

Quantock Hills AONB

Annual Report 2017/18

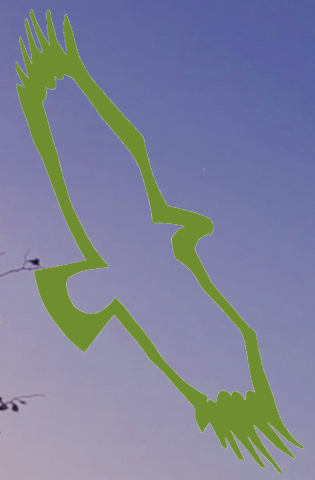


Image by Sally Pryde
Best Landscape Image AONB and DoF
Photography Competition 2018

Funded by :





Highlights

- Partnered FWAG-SW in the successful Countryside Stewardship application for the Quantock Hills Facilitation Fund.
- Submission of pilot land management scheme to Defra
- Completion of the LMSS funded Building Resilience Project which engaged 87 landowners / land managers in four workshops and produced 10 farm / forestry plans.
- Approximately 0.6 Hectares of Sycamore removed from the northwest end of Cothelstone Hill to allow light onto the ground
- 7 blocks of heathland swaled and 1 block cut and collected totalling over 13Ha
- Major improvements to water management on Lydeard Hill and Wills Neck using Hills to Levels funding.
- Challenging winter of snow, during which rangers and their 4x4 vehicles supported SCC Civil Contingencies to aid transporting people requiring dialysis to and from Taunton
- Annual wildlife surveys completed including deer, pied flycatcher, ticks and bats
- Recruitment, training and management support for our large team of volunteers who over the year have provided 4169 hours of their time
- Over 75 volunteers undertaking a wide range of tasks including on the ground patrols, heritage monument surveying, land management tasks, swaling, wildlife surveying and community engagement.
- Specialist training provided to 4 volunteers to enable conservation works on Scheduled Monuments funded by Historic England through a Capacity Building Grant
- 16 public events led by rangers and volunteers with 242 attendees
- 137 Planning applications monitored in and around the AONB and with detailed consultation and comments on 30 applications
- 2 work placement student (from Cannington College and Plymouth University) mentored by the team and providing over 1000 hours of work
- 7 projects approved for Greater Quantock Landscape Development Funding totalling grants of £19,600.
- 24 Fly tipping incident recorded and reported
- Ongoing monitoring of illegal vehicle use on the hills, 5 joint patrols with Police and PCSO's over the year at night and weekends
- Review of the Quantock Hills Management Plan underway
- Launch of the new volunteer led project website – Quantock Views – which will create an online archive of Quantock images – www.quantockviews.uk
- Launch of new and fresh AONB website – www.quantockhills.com
- Successful collaboration with Duke of Edinburgh Awards to run a Photo Competition for a 2nd year with over 150 entries received and an exhibition at Fyne Court over the Easter holidays

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NATURE AND WELLBEING PROJECT

The Somerset AONBs Nature and Wellbeing project, funded by Public Health and now in its final year, aims to tackle barriers that prevent particular groups experiencing the health and wellbeing benefits that the Blackdown, Mendip and Quantock Hills offer. Year two of the project continues to work with existing groups as well as introducing new groups and supporting their involvement and access to sites on the Quantock Hills. The requests to be involved in the project show it is going from strength to strength.



Eastover Primary School, Bridgwater

Two yr3 classes have spent the summer term since 2016 making weekly visits to Fyne Court. The visits have been supported by the National Trust and offer children the opportunity to connect with nature and experience free play and exploration within the quality natural environments of the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. At the beginning of the project 29% of children felt that they didn't get enough time to play outside in places with trees, plants, flowers and wildlife. Over half the children hadn't visited Fyne Court before. Some children have already returned to the Quantock Hills with their parents since the sessions took place. We continue to work with the school, the Nature and Wellbeing Officer has helped them prepare for the Spring/Summer Quantock Hills programme.

95% of pupils felt that they were able to play outside with nature more than they would on a normal school day and would like to visit Fyne Court again.



Rydon Ward

'It's lovely to be outside, away from the ward'

Staff from the Somerset Partnership Community Health Team, based at Rydon Ward, were keen to run a project for people accessing their services. A local private landowner was approached about offering her beautiful site for groups to use. Rydon are now linked in with the private landowner and they take regular weekly visits getting involved in some volunteering tasks with the support of the gardener. Feedback has been highly positive; the group really enjoy being there from tea and cake to time in the garden and the gardener feels that they are benefiting from the relaxed environment. One participant from the original group has been taken on as a member of staff and works there once a week to assist the gardener, helping his confidence.

AGRICULTURAL BUILDING WORKSHOP

In November 2017, the Quantock Hills AONB Service worked collaboratively with the Mendip Hills AONB Unit and the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership to hold a training event on Agricultural Buildings in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The event was very much geared at sharing knowledge and developing good working practices between AONB Officers and Local Authority planning staff.

The event was attended by over 30 officers from AONB Services across the country and by planning and landscape officers from the local planning authorities crossing one or more of the three AONBs (from Bath and North East Somerset to Mid Devon). Presentations and workshop sessions centred around:

- AONBs and their role in the planning process;
- Design of new agricultural buildings within AONBs;
- Agricultural Buildings and Permitted Development Rights (prior approval process); and
- Conversion of traditional and modern Agricultural Buildings within AONBs.

The event was acknowledged as a success, with very positive formal feedback received. The intention is to hold a training event annually with a planning and landscape related theme; focussing on best practice for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONB landscape through the planning process.



Kilve Village

 **Quantock Views Picture Archive**

Search Quantock Views Archive Here

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QUANTOCK VIEWS NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED

The Quantock Hills AONB Service launched a new website www.quantockviews.uk to capture and record the changing landscape and village life of the Quantock Hills. The Quantock Views website aims to capture historic pictures, postcards and photographs of the Quantock Hills and the surrounding villages, building an online resource showing the changing landscape of England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Quantock Hills AONB Service's volunteers, led by Keith Edwards have driven this project. Keith says 'Quantock Views started in order to pull together various existing collections of photographs, postcards and paintings which are rarely seen and to gather together private collections and recollections, which may be in danger of being lost to the Quantock community.' The images are being collected, scanned and uploaded by volunteers, and many have been contributed by individuals, within the community as well as other sources.

QUANTOCK HILLS LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME



The Stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund we submitted in 2017 was one of only 8 Landscape Partnership Schemes that were approved nationally. The £2.7m project is now in development ready to submit a full (stage 2) application in September 2019. Bill Jenman has joined the AONB team as the lottery-funded Landscape Partnership Scheme Development Officer.

The proposed Scheme included 26 project threads, divided into three themes;

Inspire - engage people in understanding the landscape, its cultural influence and work with communities to understand the pressures and opportunities into the future.

Live - undertake physical works to conserve and enhance the landscape and heritage assets of the Quantock Hills.

Learn - increase knowledge of the Quantock Hills and the role of the estates in the formation of its landscapes.

Over the next 15 months Bill's role is to work with the Scheme Partnership and local communities to develop the initial project proposals into a unified and socially inclusive package with detailed budgets, work programmes, etc.



HILLS TO LEVEL PROJECT

Through the Somerset Rivers Authority's Hills to Levels fund, administered by FWAG-SW the AONB service undertook a range of practical 'Slow the Flow' techniques. The aim is to reduce the speed of water run-off from the hill tops, store small areas of water and reduce the loss of sediment (soil and stones). Rangers, volunteers and contractors have been building woody dams and hurdles using silver birch, installing coir matting to encourage vegetation to re-establish itself and constructing and repairing stone grips to drain water into less steep areas. The natural water management techniques have been successful in trapping sediment and slowing water flow from the hill tops. Given these early successes the AONB Service and FWAG-SW are keen to extend to project to other hilltop areas.

GETTING STUCK INTO **Quantock Case Studies**

THE HILLS -

HOW ARE VOLUNTEERS HELPING THE AONB?

Our volunteers take part in a wide variety of volunteering opportunities, with many undertaking more than one volunteer role as well as volunteering with the AONB's partners. Volunteering roles with the AONB Service include - volunteer rangers, heritage monument monitoring, wildlife surveys such as dormice and bat , work experience placements and community engagement.

New for this year has been the introduction of the Community Engagement volunteer role to support the work of the Nature and Wellbeing Project. The AONB has a team of 12 volunteers who support with the running of sessions with various groups. They provide staffing assistance and help attendees feel better supported during their time with the AONB. An example of this work is the Working Well Group at Cothelstone Hill who work with the AONB Rangers to undertake practical tasks including dry stone walling and gorse clearance. Many of these volunteers have also been supporting project work in the Blackdown Hills AONB.

This year has seen several training sessions take place for our volunteer teams, helping to enhance their skills but also to enable us to receive feedback on what improvements they would like to see. This has included a training day with our Quantock Countryside Volunteers (a shared volunteer group with the National Trust) based on health and safety and updates on the work of the AONB and the National Trust. Our new and existing Heritage Monument Monitoring volunteers have also received training from Historic England on the survey techniques as well as an update on how their data is influencing the organisation's work.



Historic England



Financial Summary 2017 - 2018

Core Income

Defra	158,446
SCC	21,500
TDBC	10,000
SDC	11,500
WSC	1,000
Friends of Quantock	2,000
Cost Recovery	7,219
Mendip Hills AONB (recharge)	9,133
Blackdown Hills AONB (recharge)	4,563
Forestry Commission (recharge)	18,002
Events	2,158
SCC (Pension/apprentice recharge)	19,900
Total	265,420

Core Expenditure

Salaries & on-costs	200,473
Training	1,783
Accommodation	11,169
Stationary / post / phones	2,641
Travel & Vehicles	19,915
Equipment & Clothing	3,200
Literature & Publications	1,819
Meeting costs & Hospitality	1,355
Management fee insurances	8,948
Membership	3,125
R&D	1,524
Pension Deficit / Apprentice fee	19,845
Total	275,796

Project Budget Income

Historic England	396
Mendip Hills AONB	955
Blackdown Hills AONB	955
Misc	585
Total	2,891

Somerset County Council (HPC)	17,238
West Somerset Council (HPC)	1,000
Total	18,238

Landscape Partnership Scheme income	10,000
RPA (Amenity)	15,604
Receipts brought forward 2016/17	62,654

TOTAL INCOME 374,808

Project Budget Expenditure

Nature and Wellbeing	31,627
HE Capacity Building	783
Quantock Views	1,348
Access	1,063
Total	34,821

HPC Projects

Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund (HPC)	12,706
Land Management and Skills Scheme (HPC)	3,442
Total	16,148

Landscape Partnership Scheme	549
Amenity Land (SCC / SWHT)	6,503
Receipts brought forward	10,000

TOTAL EXPENDITURE 343,817

2018/19 expenditure commitments

Committed - Nature and Wellbeing Project	12,904
Committed - Landscape Partnership Scheme	9,451
Committed - Amenity Land	9,100
Committed - HECB Project	3,010
Earmarked Reserves - Redundancy	24,100

Carry forward to 2018/2019	75,791
SCC Viament	44,800
Surplus	17,226



Staff Changes

We have welcomed Bill Jenman to the AONB team, Bill has joined the team as the lottery-funded Landscape Partnership Scheme Development Officer. He'll be developing the full bid for the £2.7m 5 year project.



We've also welcomed Danielle Wrench into the team while Kristen Lambert, Nature and Wellbeing Officer, is on maternity leave. All the current groups and projects have continued; if you are interested in finding out more about the project or to get involved please don't hesitate to contact Danielle - dwrench@somerset.gov.uk

Looking forward into 2018 - 19

- Taking the Landscape Partnership Scheme to its 2nd stage (submitting in Sept 2019) and if successful commencement of the five-year project programme in January 2020
- Continuation and evolution of the Nature and wellbeing Project into a third year
- Further consultation and publication (March 2019) of the new AONB Management Plan 2019-24
- Working with the newly established Quantock farming cluster to protect AONB farmland in a time of great change