows the original budget with the revised budget. The salaries budget has reduced due to the delay in recruitment of the Community Engagement & volunteering officer. There is an uplift in the Partnership Running Costs due to invoices from 2022/23 being paid out of this financial year. Currently income is reduced (less recharge for the staff post) which leads to an overall balance of £11,945 requiring an additional £2,025 from reserves. It is expected that this will be available when the Receipts in Advance carry forward is finally allocated to our budgets.

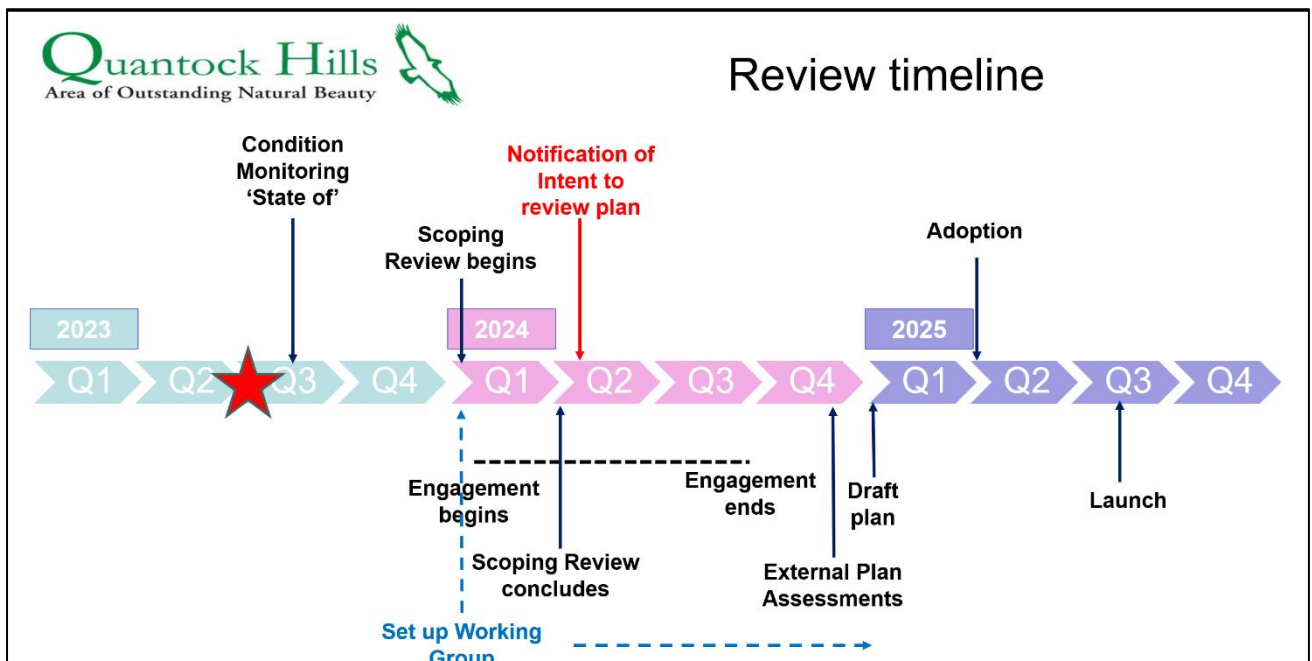
<b>Top line item</b>	<b>Original Budget</b>	<b>Revised Budget</b>	<b>Var</b>
Salaries, training	236,978	225,434	-11,544
Travel, vehicles	21,636	21,000	-636
Accommodation	12,550	12,550	0
Partnership Running costs	16,287	19,245	2,958
Management Plan review /RD	2,000	2,000	0
Management Fee	8,250	8,250	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>297,701</b>	<b>288,479</b>	<b>-9,222</b>
Income	-287,781	-276,534	11,247
<i>Balance</i>	<i>9,920</i>	<i>11,945</i>	<i>2,025</i>

**Recommendation(s):**

- (1) The JAC notes the report.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER B</b>
Subject	Quantock Hills AONB Management Plan Review	
Author	Iain Porter, AONB Manager	
Date	25 October 2023	

- 1) The current statutory AONB Management Plan runs until 31 March 2024. In July 2022 Rt Hon Lord Benyon (Defra) wrote to AONB Partnerships to allow an option to delay the review of any Management Plans that were due to be completed in 2024 by a year. This was to allow for the new Protected Landscape Management Plan Guidance to be taken into account when reviewing plans. The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership took the decision to delay the review of the Management Plan by a year to be completed by March 2025.
- 2) Natural England have released the first draft of the new Management Plan Guidance in August. While it is still draft there are some useful steers, which reflects changes highlighted by the Landscapes Review –
  - a. A requirement for Management Plans to be spatial in their considerations of the landscape, this is inline with the new Local Nature Recovery Strategies
  - b. To align with the new Outcomes and Targets framework, with each protected landscape delivering on each of their apportioned targets for nature, climate, people and place.
  - c. Guidance for the creation of Climate Change Adaptation Plans, now mandatory in the new Plans.
  - d. Plans need to be actioned focussed, prioritising deliverable on-the-ground management across the protected landscape
- 3) Rather unhelpfully there some areas in the draft guidance that have not been completed including the Targets and Outcomes Framework, 30 by 30, tree planting in protected landscapes and Climate Change Adaptation Plans with Natural England stating these will be release in due course.
- 4) Review timeline. Below is the timeline that will deliver the review of the Management Plan to adoption in April 2025.



- a. Condition Monitoring (October – December 2023). The starting point for the review is to understand the condition of the natural beauty. The State of Nature will assess the trends or baseline of a number of national indicators and locally derived indicators. National indicators are provided through the MEOPPL dataset produced by Natural England and others. Natural England are also due to produce a new dataset of condition monitoring indicators.
  - b. Working Group (January 2024 – January 2025). The Working Group will be made up from members of the Partnership and Steering Group and will assist the Manager to ensure the review remains on schedule.
  - c. Scoping Process (January – March 2024). The scoping process will review the state of nature data, assess issues review the external context and new drivers that the plan will need to address. It will also review stakeholder information, appraise existing content and undertake a gap analysis to allow planning of the Plan structure.
  - d. Engagement (January – August 2024). Consultation and engagement is a key element of the review process. As well as stakeholders it is important that the wider public is consulted and thought will need to be given as to how it ensures inclusion. Existing consultations or work with hard to reach groups should be included and built upon.
  - e. External Plan Assessment (October – November 2024). A draft plan will be required to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment and a Habitat Regulation Assessment. These elements will be contracted out to allow for independent assessment.
  - f. Adoption (January – March 2025). The plan will need to be reviewed and approved by Natural England prior to sign off of the Partnership and adoption by the local authority. Other public bodies including The Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and Historic England are also required to be consulted. Due to the new unitary authority in Somerset the plan will only need to go through one adoption process. Time needs to be built in to ensure the plan is able to be considered at the relevant committees and advice will be sought from Somerset Council in mid 2024 as to the correct committee and timings.
- 5) Resourcing the review. The majority of the review will be undertaken by the core team, mainly the AONB Manager. There will be some distinct work packages that will be undertaken by consultants / contractors such as the Habitat Regulation Assessment. Budget has been allocated to ensure that these work packages happen and the work programme for the team for 2024/25 will be adjusted to take account of the review.

**Recommendation(s):**

- (1) The JAC approves the Management Plan Review timeline.**
- (2) The JAC approves the setting up of a Management Plan Review Working Group to run from January 2024 and consider membership of the working group.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER</b> <b>C</b>
Subject	Planning Update	
Author	Alex Meletiou, Quantock Hills AONB Planning Officer	
Date	25 October 2023	

## 1. Planning applications

From 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 to 1st October 2023 the AONB received 42 planning applications for consideration and 6 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.

The distribution between the two planning regions is listed below together with the number of applications within each Parish.

### Planning North:

Bridgwater	1
Broomfield	2
Kingston St Mary	6
Enmore	2
Nether Stowey	4
North Petherton	2
Over Stowey	5
Spaxton	3

**Total** **25**

### Planning West:

Cothelstone	1
Crowcombe	2
Holford	2
Kilve	3
Staplegrove	1
Stogumber	1
Washford	3
West Bagborough	3
W. Quantoxhead	1

**Total** **17**

### Applications by type:

Access	1
Agricultural buildings	2
Agricultural conversions	3
Caravans – site extension	3
Caravans/camping	1
Conversion to holiday lets	1
Domestic extensions	8
Holiday lodge	1
Major residential	3
Mast and aerials	1
Minor works	1
New dwellings	8
Planning conditions	2
Solar – PV panels	4
Variation to conditions	2
Workshop extension	1

**Total** **42**



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

## 2. Current Issues

**a. Solar park, Washford** In my last report to the JAC earlier in March, this planning application was still being considered following further information provided by the applicant. However the case eventually went to the Planning Committee West on 18<sup>th</sup> July. The AONB's stance has remained the same throughout, in that objections were raised on the potential harmful impact on the views from the Quantock Hills. Exmoor National Park expressed similar objections as the site is located between the two Protected Landscapes.

The application was refused on 2 grounds:

1. The proposed development due to its scale, location, layout and appearance fails to take into account the local visual adverse impact on the landscape, notably in relation to the Exmoor National Park and the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and is therefore contrary to Policy SD1, CC1 and NH5 and NH14 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 (2016).
2. The proposed development due to its scale and layout would result in the loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Agricultural Land contrary to Policy NH8 of the West Somerset Local Plan to 2032 (2016).

**b. Hinkley Point workers** Two applications have been received during the last three months, one close to Nether Stowey and the second between Holford and Kilve, to increase the number of caravans on existing tourist/HP accommodation sites, to accommodate more Hinkley Point workers.

Although just outside of the AONB boundary, both these sites have the potential to impact the visual landscape when viewed from the Hills and therefore the AONB Service has submitted formal objections to these applications.

**c. Blue Ball Inn, Triscombe.** Following many objections to this application for '*a proposed change of use from public house to holiday accommodation with ancillary bar*', it was originally approved by the Planning Officer without reference to the Planning Committee, contrary to the Council's constitution. However, this decision was referred to the High Court and on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 a Consent Order was granted to quash the approval.

**The Court's adjudication:** The Defendant's decision on 19 December 2022 to grant planning permission pursuant to reference 45/22/0010; in respect to Blue Ball Inn, Cockercombe Road, Bagborough be quashed for the reasons set out in the Schedule to this Order.

### SCHEDULE OF REASONS

1. On 19 December 2022, the Defendant Council granted planning permission pursuant to reference 45/22/0010, in respect to Blue Ball Inn, Cockercombe Road, Bagborough ('the Site') for the following description of development ('the Approved Development):

*Proposed Change of Use of Blue Ball Public House (Sui-generis) to Holiday*

### *Accommodation with Ancillary Bar (C3) and Community Use (F1 & F2)*

2. The decision to grant planning permission was taken by Alison Blom-Cooper, the Council's Assistant Director of Strategic Place and Planning. However, Mrs Blom-Cooper did not have the legal authority to take this decision.

3. The Council's constitution (Terms of Reference paragraph 3.1 criterion 5) says that, "where an application is the subject of representations contrary to the officer recommendation (with planning reasons) submitted to the Council by:

(a) not less than four individuals; and

(b) 'at least' one of the following:

i) a Town/Parish Council;

ii) a Parish Meeting;

iii) a Ward Member;

then the application shall be reserved to the Planning Committee for determination.

4. The West Bagborough Parish Council objected to the application alongside well over four individuals. Accordingly the application should have been referred to the Planning Committee in accordance with the Council's constitution.

5. Accordingly, the decision to grant permission was contrary to the Council's constitution and thus ultra vires.

6. It follows that the Defendant agrees that the decision was unlawful and thus should be quashed. The Defendant further agrees that it should pay the Claimant's costs of the claim.

The application was subsequently withdrawn in July 2023.

### **Enforcement**

Two ongoing 'enforcement' problems are still being pursued. These were mentioned at the June meeting of the JAC.

- 1) The vanished hedge near Spaxton, and
- 2) The illegal access and track at Pightley that should have been re-instated following the refusal of a retrospective application 14 months ago.

### **Planning matters**

Part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has recently been revised ahead of many changes which will be added next year following the LURB legislation coming into force.

#### A) NPPF revised 5th September 2023 – On-shore wind

New wording in the September 2023 version of the NPPF has been added regarding onshore wind development and is highlighted with new text underlined, and wording to be replaced crossed through.

Paragraph 158, footnote 54 - "Except for applications for the repowering and life-extension of existing wind turbines, a planning application for proposed wind energy development

involving one or more turbines should not be considered acceptable unless it is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in the development plan or a supplementary planning document; and, following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by the affected local community have been appropriately fully-addressed and the proposal has community support." ~~their backing~~"

The footnote now:

- addresses the life-extension of existing wind turbines (as well as repowering);
- allows for 'suitable areas' to be identified in supplementary planning documents (as well as in development plans);
- requires planning impacts to be 'appropriately' addressed rather than 'fully' addressed;
- requires community 'support' instead of the 'backing' of the local community.

What is the difference between 'support' and 'backing' and between 'appropriately' addressed and 'fully' addressed?

Extract from Written Ministerial Statements (WMS):

"We have heard accounts that current policy has been applied in such a way that a very limited number of objections, and even at times objections of single individuals, have been taken as showing a lack of community backing. This is not the policy intent, and as a result of today's policy change it will now be important that local decision makers are able to take a more balanced approach, considering the views of communities as a whole."

**Recommendation(s):**

**(3) The JAC notes the report.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER D</b>
Subject	Dark Skies Position Statement	
Author	Alex Meletiou	
Date	25 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	

### 1) Introduction

- a. The magical sensation of being able to see the wonders of the night sky are under threat from the increasing use of artificial light. Darkness at night is an integral part of the landscape and we want to ensure the Quantock Hills remains a place where a sense of remoteness and tranquillity predominates and where, unaffected by light pollution, night skies can thrill the eye.
- b. Excessive artificial light can also disrupt our sleep and potentially lead to serious health issues. It does not just affect us, it also plays havoc with the feeding and breeding cycles of bats, birds, insects and nocturnal animals. The night sky makes up half of our visual environment and yet, unlike historic housing, ancient settlements, resident wildlife and our fantastic landscapes, the night sky has no protection.

### 2) Light pollution in the Quantock Hills

- a. The Campaign to Protection Rural England (CPRE) have undertaken a number of satellite based light level surveys of the UK in 1993, 2000 and more recently in 2018. The most recent survey was at an unprecedented level of detail and allowed a better assessment of light pollution and its affects on urban and rural areas.
- b. The Quantock Hills retains a core area little impacted by light pollution, however development around its boundary is starting to impact on the AONB.

### 3) Requirement for a position statement

- a. Studies undertaken by the CPRE and the Institution of Lighting Professionals show that light pollution is increasing over the country. With its potentially serious effect on the environment, a positive statement is required from the JAC Partnership that highlights the problems and possible solutions.
- b. The Statutory AONB Management Plan has a Management Policy – DPIIP 7: Protect the dark skies and tranquillity of the AONB. However the policy is not detailed or evidenced. A Position Statement, **attachment B** will provide further context, evidence and provide external organisations and stakeholders with the Partnerships preferred approach to artificial light in the built and natural environment. The Position Statement will also provide the foundations for an enhanced policy when the Management Plan is review in 2025.

### **Recommendation(s):**

**(1) The JAC adopts the Dark Skies Position Statement.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER</b> <b>E</b>
Subject	Nature, Heritage & Engagement Update	
Author(s)	Owen Jones, Partnership Ranger, Andy Stevenson, Ranger, Abby Wilkinson, Community Engagement Ranger	
Date	25 October 2023	

**1. Land & Heritage Management**

- a. Cothelstone Hill. This autumn the coppice rotation has continued with 4 new coupes being cut by volunteers. 1 coupe cut with the Working Well group and a Somerset Council corporate volunteer group, 1 coupe cut with the QCV and Volunteer Rangers groups, 1 coupe cut by QLPS volunteer groups and the Apprentices and 1 coupe cut by Young Rangers and Young Somerset school groups. The glades, corals and rides were cut during the summer. On the open hilltop the rosebay willowherb that has been dominating in previous years has reduced but been overtaken by bracken. The bracken has been topped. Gorse is also on a continuously rotating cutting and burning regime. The 12 Exmoor ponies on Cothelstone Hill continue to do well, with special attention being paid to the four older mares. The four geldings have been a great addition and are mixing with the whole herd. We have continued to investigate the possibility of getting some cattle grazing up there but with no luck. The current Woodland Management Plan is being reviewed. This is to take into account the woodland work carried out as part of the Countryside Stewardship scheme and also the impacts of Ash Dieback. As part of the QLPS access work a contract has been released for an access plan for Cothelstone Hill. This aims to enhance the user experience of the site rather than increase the overall number of users.
  
- b. Swaling/fire breaks. Last season the team, volunteers and commoners completed six burns at various locations around the commons. As part of the new Moorland Implementation Plan (MIP), that is currently being written, a new 10-year swaling plan will be produced. Wildfire management will have a greater priority in the new MIP and the fire breaks cut last year will again be cut by the commoners along with further fire breaks to reduce the risk of large scale summer fires.
  
- c. Hedgelaying – with the Somerset Hedge Group one training date was held at West Quantoxhead in September to be followed by the annual competition at a farm near Spaxton. A second training date is being held in Aisholt in late October and a separate training day is being held for the Young Rangers on the QLPS scheme.
  
- d. Hayman’s Pond – Following felling of trees in the bank of the pond last autumn, renovation works were due to happen this autumn including removal of silt and restoration of the holding walls but further investigative works need to be done to provide detailed specifications.

## 2. Volunteering

### a. Summary

No of individuals volunteering with AONB Team		97
Volunteer Role	No of active volunteers	Volunteer hours*
Volunteer Rangers	13	520
Community Engagement Volunteers	6	46
Quantock Conservation Volunteers	12	118
Estates Team	2	212
Heritage	20	50
Wildlife Surveyors	44	356

- Volunteer hours from 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> September.

- b. Volunteer Rangers are invaluable assistants to the team, carrying out patrols at all times of the week and practical tasks both small scale and large scale. We also hold monthly meetups to bring the volunteer rangers together to ensure they feel connected as they are mostly carrying out patrols on their own. A number of longer serving members have recently moved away and some are less active and we are recruiting new volunteers through Assemble, with the intention to bring the number in the role to 20.
- c. Community Engagement Volunteers. The Community Engagement volunteers have been supporting the Working Well Group as well as other groups such as Green Days. We are looking at the potential to increase the size of this group to allow for increasing the role with the potential to link to the Somerset Nature Connections Project.
- d. Event Leaders. This year we have created the volunteer role of walk or event leaders. Volunteers who want to take on this role will receive training in Lowland Walk Leaders, which ensure they are highly trained and competent in leading walks in all seasons in the Quantock Hills. Six volunteers are currently going through the training with the aim of being qualified early in 2024 to be able to start leading walks and events for next years events programme.
- e. Working Well group. This group meets on a monthly basis and is focused on participant wellbeing and enjoyment. The group is advertised for people with low mental health and wellbeing and people can be referred or refer themselves. They have had some incredible success stories with participants going onto mainstream volunteering and returning to full time employment. Numbers of participants do vary and in September the group expanded further by being joined by two asylum seekers from Bridgewater and we hope to provide a pathway for the participants of the Somerset Nature connections project to join this group.
- f. Quantock Conservation Volunteers. Providing monthly sessions for the National Trust led volunteer group who carry a wide range of tasks mainly conservation and access management. Activities have included gorse cutting, coppicing, grip repairs, fence repairs and hedgelaying.

- g. Estates Team. Our two members have been bolstered with help from two volunteers who have been trained to use brushcutters.
- h. Heritage Surveyors Volunteers continue to monitor the 52 scheduled monuments within the AONB. The results of the surveys are sent to Historic England who use the information to request management works or spot early signs of damaging activity.
- i. Wildlife Surveyors. Volunteers support many of the species monitoring programmes led by the AONB Team. There are two in particular that could not happen without volunteers, butterfly monitoring and bat monitoring. Both these groups have completed a successful monitoring season throughout the summer with results being fed back into the national monitoring programmes.

### 3. Engagement.

- a. Work Experience. Over the year the team have hosted a number of students, from university age to year 10 school children. All have thrown themselves into the experience both in terms of practical tasks and working with other volunteers. Since coming out on work experience a couple of students have stayed in touch by attending events run by us and one is also looking to join the Young Rangers scheme. The team has hosted two work experience students this year with different members of the team providing different opportunities to experience the range of work we do.
- b. Schools. The team also work with larger groups of young people. Wellington School recently brought 39 students to Cothelstone Hill to undertake practical work. The team are hosting 40 students from Kilve Court carrying out their practical assessment for their gold Duke of Edinburgh scheme and we are taking a year group of A level students from Bridgwater and Taunton College onto the heathland to look at the management of the area for their geography course.
- c. Young Rangers and Apprentices, mentored by Young Somerset, have been a valuable asset to the Team and with them recently completing certification in chainsaws, brushcutters and tractors driving they are able to undertake a lot more tasks.
- d. Events/activities – The AONB Team delivers an events programme which has included 15 events this year. Where events require booking we have had 190 people attend, which is an increase on 2022. In 2023 there has been more variety to the activities on offer between the core team, the QLPS and external organisers. The team continue to monitor external events however we are aware of a number of events that have not gone through the event notification process. The Team will be assessing the value of this process and looking to engage event organisers to ensure events and recreational pressures are managed.

### 4. Visitor Management

- a. Fly tipping / litter – there has been relatively constant levels of fly tipping across all parts of the Quantock Hills as well as usual littering mainly around car parks. Larger deposits of flytipping were reported to Somerset Council who have collected, usually very quickly.

- b. Patrols – the Rangers maintain a regular routine of patrols during the week and at weekends/bank holidays. Joint patrols with the police have taken place although another one of the excellent PCSOs has recently retired. Two raves had been organised on the Quantock Hills this year with the Rangers and Police attending to mitigate issues.
- c. Access and Disabled Ramblers. The Rangers have audited the AONB promoted routes, such as the Quantock Greenway and waymarked trails, and made any changes to signage and furniture needed. Major improvements were carried out by contractors at a number of key locations on the northern and southern common. This work was funded by the Defra Capital Access Grant and allowed the routes to be used by mobility scooters and wheelchairs. Further auditing of rights of way with the local Disabled Ramblers members led to small scale changes to allow access at other locations throughout the AONB. The culmination of this partnership enabled the Disabled Ramblers to host a national walking festival to showcase the hills in general and some of the improvements.

## 5. Species Monitoring

- a. Pied flycatchers. The AONB team supports the Quantock Hills scheme with both Andy and Owen responsible for a number of nest boxes. There are four transects, in the combes, and nestboxes were checked weekly during the early summer months. The numbers of Pied Flycatchers remain stable along with great tits and blue tits. Any young pied flycatchers were ringed and a number of the females on the nests were birds we had ringed in previous years. Numbers were fed into the national scheme, run by the BTO (British Ornithological Trust) which helps look and plan for future trends.
- b. Bats. Led by the AONB Manager and delivered by trained volunteers the bat monitoring includes seven transects covering most habitat and landscapes across the Quantock Hills. All transects were fully surveyed this summer with a training session in bat call analysis planned for later in the year. All result will be analysed and submitted to the Bat Conservation Trust / Natural England.
- c. Butterfly. Led by trained volunteers the surveys are based on two transects at Cothelstone Hill and Fyne Court. Numbers are still being compiled for the summer and will be sent through to UKBMS soon. We will be looking to recruit more butterfly volunteers for next season so that they can be supported by the existing experience volunteers and also look to survey more transects.
- d. Nightjar Survey – With the assistance of volunteers and staff the nightjar survey was undertaken for the fourth year. The survey is undertaken over ten 1km squares twice during the summer months at Dawn and dusk. Data from these is still being gathered and will help influence future management of the common.
- e. Dormouse surveys – the dormouse boxes are checked monthly at Cothelstone Hill but sadly there has been a decline in numbers here and nationally. The additional work being undertaken to bring the hazel coppice back into rotation will hopefully benefit this species in the near future.
- f. Tick Survey – we continue to collect ticks from around the Quantock Hills as part of a national survey mainly to identify the range of species present and the proportion of ticks that carry Lyme disease.



- g. Summer heathland bird survey 2024. The team has put out a request for quote for a contractor to support us collate and survey for the upcoming survey in 2024. This will continue the regular six yearly surveying for heathland bird species to analyse trends within key populations.

**Recommendation(s):**

**(1) The JAC notes the report.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER</b> <b>F</b>
Subject	Nature Recovery Plan – State of Nature report	
Author	Mark Baker, Projects Manager	
Date	25 October 2023	

- 1) Introduction. As reported in January 2023 the Quantock Hills, along with other AONBs, have pledged through the Colchester Declaration to set out how they will work towards the government’s targets for nature recovery. Part of this is the production of a Nature Recovery Plan, which will set out the current state of nature in the AONB, the opportunities for increasing nature richness and how this will deliver on the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan targets.
  
- 2) Progress. The original timescale for the production of the Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan had been to be at draft stage for this JAC meeting. Unfortunately due to other work commitments this has not been possible. However the first part of the Nature Recovery Plan, the State of Nature element, has been drafted and is attached (**attachment C**).
  
- 3) The State of Nature is compiled of national and local datasets, including trend data where available, which allow for assessment on threats and opportunities for the Nature Recovery Plan. It includes landscape, habitat and designated site data, some of which is nationally compiled and some is locally derived. While drafting the report it became apparent that centring on habitat-based data allowed more robust understanding of the state of nature. Species based data has not been included in the State of Nature element of the report but will be built into the main Nature Recovery Plan.
  
- 4) Timescale. While the drafting of the full report has been delayed, it has been prioritised with a full draft due to be presented to the JAC at the January 2024 meeting. This timeline will ensure it meets the timing requirements for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy being undertaken by Somerset Council and the review of the AONB Management Plan.

**Recommendation(s):**

- (1) The JAC approved the State of Nature element of the Nature Recovery Plan.**
- (2) The JAC note the revised timeline for the drafting of the Nature Recovery Plan.**

To	Quantock Hills JAC	<b>PAPER</b> <b>G</b>
Subject	Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Update	
Author	Bill Jenman, QLPS Manager	
Date	25 October 2023	



## 1) Team update

- a) Vickie Selleck has sadly left us for a new role with Exmoor NP. Her replacement, Alison Ricketts, starts on 16<sup>th</sup> October.
- b) Members may be aware that, following our mid project evaluation review, we agreed with NLHF to prioritise ensuring the legacy of our very successful engagement and inclusion work rather than try to “catch up” on projects where we were behind for one reason or another.
- c) The plan was to bump up Jon’s role by a grade and increase the amount of time he could spend on legacy development, while backfilling the delivery part of his role with a new part time post that would be shared between the QLPS and AONB (2 days/1 day pw). This would begin the process of “mainstreaming” our community work within the core AONB work as well as freeing up Jon from some of his existing commitments.

## 2) Delivery. The programme is grouped into three themes, “Inspire”, “Live”, and “Learn”

### a) Inspire

- i) The “A view to a Hill “project was completed this spring as planned.
- ii) The Poetry Trail has now launched – there are two poem clusters now available online with more to follow. For now, they are downloadable from Ralph Hoyte’s (the lead Poet’s) website at [The Quantock Poetry Trail – Ralph Hoyte](#) but will be on the QLPS website once they’ve had more real worked testing.
- iii) Throughout our summer events program, we have been connecting people in Bridgwater, Taunton, and beyond with nature through a range of activities such as pond dipping, nest building, fire lighting and crafts.
- iv) We have had many collaborative events, in partnership with local and regional organisations. From Photo Walks with England Coast Path, Plowright Organic, Coleridge Cottage, Wildfowl & Wetland Trust, Queer Hiking Bristol, and more in the pipeline with Geckoella and other organisations, we’re working with organisations who are aligned with our principles but may not have worked with the community groups we’ve reached before. Photo Walks have been a great way to engage non-traditional audiences with rural practices.

- v)** We have also engaged children of Polish heritage living in Somerset in an activity day at Great Wood. Up to 60 children engaged in a range of different nature, craft, and storytelling activities, as well as learning how to cook over English charcoal.
- vi)** Our first Wild Wednesday of the season, at Hamp/Stockmoor, had good attendance had been on a par with what we'd hoped. Thanks to social value funding secured by Sally Hill from LiveWest, other providers locally have been able to draw down essential funds to deliver projects in the area and support Wild Wednesdays. We worked with Somerset Art Works and Somerset Wildlife Trust, as well as WWT, in a programme of Wild Wednesdays across the summer. This gave these events a boost in terms of delivery and activities, with artists and experienced professionals able to provide activities during the summer. We also worked with similar organisations at Priorswood and Halcon.
- vii)** Our family-friendly events also took place on the hills, with our second Discovering Dragons event being very well attended and enjoyed by all, thanks to Dan's storytelling. Dan has also enjoyed several events in association with Friends of the Quantocks. Likewise, Jem's Dawn Chorus, Wildlife Watch, and Stogumber Apple Blossom Day, all boosted our event offer, partnerships, and embedding the QLPS in local parishes. The Quantock Walking festival was another success, with 59 miles covered on the Coleridge Way challenge walk, and many more events.
- viii)** A trip to the Bath & West Show with Youth Unlimited helped our foundations for this summer's camping trips with children from Sydenham and Stogursey. We had three camping weekends across the summer, all of which were with young people. From two weekends with youth clubs to one weekend with 2BU LGBTQ+ support group, it was a great way to embed our work in the heart of our younger participants. Feedback from each had been very strong, and it built on similar successes in previous years, with cohorts from similar areas (Stogursey and Sydenham youth clubs, as well as 2BU) helping to build on relationships year on year. People reported being more informed and having a greater understanding of the Quantocks as a result.
- ix)** We also took our first events management work experience student for a week, thanks to contacts from our Nigerian community members. Tofunmi Awopetu joined and helped to structure our summer programme, meeting various other partners in the process. The outcome was that Tofunmi would welcome a job in the environmental sector in the future.
- x)** Finally, our AfriQuan community work has developed (a grassroots informal organisation FOR African expatriates which has grown out of our engagement with the local West African nurses at Musgrove and their families). The AfriQuan gathering was another community-led initiative that brought together over 50 families, some 110 people, to celebrate culture and community and tackle some of the challenges and barriers that face Africans living in Somerset today. Many of the group are mental

health nurses who don't regularly see each other face-to-face as they work long hours across the county, however, a local focus group made up of residents from North Taunton and Bridgwater (who we met through our engagement work) developed the name AfriQuan, a name that showed thanks to the landscape that united them, and builds a platform for the group to come together. We have already seen new engagement from African families living locally as a result of this exchange – and thanks to the local press picking up the good news story. From families of Nigerian descent recently moved to the area from Bucks wanting to get involved, to long-standing residents of African descent offering their skillsets as opportunities for the group, it has grown an audience whose central premise is their relationship with the hills.

The community continues to grow at a grass roots level, organising activity days and trips. We enjoyed trips to the beach, and a chance to celebrate Nigerian Independence Day and show our support for this national holiday. We printed t-shirts emblazoned with AfriQuan logos for a community football match, and the group have shown interest in working with us to reach careers advice and gain funding to further these trips in the future. Somerset Diverse Communities are keen to support the group and have invited us to be part of Bridgwater Together under the AfriQuan banner.

**xi)** Sadly, our Bulgarian community group weren't successful in a bid to the Arts Council for funding to produce a Bulgarian folk dance inspired by the natural world. Though the process was helpful for all involved and funding has been achieved elsewhere to help the initiative continue. We will continue to support the group in the endeavour. Likewise, we have had a successful quarter working with refugee communities and integrating or work into the outreach of migrant and refugee families, with Wild Wednesdays and trips to Fyne Court being some of those engagement opportunities. We look forward to enhancing this engagement over time.

**xii)** At the end of the school holidays, we took a few families from Priorswood to Kilve Beach for a Wild Day Out rock pooling and exploring the foreshore which was well received. We also ran a Woodland Craft Day in September at Cothelstone Hill, also attended by some of our Priorswood cohort.

**xiii)** The Young Rangers programme has continued successfully, but it is the Apprentice scheme has continued to be a particular success. The Apprenticeship team has been invaluable in delivering work on our survey projects over summer. Many of the adder and hedgerow surveys have been conducted by the apprentices as well as most of the leg work for the footprint tunnel project and the static bat detector deployments. The team has also built a compost loo at Cothelstone Hill and assisted with the ongoing management of Broomfield Community Woodland.

The initial 1 year Level 2 course is coming to an end soon. One apprentice, Tom, has some employment lined up. Lewis will be staying on a Young Somerset until the end of March to help him find another supported role to continue to develop his confidence and personal skills. Ella will be staying on with us for another year to complete a Level 4 ranger course and she promises to be a real asset for the team.

**b) Live**

- i)** The replacement of estate fencing at Over Stowey recreation ground has been completed, funded from our third-party grant budget. We have also approved an application for support in funding the repair and restoration of a section of church-yard wall at East Quantoxhead. Whether this latter project will now proceed has been thrown into doubt, however, due to a dispute between the Estate and PCC over maintenance of the nearby carpark. The situation is ongoing. More positively, we have received a renewed enquiry from Broomfield PCC for assistance in funding the installation of estate fencing for the newly restored Old School building, now the Village Hall.
  
- ii)** Throughout April and May our Adder surveyors were out across the hills. A very rainy April followed by a very rapid increase of temperature meant there were very few ideal survey days. Despite this we had several adder sightings and almost 200 surveying hours. The full report will be shared in due course. As well as our volunteer surveyors, the two groups of Young Ranger's and two corporate volunteering groups, one from Hinkley Point and one from Redrow Housing, joined the survey effort.
  
- iii)** Dormouse Monitoring was concluded at Broomfield Common, unfortunately, we did not get enough evidence to confirm the presence of dormice, now we have altered the survey methodology, I plan to retry this project next summer.
  
- iv)** Our partnership with Stogumber Community Orchard has continued, QLPS will be supporting their annual Apple Day in October. We have also granted funds for the creation of a 40-tree orchard in Triscombe.
  
- v)** Work at Broomfield Community Woodland is ongoing. Several volunteer groups have helped us tackle the invasive laurel including a Gold Duke of Edinburgh award group brought to us by the Field Studies Council. Similarly, we have had several volunteer and community groups at Cothelstone Hill for coppicing, which will continue through October.
  
- vi)** Working with the AONB team, we saw a good numbers of volunteers on the bat transects, including several new volunteers. We also ran two Bat Walk and Talk events in Enmore Parish with local members of the public, which were very well attended. We are working closely with the Wilder Enmore team to assist in their wildlife surveying and enhancement projects. In August, we had two successful nights of bat trapping with Geckoella, unfortunately we lost one night to torrential rain and winds. This year

we were able to invite a small group of volunteers and staff to the trapping. This group included two volunteers who told us that QLPS and the QHAONB bat projects have helped them redirect their careers toward the field of ecology. To date we have deployed bat detectors at over 110 locations across the Quantocks from Heddon Oak to Kilve in the North down to Hestercombe in the South. This project is close to being finished and we are expecting results towards the end of the year.

**c) Learn**

- i)** Research of relevant historic archives for Broomfield, West Bagborough, Stowey, Holford, and Quantock Lodge estate are complete, and volunteers are in the process of writing these up. Research is continuing on surveys of Cothelstone Manor, Crowcombe and Fairfield Estates. This quarter, the cataloguing of another major collection, the Esdaile family archive, has been completed. Two smaller collections have also been catalogued: the Papers of Charles Rowcliffe, solicitor of Stogumber; and Deeds for Higher Vexford Farm, Stogumber and Hartrow Manor and Estate. All of these collections are now available to the public in the search room at the Somerset Heritage Centre and details can be viewed via the Somerset Archives' online catalogue. A group of our Digital Heritage Assistants are now beginning to map the results of the archive survey into a GIS layer within the Somerset Historic Environment Record. Our aim is to have this work complete for at least two parishes, along with the creation of an interim report before Christmas. Next quarter will be the last as part of the formal cataloguing element of Unlocking the Archives. However, volunteer engagement will continue in the form of both Land Tax transcription and ongoing research for the South West Heritage Trust's QLPS blog page.
- ii)** With focus for the summer being largely on practical archaeology, only one further oral history interview was undertaken this quarter – with Audrey Mead, age 102, formerly
- iii)** Our Community Excavation took place from 29 August to 9 September. Our target this year was a large circular cropmark at Broomfield, previously identified from aerial photography as a possible Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age henge site. The excavations were led by Context One Heritage & Archaeology, and over the course of the dig 35 individual volunteers took part. We were also joined by 19 members of Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists club, ages ranging from 8-16 years, and their associated parents and helpers, for whom we were able to provide transport to the site. While we await the results of post excavation work, two main interpretations of the site's original function seem most likely: either it is a henge, an essentially ritual/ceremonial structure of the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Ae; or it is a Late Bronze Age Ringwork settlement enclosure. A clearer understanding of this, and the date of the circle itself, will depend on the post-excavation results of pottery analysis, carbon-dating and processing of soil samples. However, the presence of hammer stones and a fragment of probable saddle quern, along with some of the pottery recovered from the ditch suggest would tend to suggest an earlier date. The site is clearly multi-

phased, with later extension and adaptation of the earlier site, evident from the presence of Iron Age pottery and evidence of metal working. There is debate as to whether there is evidence of permanent settlement within the main circle and, if so, which period of occupation this falls into. Hopefully, this will be clarified by the results of the post-excavation work.

A public open day was held on the final day of the dig, with displays and family activities held at Fyne Court and a shuttle bus running between there and the dig-site. An estimated 110 people visited across the course of the day. A full update will be given to the JAC at the January meeting.

**iv)** The interpretation of the LiDAR results is reaching a natural conclusion, with well over 1,500 potential archaeological features identified by our team of volunteers. A number of these features have already been added to the Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER), however the vast majority, remain to be processed. A small group of the more experienced volunteers will now be given the opportunity to work with the South West Heritage Trust to sift through the initial findings, removing any misidentified features and making the positive results available to the public via the HER.

### **3) Legacy Planning**

- a)** Four task and finish working groups have been created to look at various aspects of the QLPS legacy.
- b)** The wildlife group was most straightforward, as between the AONB and FotQ all the on-going work has found a future “home” with capacity to carry it forward.
- c)** FotQ is also likely to have a significant role in the continuation of educational engagement in the Quantocks. This sort of work with schools requires specialist skills and contacts which are unlike to ever be core AONB abilities, so SPAEDA is likely to remain a key delivery partner. Conversation so far has therefore focussed on what form that might take and what work might be fundable. A further meeting of this working group will take place shortly.
- d)** The Community Engagement working group has also started work, with discussions about potential Social Value funding, how best to build capacity within community groups themselves, and how best to integrate this work into the core AONB programme so it can continue after the LPS has finished.
- e)** Following the Broomfield Dig, we have now also begun the process of legacy planning for the Historic Heritage work. This is likely to be primarily under the SWHT umbrella rather than the AONB.
- f)** A core team of volunteers have expressed an interest in creating an ongoing Quantock community heritage group which can continue beyond the life of the QLPS. Work such



as fieldwalking, ground truthing of LiDAR, and oral history interviews are ongoing projects which would be relatively simple to continue. Test-pitting or small excavations would be more challenging but certainly not be impossible with suitable external support. Amongst the volunteers are two professional archaeologists who have also stated a desire to help advise and offer ongoing support to the proposed group. Various contractors and other groups we have worked with have also offered to advise in the creation of the group, notably Context One; Past Participate and the South Somerset Archaeological Research Group (SSARG). A first working group meeting will be held this autumn (date TBC at the time of writing.)

**Recommendation(s):**

- (1) The JAC notes the report.**