



QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams)

on

Tuesday 27th October 2020

at


2.15pm

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 at asampson@somerset.gov.uk

Guidance about procedures at the meeting is given on the last page.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item No.	
1.	Apologies for absence
2.	Declarations of interest An opportunity for members of the JAC to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any matter being considered at this meeting.
3.	Accuracy and matters arising from the previous minutes
4.	Public question time The Chairman will allow members of the public to ask questions or make statements about any matter on the agenda for this meeting or present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit.
5.	Paper A - Team and Partnership Update (Chris Edwards)
6.	Paper B - Business Plan mid-point review (Iain Porter)
7.	Paper C - Finance Highlight Report (Iain Porter)
8.	Paper D – Rangers Report (Andy Stevenson and Owen Jones)
9.	Paper E - QH Landscape Partnership Report (Bill Jenman)
10.	Paper F - Nature Recovery Plan Update (Iain Porter)
11.	Paper G - Planning White Paper Consultation (Chris Edwards)
12.	Paper H - Ash Dieback Report (Iain Porter)
13.	AOB Future JAC meetings (all start at 2.15pm locations TBC) Tuesday 26 th January 2021 Tuesday 20 th April 2021 Tuesday 20 th July 2021 Officer Working Group meetings (all start at 10.00am) Tuesday 12 th January 2021 Tuesday 30 th March 2021 Tuesday 6 th July 2021

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee held virtually via Microsoft Teams on **Tuesday 21st July 2020 at 2.15pm.**

Present:

Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew – Chair (ATB)	- Somerset West & Taunton Council
Mike Caswell – Vice Chair (MC)	- Somerset County Council
Chris Edwards (CE)	- Quantock Hills AONB Service
Iain Porter (IP)	- Quantock Hills AONB Service
Julian Taylor (JT)	- North Petherton Town Council
Dixie Darch (DD)	- Somerset West & Taunton
Nick Salter (NS)	- Forestry England
Philip Comer (PC)	- Friends of Quantock
Alan Bradford (AB)	- Sedgemoor District Council
Mandy Chilcott (MAC)	- Somerset County Council

Also Present:

Kristen Lambert (KL) AONB Nature & Wellbeing Officer, Alex Meletiou (AM) Quantock Hills AONB Planning Officer, David Stripp (DS) Kingston St Mary PC, Jo Chesworth (JC) Natural England, Alicia Aras (AA), Peter Payne (PP) Williton PC, Colin Falla (CF) Nether Stowey PC, Mike Copleston (MCO), Roger Craddock (RC).

Amanda Sampson (AS) - Quantock Hills AONB Comms Officer (note taker).

1. Annual Election of JAC Chairman and Vice Chairman

MC proposed Anthony Trollope-Bellew to remain as the Chairperson, this was seconded by JT and all in attendance agreed.

ATB proposed Mike Caswell to remain as the Vice Chairperson, this was seconded by JT and all in attendance agreed.

2. Apologies

Hugh Davies (SCC), Jo Pearson (Cheddon Fitzpaine PC), Nigel Garnsworthy (NT), Alan Hughes (FOQ), Martin Jones (West Bagborough PC).

3. Declarations of Interest

ATB declared himself to be a member of Quantock Eco, Friends of Quantock, Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group, Quantock Stag Hounds and a Quantock Landowner. No other declarations were given.

4. Accuracy of the previous minutes (21st January 2020)

The minutes from January were signed off as a true representation of the meeting with the addition of Paul Trolley from Broomfield PC as in attendance. The scheduled meeting for April 2020 was cancelled due to the Coronavirus Lockdown.

Matters Arising

(6.2) CE new Parish Council Representation confirmation from SALC has gone very quiet with everything going on, but once lockdown has come to an end will follow this up.

(7.2) CE fly tipping did increase during the height of the Coronavirus lockdown, although this seems to have tailed off now with people getting back to visiting the hills. We have had good communications with the local PCSO's about this and the Rangers are working closely with them.

5. Public Question Time

No questions

6. Paper A - Quantock Hills Team and Partnership Update (Chris Edwards)

6.1 Team

CE gave an overview of Paper A including an update on the QH AONB staff working remotely from home and the Rangers were still being able to continue with their necessary patrols, pony checks on Cothelstone Hill and raising awareness of the situation by putting up signage with information for visitors. Risk Assessments have been carried out for all ongoing activity within the team and volunteers. CE went on secondment for the PPE distribution at the start of the lockdown for a week. AS has been producing Lockdown newsletters to try and keep in touch with the public and some of our more vulnerable groups. CE commented how proud he was of the team for adapting to the very strange situation so well.

6.2 Partnership

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme is still moving forward where possible at the moment, with the new team being recruited soon. Bill Jenman will give a more detailed update on the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme at the next JAC meeting.

The Nature & Wellbeing Project is coming to an end at the end of August 2020, with the new follow on project Somerset Nature Connections which is being run in partnership with Somerset's 3 AONB's and the Somerset Wildlife Trust starting in September 2020. The Quantock Hills and the other 2 AONB's have Committed to £6,000 pa towards the new project.

The ELMS Test & Trials has had to alter a bit as getting out to meet with farmers and landowners has not been able to take place due to the Covid 19 lockdown and restrictions.

MAC thanked the Quantock Hills team for opening up the hills so well for everyone to be able to get back and enjoy them as safely as possible especially for mental health and wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC supports the Covid 19 actions that have been taken and described in this report – Supported.**
- 2) The JAC endorses the £6,000pa partner contribution to the Somerset Nature Connections Project – Endorsed.**
- 3) The JAC notes the report – Noted.**

7. Paper B - Nature & Wellbeing Project Update and Final Report (Kristen Lambert)

KL gave an update on the Nature & Wellbeing Project, which will be the final report with us as the project finishes at the end of August 2020. KL has been working on the project for the past 4 years and is very grateful for the opportunity. The project was initially funded for 3 years, but we were able to get additional funding in, to extend the project into its 4th year. Although the project comes to an end, some of the groups created under the project will continue under their own steam and through the new Somerset Nature Connections project.

The Nature & Wellbeing Report gives an overview of the whole project including some of the barriers recognised with people accessing the hills, the referral process and the long term focus. The project has had an overwhelming positive response from people who have been able to access this work.

KL has put in place a live map on the Somerset Wildlife Trust website showing the Nature & Wellbeing network across Somerset with contact points. She has also brought together over 100 people as the Somerset Nature and Wellbeing Network and this will continue into the Somerset Nature Connections Project which will be starting in September 2020.

KL thanked the Quantock Hills team for all of their engagement and support throughout her work on the Nature & Wellbeing Project and also thanked JAC members for the continued support.

ATB thanked Kristen for her hard work on the project which has been a great breakthrough. MAC commented on the professional report that Kristen has produced. CE encouraged everyone to read the Nature & Wellbeing Report and thanked Kristen for an excellent and heartfelt report and for her hard work on the project. MC thanked Kristen for her very clear report and all of her hard work on the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1) The JAC notes the report – Noted.

8. Paper C - Nature Recovery Plan Scoping Presentation (Iain Porter)

IP introduced the scoping paper on the proposed approach for a Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan. Through the Colchester Declaration the AONB's signed up to a number of pledges. The first pledge is that each AONB creates a Nature Recovery Plan by 2021.

JT Appendix 3, there are a number of native tree species on the hills, what will happen with those and is there any intention to cooperate with other organisations Natural England and reintroduce some of our lost indigenous species. IP Appendix 3, we would see this as core work where possible, species are tricky, but priority is ensuring the habitat types are resilient, and this includes removal of invasive species. Reintroduction isn't a high priority at present but certainly not against this and would like to see the reintroduction of many things including the red squirrel. ATB Grey squirrel number would need to be reduced before the red squirrel could be reintroduced.

DD Section 41 species, Adders don't seem to be included, is this for any reason. IP Section 41 species are species of national concern and thought of being vulnerable nationally. The list within the scoping paper is from Natural England and contains

species that are of principal importance for the Quantock Hills not s41 species that are present in the Quantock Hills.

JT confirmed that Adders are on the section 41 species list.

JT asked for recommendations to be sent to all member councils including district councils, local councils and town and parish councils. CE all councils receive copies of the papers before the meetings, so the recommendations are in those.

IP will be asking for recommendations for species to be taken forward in winter 2020/21.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC agrees the ownership of the Nature Recovery Plan remains with AONB Partnership.**
- 2) The JAC agrees the plan is developed in collaboration**
- 3) The JAC approved the recommended approach to deliver the Nature Recovery Plan**
- 4) The JAC accepts the recommended budget of £3,000 from reserves.**

9. Paper D - Planning Report (Alex Meletiou)

AM asked for any questions about the report but there were no questions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC notes the report – Noted.**

10. Paper E - Finance Report (Iain Porter)

IP gave a brief update on the finance report. The rent for the Quantock Hills Office is paid in advance so the fact that only 1 member of staff has been using the office during the Covid lockdown couldn't be taken into consideration as this happened after the payment. Nature & Wellbeing coming to an end, an extra £800 was required from all partner agencies to cover the slight extension to the end of August.

MAC were some staff furloughed as was expecting to see a slight reduction in the salaries due to Covid. IP some staff were due to be furloughed but this wasn't required in the end.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC notes the report – Noted.**

11. Paper F - Business Plan 2020-21 response to Covid19 (Iain Porter)

There have been a lot of changes due to Covid, the main items to note are that some land management works had to be postponed. Engagement work had to be postponed but now some volunteer work has restarted with restrictions in place. Hoping over the next few months to start taking these forward again.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC notes the report – Noted.**

12. AOB

ATB some gateposts have appeared at Triscombe Stone and the locals are wondering what's happening and asked MAC if she could provide some answers to this. MAC requested ATB to send an email to which she would follow up.

MAC the county council have put 1 million pounds aside for climate emergency initiative in Somerset, working with town and parish councils in the area. Hoping for this to open in October.

MC will talk to the local parish council reference Triscombe Stone.

DS reference access travel routes to the Quantocks, has there been any liaison. Kingston Parish Council have been doing a lot of work for an active route through Kingston to the Quantocks. CE hasn't heard any more since the Management Plan was produced all has gone very quiet and hasn't heard any more about the application that went in. Finding the right balance with this is very important.

MCO Alfoxton Park has now been sold and is being turned into a Buddhist Retreat, they aim to restore the walled garden and maintain the history of it and are very keen to be a part of the local community.

Meeting closed at 4.00pm.

Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 27th October 2020 at 2.15pm, virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams.



Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee

27th October 2020

AONB Team and Partnership Report.

On-line meeting under Covid 19 restrictions

Team

We are of course still working from home with weekly Teams team meetings and occasional visits to the office for essentials. Team members remain fit and well at the moment, despite the occasional self-isolation while family members are tested.

Quantock Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme

Bill has been on a recruitment drive since the last OWG, with the support of the team and others he has managed to recruit the whole Landscape Partnership Team: Vickie Sellick (Support Officer) started a month ago, Simon Phelps (Natural Heritage Officer) and Jon Barrett (Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer) are starting in late October and Dan Broadbent (Historic Heritage Officer) is starting a week or so into November. This year's Landscape Partnership budget is being reduced with the agreement of Heritage Lottery to account for the restrictions on activity this year, leaving that funding available to access later in the project (when there will be an element of catch-up). Bill has provided an update report for this meeting.

Somerset Nature Connections

Kristen Lambert has now left our employment and our highly effective Somerset AONBs Nature and Wellbeing project has come to an end. The great news is that on the 7th September, a week after finishing with us, Kristen started her new role as Project Manager of the new bigger, better version, Somerset Nature Connections (SNC). This is the project we have been preparing and finding funding for with the Somerset Wildlife Trust over the last year, and Kristen successfully applied for the Project Manager post. She is cracking on with both continued aspects of the previous project and the new elements introduced in SNC. Somerset Wildlife Trust are the host partner so Kristen is now employed by them with us as equal project partners as are Blackdown and Mendip AONBs. We had the first Project Board meeting a couple of weeks ago and have agreed that recruitment of the three part time Project Delivery Officers to be based in the AONBs should go ahead. While Covid 19 restrictions do impact delivery on the ground there is significant recruitment and training to be achieved first and with the unknown aspect of how long restrictions will last it is necessary to take the project forward delivering what can be delivered at this stage.

Partnership

Proposed Mobile Coffee Outlet

Andy has been in communication with Tony McCallum who initially enquired by email:

"I'm setting up a mobile coffee van business and will be looking to sell coffee in car parks across Taunton Deane & West Somerset to walkers, cyclists, etc. Do I need a licence to trade in any car parks on the Quantocks, if so, what are the costs and what are the restrictions"

Andy has subsequently continued the discussion, including contacting relevant landowners to ask their position. The initial responses Andy has received have been largely negative with a couple of more neutral positions expressed.

Tony has asked to speak to the JAC and will, with the chairman's permission, speak briefly in a moment about his proposed business and take questions from the JAC. The decisions ultimately are for the individual landowners involved however an overview from the JAC would be valuable. Obvious areas for consideration in respect of the JAC remit include:

- Landscape impact – parking areas are in themselves unattractive elements of this protected landscape, would adding a commercial outlet and any on-site promotional materials change this impact?
- Litter – would there be a significant litter impact if this went ahead?
- Public provision – would this activity provide a valued service to the visiting public and/or host communities?
- Are there planning control requirements?
- Impact on existing outlets?
- Would this set a precedent and potentially lead to more or higher impact commercial activity?

Statement of Intent

I attach as an appendix the redrafted core funding partners Statement of Intent as agreed by the JAC in January. The Officers Working Group is happy with it, so this is for adoption by the JAC – as always, we recognise that this is subject to the individual bodies' agreement.

The previous Statement of Intent (SoI) was in place from April 2015 until March 2019. In April 2019 all core partners agreed a one-year extension on the same terms due to the creation of a new local authority – Somerset West & Taunton – on 1st April 2019. A new SoI was presented to the core partners at the Officer Working Group of 7th January and at the Joint Advisory Committee meeting of 21st of Jan 2020. The JAC agreed the amendments that have created the SoI in Appendix 1.

Summary of amendments:

- 1) Change of number and name of local authority partners
- 2) Reduction of local authority representatives required for a JAC meeting to be quorate to take account of reduction in local authorities.
- 3) Inclusion of Friends of Quantock as core funding partner.
- 4) Addition of a 2% inflationary increase in partner contributions (excluding Defra)
- 5) Clarity over role and amount of Earmarked Reserves to be held in the event of AONB team redundancy

Parish Council JAC Representatives

Justin Robinson, the CEO of Somerset Association of Local Councils, has completed the nominations process for Parish Representatives to join the JAC. There were 4 nominations for the 4 available slots at the JAC, so an election was not triggered. Subsequently the Holford Parish Council nominee resigned from the Council and as there were only as many nominations as available slots with the support of the JAC Chairman I invited Holford PC to nominate an alternative councillor as their rep. The Quantock Parish Representatives nominated are:

- Stephen Campbell, Holford Parish Council
- Julian Taylor, North Petherton Town Council
- Dr Martin Jones, West Bagborough Parish Council
- Mark Philipson, West Quantoxhead Parish Council

It is good to note that these councils represent an ideal spread around the AONB and I'm grateful for their engagement.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Last month Natural England put a call out for pilot projects for the Biodiversity Net Gain Credit Scheme. There was a short application window and the application guidance was vague to allow a wide range of potential projects. The Quantock Hills AONB submitted an application based on grassland restoration and enhancement with the majority of the project engaging landowners / farmers to understand the interest in the BNG credit scheme. Unfortunately, the application has been unsuccessful with only five projects going forward.

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

The Quantock Hills AONB Service have joined with other south-west AONBs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to submit an application under the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The funding is an emergency funding stream from Defra and is being administered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Application is for 'shovel ready' capital projects which support job retention or creation in the environmental sector and is primarily aimed at NGOs, though AONBs and National Parks were encouraged to apply. Projects have to be ready to go and need to be complete by March 2022. The

short application window and short delivery period restricted projects that could be put forward, however the Quantock Hills AONB put forward three small projects and is assisting with another. Two of these projects are working with the South West Heritage Trust and the other two are being led by us, we should be informed of the outcome towards the end of October.

Recommendations

- 1 The JAC considers the Mobile Coffee Outlet proposal.**
- 2 The JAC adopts the Statement of Intent as shown in Appendix 1.**
- 3 The JAC accepts and welcomes the Parish Council representatives nominated.**
- 4 The JAC notes the report.**

Chris Edwards, October 2020



Appendix 1

Quantock Hills AONB Partnership Statement of Intent.

Start date: 1st April 2020.

End date: 31st March 2025.

As local authorities covering parts of the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty we; Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council, The Forestry Commission and Friends of Quantock are committed to the purpose and functions of the AONB Partnership as set out in Schedule 1 – Quantock Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee Terms of Reference.

To deliver duties and obligations arising from Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 including the operation and management of an AONB Partnership ("the Partnership"), a Staff Unit (as defined in Schedule 2) to act on behalf of the Partnership in the publishing, monitoring and review of the Management Plan. We commit together with the other partners to provide to the best of our abilities the following contributions (contributions are indicative and may not be confirmed until the preceding January of the financial year) which includes 2% annual increase for inflation:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>2020/21</u>	<u>2021/22</u>	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>2023/24</u>
Somerset County Council	£20,400	£20,808	£21,224	£21,649
Sedgemoor District Council	£12,000	£12,240	£12,485	£12,734
Somerset West & Taunton Council	£12,000	£12,240	£12,485	£12,734
Forestry England (Forestry Commission)	£20,754	£21,788	£22,376	
Friends of Quantock	£ 1,000	£ 1,000	£1,000	£ 1,000
Defra	£166,239	*	*	*

**Note: Defra's contribution for period 2021 – 2024 to be announced in winter 2020*

Contributions will be paid to the Host Authority by June 30th in each year. The host authority is Somerset County Council and thereby responsible for administration of the Partnership's finances and employment of AONB staff.

In case of redundancy

Whilst it is envisaged that Defra, Local Authorities and other partner contributions will be sufficient to maintain the AONB staff unit and core functions, in the event of a redundancy situation the following will apply :

- Any redundancy payments legally due to AONB Core Staff under Part XI of the Employment Rights Act 1996 or other relevant legislation on termination of employment will be part covered by an existing specific/ring fenced Partnership budget (Earmarked Reserves) that has been allocated to cover 50% of such costs. If this is insufficient the deficit will be met through in-year partnership budget.
- This budget will be maintained at a level to cover 50% of AONB Unit costs, excluding 50% redundancy cost of the Partnership Ranger (detailed in the Forestry Commission / Quantock Hills AONB Memorandum of Understanding 2020 – 2023), to cover compulsory redundancy costs of the current team. This figure will be reviewed annually, and the budget amended accordingly, using additional funds if required, from partner (excluding Forestry Commission) contributions.
- Any redundancy payments legally due to the Partnership Ranger postholder under Part XI of the Employment Rights Act 1996 or other relevant legislation on


termination of employment will be met as outlined in the Forestry Commission / Quantock Hills AONB Memorandum of Understanding.


Reduction in contributions


Any intention to reduce funding, from the contributions indicated on page 1, should be given to the AONB and host authority no less than 6 months before the end of the financial year (31st March).

Signed:	 SOMERSET County Council
Name (print):	

Signed:	 Sedgemoor District Council
Name (print):	

Signed:	 Somerset West and Taunton
Name (print):	

Signed:	
Name (print):	

Signed:	
Name (print):	

Schedule 1:

QUANTOCK HILLS JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The JAC shall:-

- (a) act as a forum for the discussion and investigation of issues affecting the Quantock Hills AONB and to promote action by the constituent Local Authorities and relevant bodies to further the interests and purposes of the AONB and to recommend action to its constituent organisations;
- (b) co-ordinate the decisions of the local authorities in the exercise of their powers in the AONB, through the implementation of approved and existing Local Plan policies;
- (c) oversee the implementation of the AONB Management Strategy and associated Service and Action Plans;
- (d) guide the operation of the Quantock Hills AONB Service (day to day management of the Service to be undertaken by Somerset County Council);
- (e) make observations on development control matters referred to the Committee for its views by the relevant Local Planning Authorities.

Schedule 2:
STAFF UNIT CORE FUNCTIONS

1. MANAGEMENT PLAN

- 1.1 Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the AONB vision and the Management Plan
- 1.2 Promoting the AONB vision and Management Plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside
- 1.3 Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan
- 1.4 Accessing resources for management activities
- 1.5 Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB
- 1.6 Providing a management role to co-ordinate AONB protection through the actions of the AONB unit, the AONB Partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level
- 1.7 Problem solving with the unit acting as co-ordinator and facilitators

2. ADVISORY / ADVOCACY

- 2.1 Advising Local Authorities and other partners on their activities within AONBs, to encourage them to attain the highest possible standards in AONBs
- 2.2 Working with and contributing to the NAAONB activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally.
- 2.3 Providing landscape related planning advice (to local planning authorities and in conjunction with Natural England as appropriate in line with, and underpinned by protocols)
- 2.4 Financial support for NAAONB
- 2.5 Contribution and support to activity between AONBs and protected landscapes to strengthen the status of the AONBs individually and collectively.

3. MONITORING

- 3.1 To monitor and report on progress against Management Plans and Annual Business Plans to the Partnership.
- 3.2 To provide monitoring and reporting information to Defra in accordance with any guidance issued by Defra.

END

Quantock Hills AONB Service



2020 / 21 Business Plan – Mid Point Review

Supported by:







Author	Iain Porter	Date	15/09/2020
Check	Chris Edwards	Status	Draft
Version History			
1.1	Updated figures from rangers for action 26, updated BRAG figures		

2020/21 Business Plan – Mid Point Review

1. Purpose:

- a. The report sets out the progress against the Quantock Hills AONB Service Business Plan 2020-21 objectives and 78 actions. It includes a requirement to report back to Defra, as detailed in their settlement letter dated 26th February 2020, on specific activities in relation to:
 - i. Nature Recovery
 - ii. Net zero carbon through nature-based solutions
 - iii. Support the needs of communities in modern Britain
- b. The report also identifies the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on delivery during the period April – September as well as potential impacts for the rest of the financial year. Of the 78 action points in the business plan 29 have had to be postponed until further notice or have been significantly impact. A further 13 have required adaptation to allow the action to continue.

2. Summary

			
Complete on schedule and/or budget	On target for completion to budget and / or timescale	Some variance which may mean action is not complete to timescale, budget and / or specification	Action unable to deliver to time and / or budget or at significantly reduced output
4	30	38	5

3. Covid-19 Pandemic Impacts:

- a. Impact on engagement workstream. From late March all face to face engagement activity was stopped. This included events and activities such as guided walks for the AONB own events as well as those due to be delivered on behalf of other organisations e.g. Forest bathing sessions for the Plantlife Building Resilience project. Initially volunteering activity was also stopped and only started again in a very limited capacity in July. Since July volunteering has been restricted to those activities that can be undertaken in very small groups and adhere to social distancing. This is still the case in September and is expected to continue for the rest of the 2020/21 year. This has meant lowering the outputs in terms of people engaged in volunteering activity as well as the hours of volunteering undertaken. Group engagement also stopped in March and has only started up again in September. Number of participants on the group activity have been lowered and activities / tasks adapted to ensure social distancing and hygiene requirements can be met. As with volunteering group engagement outputs have been revised down. AONB led walks have not restarted and at present there are no plans to start them up as groups are seen as a higher priority. From early on in the pandemic the AONB Service realised the importance of contact and engagement with some groups and individuals, especially those suffering with poor mental health or at risk of isolation through loneliness. A fortnightly e-newsletter was developed and supplemented with video messages and increased SM

feeds. Feedback from individuals has been incredibly positive about the increase virtual engagement and the AONB Service is looking at adjusting the business plan to allow for this increased virtual engagement to continue.

- b. Impact on land management workstream. The Covid-19 restrictions came into force at the end of the winter work programme. Unfortunately, this followed a period of bad weather where access to site was not possible. In terms of direct impact, the swaling programme was not able to be delivered by the AONB Service and a few Landscape Development Fund projects did not go ahead. The summer work programme has been less affected with contractors able to undertake essential land management and some projects able to continue. There has been a delay in setting up new contracts for the autumn work programme as site visits were harder to undertake. Land management works that would usually be undertaken with volunteer groups have not been able to go ahead to the same scale as in normal years. In the short term this will not have a large impact but if the restrictions on group sizes continues the AONB Service will have to reassess what work is undertaken by volunteers and what is put out to contract.
- c. Impact on project development workstream. There are two main projects being hosted or significantly engaged with by the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership in 2020/21. The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme is a NLHF funded partnership project hosted by the AONB Partnership. It successfully secured funding in December 2019 and the project start up phase began in January 2020 with the project start date set for 1st April 2020. Recruitment for the Project Manager occurred in March 2020 and when Covid-19 restrictions began in late March the decision was taken to continue the project start up rather than put the project on hold. There were a number of reasons for this including the financial implications of putting the project on hold and that some activity could continue in the background ready for when restrictions lifted. Six months on the project has only just started recruiting the project team and is looking at how engagement and project delivery can continue in light of the current Covid-19 guidelines. As the project is at the beginning of its 5-year delivery phase there is opportunity to move workstreams and to 'catch-up' on the time lost during the recent pandemic. The other project to be affected is the Somerset Nature Connections Project. This is a partnership project between the three main Somerset AONBs (Blackdown Hills, Mendip Hills and Quantock Hills) and Somerset Wildlife Trust. The project was due to start in July 2020 with funding secured in April 2020 from the NLCF, HPC CF and SCC. However due to Covid-19 restrictions recruitment and project start up was delayed until August 2020 with the new project manager start post in early September. Like the engagement work of the AONB and Landscape Partnership Scheme the project has had to adapt its engagement work to adhere to Covid-19 guidelines. A further impact of the delayed start to the SNC project was the decision to extend the AONBs Nature & Wellbeing Project by two months to ensure a seamless integration from one project to the next, which was important for the groups and individuals accessing these projects.
- d. Budgets. The Covid-19 pandemic has had direct and in-direct impact on the AONBs budgets. There is loss of income from contract delivery. During this period there are two contracts, swaling and Landscape Schemes associated with HPC. The income this year from recharges for staff time on these two contracts is already £8,000 down on previous years. There may be scope to increase time allocated to the Landscape Schemes, but this would be at the expense of other workstreams, which are already being squeezed in terms of time resource. Unfortunately, the AONB Service was unable to reduce its expenditure significantly as the areas of greatest expense - staff costs, accommodation and transport – still required paying.

There was some reduction in expenditure, such as mileage expenses but this was not significant. Increased expenditure due to the Covid-19 pandemic has been relatively small with £234 being paid for additional PPE and hygiene supplies e.g. hand sanitiser. The AONB Service is still expecting full expenditure on its project budgets and with the majority of projects being externally funded.

- e. Staff Resource. In March the AONBs host authority Somerset County Council moved from Business as Usual to Business Continuity. Initial impacts on the AONB unit were very minor and loss of work time through the pandemic has been relatively low with the majority of AONB staff able to work from home. Approximately 7 days of staff time was lost though staff members being redeployed to assist the host local authority undertake activities such as PPE distribution and IT support. This had been agreed with all funding partners prior to staff being released for redeployment.

4. Highlights (Defra priorities)

- a. Nature Recovery. The Quantock Hills AONB Service delivers nature recovery through four main mechanisms, direct delivery of habitat improvement works, provision of grants to allow other landowners to undertake habitat improvement works, research and monitoring ensuring land management decisions are well informed and will have the best outcome for species and strategic leadership... Table 1 below details the work undertaken in the period April – September 2020 which supports nature recovery

Table 1: Nature recovery actions (April – September 2020)

Action	AONB Role	Outputs
Grassland management for species rich grassland	Direct delivery with AONB staff & contractors	37Ha of species rich grassland enhanced.
Fencing of acidic mire on Quantock Common	Project support and contractor lead	1 acidic mire protected from poaching
Provision of 1 grant for tree and hedge planting	Grant provider (Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund)	109 native standard trees planted and 170m of hedgerow planted
Provision of 1 grant for wildflower and species rich grassland planting	Grant provider (Greater Quantock Landscape Development Fund)	17Ha of wildflower and species rich grassland planted
Bat monitoring of 6 transects across a range of habitats	Lead organisation, with staff and volunteers undertaking the surveys and analysis	6 transect surveys completed with results fed back to landowners, SERC and Bat Conservation Trust
Butterfly monitoring of 2 transects across grassland / woodland sites	Lead organisation supporting volunteers to undertake the surveys.	2 transects with surveys ongoing throughout September. Results fed back to landowners and Butterfly Conservation

Dormouse monitoring at one woodland	Lead organisation supporting volunteers to undertake the surveys	1 dormouse monitoring scheme undertaken. Results fed back to landowner and PTES
Nightjar monitoring across Quantock Common	Lead organisation, with staff and volunteers undertaking survey and analysis	10 km2 grid squares surveyed with results fed back to landowners and SERC and SoS
Produce a Nature Recovery Plan for the Quantock Hills	Lead organisation for Quantock NRP though working in partnership with other local protected landscapes to ensure sharing of best practice.	Scoping report agreed by partnership. Contracts being worked up for elements which can be shared across protected landscapes. Initial work on data available undertaken with species work also undertaken for wider consultation.
Delivery of a ELMS test & trail project undertaking output 1 (spatial framework development), 2 (co-designed land management plans) and 3 (indicators of success).	Lead organisation with support from Quantock Facilitation Group and linking with the 12 other AONB schemes being undertaking through the 'Farming for the Nation' project.	Spatial framework near completion with data gathering complete, first round consultation with land managers undertaken and feedback informing the Land Management Plan initial concept development.
Development of Nature Recovery funding bid to undertake priority habitat enhancement or creation and woodland resilience.	Lead organisation for local project elements though the scheme also includes a number of partnership project with other protected landscapes.	Draft scheme plan created and out for consultation with relevant stakeholders.

- b.** Net zero carbon through nature-based solutions. The AONB Service is delivering against this objective by direct delivery and strategic engagement (table 2).

Table 2: Net zero carbon through nature-based solutions actions (April – September 2020).

Action	AONB Role	Outputs
Nature flood management project – various locations	Lead in delivery of Quantock schemes with funding provided by Somerset Rivers Authority and Triple C (ERDF funded).	3 schemes completed to reduce erosion of soils and reduce flooding.
Fencing a acidic mire on Quantock Common to stop poaching	Project support and contractor lead	Protection of acidic mire. The acidic mires are one of the few areas on Quantock Common with deep peats. Due to the underlying geology much of Quantock Common has very shallow soils (peat). By protecting these existing areas from poaching the peat will rewet increasing carbon capture.
Pursue funding for a tree planting project that will allow underplanting in ash dominated woodlands	Secure funding or signpost to other funding where appropriate e.g. CS Tree health grant. Manage contracts to undertake roles where required	AIM – 40Ha of ash dominated woodland made more resilient through underplanting.

- c. Support the needs of communities in modern Britain. This is a wide-ranging objective and open to interpretation. However, we have taken this to mean the direct value of the AONB through engagement in nature. This is an area where Covid-19 has had the biggest impact. Much of the work including general volunteering, working with groups with mental health issues, engagement with young people has been postponed or cancelled. In July the AONB Service was one of the first team in Somerset County Council to open up limited volunteering opportunities as we realised the value of volunteering to peoples mental wellbeing. Later in September we started limited group work prioritising those groups with poor mental wellbeing and young people, starting the Working Well group, Green Day visits and engagement with school groups. This is still limited in terms of numbers and will be continually reviewed to ensure it is safe in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic. While actual visits the Quantock Hills were not possible the AONB increased it communication with groups through a e-newsletter, which was produced on a fortnightly basis. Feedback has been incredibly positive.









5. Delivery Mechanisms

- a. The AONB Service core team has remained at the 2019/20 level and will be responsible for delivery of the Business Plan (Table 1). There are several project posts which will deliver Business Plan actions which are also highlighted. These are time bound posts on fixed-term contracts.
- b. Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS). The QLPS is a £2.6m scheme with 23 projects to be delivered over five years from 01/04/2020 – 31/03/2025. The scheme has received a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) of £1.9m with other match funding from National Trust, EDF, the AONB Service and Friends of Quantock. The scheme is fully staffed and will be delivering on AONB Management Plan objectives where they align with the Landscape Character Action Plan (LCAP), though the project area is twice that of the AONB and much of the deliver will be in the area outside the AONB. Link - <https://www.quantockhills.com/reimagining-the-manor-scheme>
- c. Several project-based bids have been developed and other are still being developed. These are identified in the table below.

6. Unit Work Plan 2020/21.

- a. The Unit Work Plan below lists the actions and milestones to be undertaken by the partnership in delivery of the Quantock Hills AONB Management Plan. It also provides the progress to date for that action. Where actions have been started that were not in the original Business Plan they are identified by the word 'NEW'.
- b. The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme is hosted by the Quantock Hills AONB service. It will be delivering 23 projects under the Quantock Landscape Character Action Plan (LCAP) and reports to an independent board. Many of the projects meet AONB Management Plan objectives and Defra themes. Table 4 summaries the annual work programme for the QLPS.

Table 3 Quantock Hills AONB Service 2020/21 Unit Work Plan Progress.











Action	Milestone / Target	Progress	RAGB
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER & QUALITY			
1) Request evidence from LPA's how they have demonstrated due regard.	Information included in JAC reports	No progress as April partnership meeting cancelled due to Covid-19 and July meeting held virtually. LA's have been operation on Business Continuity basis so unable to provide additional reporting during this time.	
2) Deliver ELMS Test & Trial Project	Test and trail complete by 31/03/2021	2 contracts (Facilitator & GIS and Data) released. Still looking to complete by March 2021 with some project milestones put back due to Covid-19. The face to face elements of the project have been amended with more emphasis on individual meetings between facilitators and farmers and no group working. Further contract on Indicators for Success being let to link with timescales of the project. Project is due to deliver on time and to original budget though some items of expenditure have been moved such as venue hire being reduced and facilitator time increased.	
3) Assess requirement to renew arrange for pre-application advice to local planning authorities.	Decision reached 31/10/2020	No progress. Due to Covid-19 engagement with local authorities has not occurred and this action has been postponed until 2021.	
4) Contact relevant landowners and develop a scheme of work as basis of LEI bid	Bid submitted	Initial contact made with some relevant landowners. Due to Covid-19 unable to meet with some landowners but still working up scheme of works based on local knowledge and use of remote data.	
5) Input into events under Quantock Facilitation Fund.	8 events undertaken	POSTPONE - Facilitation fund not undertaking events during CV. NE have not responded on impact yet but it is likely that overall number of events required will be reduced inline with time lost.	
6) Complete fixed-point photography for 2020	Take photographs from 12 sites during 2020	POSTPONE - Can occur later in year if restrictions allow. Some FPP undertaken in 2019 and early 2020 so few sites left for completion.	
7) Promote events by other organisations where they promote the special qualities of the Quantock Hills	All relevant events, where notified, promoted via AONB website and SM feeds	AONB led events cancelled during period March – July due to Covid-19 restrictions. During August investigative work was undertaken to see what type of engagement events could start again. Where other events are going ahead the AONB Service has promoted these	
LAND MANAGEMENT: FARMING, FORESTRY & CATCHMENT			
8) NELMS T&T Project: Recommend options which are beneficial to priority habitats of Quantock Hills AONB	Final report highlights options which will be beneficial to priority habitats	The action has been delayed due to the access restrictions of Covid-19. The work is continuing and expected to complete by the end of January 2021.	











9) NELMS T&T Project: Ensure inclusion of beech hedgebank option through NELMS	Recommendation in final report	The importance of beech hedgebanks has been raised with the NELMS T&T project team and is being assessed in terms of inclusion in future schemes	😊
10) NELMS T&T Project: As part of the spatial framework development include connectivity mapping	Datasets / GIS layers created and available with final report	Contract released and work continues inline with expected timescales. Further mapping from the Somerset EcoNet work will inform wider environment connectivity.	😊
11) Support FoQ to fence Ramscombe mire.	Ramscombe mire fenced	COMPLETE – on time and budget.	😊
12) Support QCA in delivery of HLS on Quantock Common SSSI, source funding for scrub removal	Swaling & scrub management undertaken to NE prescription	Works due to be undertaken in autumn / winter 2020/21. Still looking to take works forward but may be reduced outputs as works will need to be Covid-19 secure and use less volunteers.	😊
13) Apply for funding through SRA and FWAG-SW NFM projects	Funding secured and project delivered	Winter 2020 projects delivered, though due to Covid-19 the works on the ground were delayed slightly. Winter 2020/21 works still to be developed and funding application submitted.	😊
14) Engage with tree planting initiatives supporting community planting schemes utilising funding sources such as the 2SP and SRA.	2 tree regeneration / planting schemes supported	No action has been taken on these as unable to meet up with community groups to develop projects. Currently postponed and looking to take forward in January 2020. Project has been amended to concentrate on areas impacted by Ash dieback due to the significant increase in the disease during 2020 with bids put forward to increase underplanting in ash dominated woodlands where CS planting schemes are not appropriate.	😊
15) Ensure woodland management events undertaken as part of the QFF event programme	3 events run under QFF cover woodland management topics	No events have occurred due to Covid-19 restrictions. Going forward there may be potential for small group (6 or less) gathering and this is being investigated for January onwards	😊
16) Promote opportunities for woodland creation through CS and ensure inclusion in QFF events	2 woodland creation schemes approved	Promotion of CS woodland creation grant through Quantock Facilitation group.	😊
17) Screen woodland management plans ensuring opportunities for broadleaf conversion or creation of open ground is realised.	All consulted WMP screened and relevant comments submitted	One woodland management plan has come forward for comment from the AONB Service. Comments fed back to FC on increasing diversity and breaking up woodland to include small open spaces. A WMP developed by the AONB Service has been reviewed and amended to take account of ash dieback with increased diversification of replanted species and underplanting.	😊
18) Undertake swaling programme as agreed by QCMG and approved by NE	Agreed swaling programme completed.	2019/20 season heavily impacted by weather and Covid-19 restrictions. Only one burn undertaken, which has income implications. 2020/21 swaling season is planned to go ahead with adapted working practices due to Covid-19. This is likely to impact the number of burns completed and have further	😊

		impacts for funding.	
19) Support delivery of hedge laying training and competition	2 training days and 1 hedgelaying competition delivered.	This work is due in the autumn and winter. Currently assessing whether the activity can be delivered safely. If it is unable to be delivered safely postpone until 2021.	☹️
20) Undertake land management activities on SWHT and FoQ land holdings	Regular audits completed. Work programme for CS and HLS completed	In spring AONB Service prioritised activity to essential tasks (e.g. pony checks). Some items of work were delayed due to access restrictions, but summer work programme went ahead with distancing requirements in place for staff, volunteers and contractors. Autumn and winter work programme adapted slightly to take account of Covid-19 restrictions but expected to complete required works.	☹️
21) Support Building Resilience Project in delivery of workshops / training opportunities for volunteers	4 volunteers engaged in workshops / training events	The project was on hold March 2020 – July 2020 due to Covid-19 with both staff from Plantlife on Furlough. The project is currently assessing delivery of engagement activities in line with Covid-19 restrictions. No AONB volunteer engagement to date	☹️
BIODIVERSITY: WILDLIFE & HABITATS			
22) LIS: Undertake ground preparation at Ramscombe to create open areas.	12Ha managed as open areas with aim of creation of extensive species rich grassland and native scrub.	Contracts let and due to be undertaken autumn 2020.	😊
23) Lead on Quantock Bat Monitoring programme ensuring 6 transects are completed	6 transect recording completed	6 transect recording complete including 3 field surveys and 3 woodland surveys. Results submitted to BCT as part of the NBMP for the woodland surveys. Results from field surveys to be analysed over autumn and reports submitted to BCT and SERC.	😊
24) Lead on Dormouse monitoring for Cothelstone Hill	Dormouse monitoring carried out as part of PTES national monitoring programme.	Monitoring by licensed volunteers only. Due to distancing requirements it is not possible for licenced volunteers to supervise other volunteers / staff. While whole season monitoring has not been possible under restrictions partial season monitoring will still be useful. Continue to review in line with PTES guidance	☹️
25) Lead on the annual Quantock deer count	Annual deer count completed and figures available to the public.	Due March 2021. As survey is undertaken by landowners / volunteers either individually or in pairs it is expected that the survey can continue with minor adaptations to ensure Covid-19 secure.	😊






26) Lead on Nightjar monitoring for Quantock Common	10 1km grid squares surveyed (evening & morning surveys)	Due to Covid-19 restrictions survey undertaken with adapted methodology to be able to ensure social distancing measures. 10 km grid squares surveyed, and results analysed – 21 churring males with additional 8 in adjacent areas. Results to be sent to SERC and SoS.	😊
27) Lead on Butterfly monitoring for Cothelstone Hill & Fyne Court	2 transected surveyed during period April – Sept.	Adapted methodology allowing surveying within social distancing requirements for both transects. Full season survey has not been possible but partial data still valuable. Continue to review in line with Butterfly Conservation guidance.	😐
28) Support monitoring of pied flycatchers on Quantock Hills and feed into regional project on effects of climate change on indicator species	Monitoring of 150 boxes in key location throughout AONB	Survey but with adapted methodology to be able to undertake is social distancing measures. Full survey not possible but counts undertaken with limited ringing. Results submitted to BTO	😐
29) NEW Develop a collaborative Nature Recovery Plan for the Quantock Hill AONB in line with Colchester Declaration commitments.	Scoping report approved by JAC. Natural capital assessment complete with consultation on habitats and species for inclusion and what a resilient landscape should look like.	Scoping report approved and working jointly with other AONBs in the collation of natural capital assessments, evaluation and monitoring frameworks and visualisations of resilient landscapes.	😊
HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT & CULTURAL INFLUENCES			
30) Investigate potential to support the Somerset Highways Parish Signs project by approach to SCC highways	Support, if appropriate, provided to parish volunteers	Postponed until 2021 as lower priority and restrictions on group activity.	😞
31) Support the Heritage Monitoring Volunteer Group enabling them to undertake SM monitoring	All SM's surveyed in summer and winter months	Limited and adaptive surveying of scheduled monuments going ahead. Summer survey collected for 51 SM's and winter due to go ahead.	😊
32) Publish and promote results of SM monitoring	Pdf summary of survey available December 2020 and posted on website.	Due winter 2020 – collated responses with simple report produced and sent to volunteers, HE, staff and other relevant organisations.	😊
GEOLOGY & CLIMATE			
33) Develop project plan to undertake climate change adaptation (based on NE546).	Project plan developed with delivery timetable for 2021 – 23.	This action is now part of the Nature Recovery Plan being developed during 2020/21.	N/a

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING & INFRASTRUCTURE			
34) Ensure resources available to respond to LPA forward planning strategies	All relevant forward planning strategies commented on	No notification of forward planning strategy consultations during this time period.	😊
35) Screen all relevant forward planning strategies and submit comments to ensure AONB special character is conserved and enhanced	All relevant forward planning strategies comments on.	No notification of forward planning strategy consultations during this time period.	😊
36) Screen and comment on relevant development applications	All relevant planning applications comments on	Planning applications with 34 applications assessed and comments submitted on 15 where relevant	😊
37) Run annual workshop for LA planning staff in partnership with other Somerset AONBs	Annual workshop undertaken	Workshop usually held in autumn but workload of LPA staff means this will be a lower priority. Look to postpone until spring 2021 or into next autumn depending on feedback from LPA staff.	😐
LOCAL ECONOMY & VISITORS			
38) Use Quantock Facilitation Fund to undertake event on diversification opportunities through NELMS	Access agreement in place with main user groups	Event postponed at present. Assessing priority events to occur under the QFF though this event may have to be postponed until 2021.	😐
ACCESS, RECREATION & WELLBEING			
39) Engage in Wilstock Hub to investigate potential non-car routes to Quantock Hills	Project and funding secured	Postponed until 2021. Unable to engage with relevant organisation / people in early 2020.	😞
40) Undertake access audit of 1 Quantock location (Cothelstone Hill) and produce an access plan	Access plan produced and finding published on website.	Access plan in development. Due for completion by end of financial year.	😊
41) Undertake audit of AONB promoted routes	Annual access audit of AONB promoted routes completed. Action plan produced and works undertaken	Access audits postponed from early in the year due to Covid-19 restrictions but able to complete in autumn to allow winter work programme to be completed.	😐
42) Provide secretariat and be AONB lead on Police & Conservation Agencies Working Group	2 PCAWG meetings held	No face to face meetings have occurred. Limited communication between members where staff have not been furloughed.	😐
43) Support new Somerset Natural Connections (SNC) projects linking projects with core AONB work	Regular liaison with SNC project staff	Delayed start due to recruitment and inability to undertake project start-up activities. Project Manager in post at beginning of September with rest of team due to be recruited in October with activities due to start on the group in November. AONB's agreed to extend existing nature and wellbeing project to the end of August 2020 to ensure continuity of service for the groups and individuals	😐

44) Ensure all volunteer role descriptions provide accessibility requirements. Investigate potential new roles that allow for participation by those with restricted mobility	All role descriptions reviewed and updated as necessary	All current role descriptions reviewed and agreed. Ongoing assessment of potential new volunteer roles	
45) Work with SNC project to develop further volunteering opportunities that enhance wellbeing of participants.	One volunteer group set up from 'missing group' population.	Due to delayed start of SNC project this action has not occurred yet. Expected that the action will be delivered by end of financial year.	
46) Ensure information from staff / organisations which will increase accessibility of AONB to individuals and groups, especially those considered to be missing groups, is promoted via website, e-newsletter and SM feeds	Assessment of existing information undertaken and reported back to AM by Dec20	No progress due to shifting workstreams associated with Covid-19 such as QLPS support and Covid-19 communications. Still high priority and due to start work during autumn 2020 as other workstreams reduced	
47) Provide data and liaise with relevant organisations / groups, especially 'missing groups' in support of SNC project development	SNC Project bids submitted.	Somerset Nature Connections bids submitted to 2 funding partners by QHAONB. Both bids have been successful securing a further £130k for the project.	
48) Ensure Somerset Wellbeing map, hosted by Somerset Wildlife Trust, is populated and live	Wellbeing map live Jul20	Somerset Nature and Wellbeing map and links to opportunities produced. Currently populated with 35 organisation links and more due to be added autumn 2020.	
49) Ensure Quantock Hills AONB information is on Somerset Wellbeing Map	All relevant Quantock Hills AONB information on map at launch	Quantock information and links on the Somerset Nature and Wellbeing online resource.	
50) Ensure that current organisations / groups engaged in the Nature & Wellbeing Project are able to access wellbeing benefits of the AONB once project ends	All groups / organisations who wish to access Quantock Hills for wellbeing activities given resources to be able to do so.	Existing groups / organisations contacted during April – July and legacy plans made for those that need continued support through existing AONB teams.	
51) Provide specific input into information requirements of Quantock Hills AONB website to maximise accessibility for groups and organisations for wellbeing activities	Input into Communication Plan, building in key messages and presentation of access information	Due to other workstream commitments .e.g. QLPS admin support and Covid-19 communications, no work undertaken yet. May need to undertake winter 2020/21 to be completed spring 2021.	
COMMUNITY & VOLUNTEERING			
52) Secure external funding for provision of discretionary grants pot available to parish councils and community groups	Discretionary Grant fund secured	Funding applications being developed for the Green Recovery Fund in partnership with the other Somerset AONBs. Engagement with Somerset West & Taunton council over landscape skills funding.	
53) Support parish / community groups to secure funding for projects which support Management Plan implementation	Within resources parish / community group projects supported.	No parish council schemes or project coming forward at the present time.	

54) Undertake screening of relevant Community and Neighbourhood Plans and respond as required	All relevant Community and Neighbourhood Plans screened.	No community or neighbourhood plans have come forward at the present time.	
55) VOLUNTEERS – engage with tasks for QCV (joint group)	Leading 6 QCV tasks based on AONB tasks	During Covid-19 restrictions no group activities were able to take place. National Trust (lead of the QCV group) not undertaking group volunteering work until January 2021. AONB Service has co-opted volunteers to allow adapted QCV tasks to occur for smaller numbers of volunteers. First task due September 2020. Expecting target of 6 tasks to be achieved by end of financial year.	
56) Support Quantock Commons Management Group by attending meetings when appropriate	Attendance at 2 QCMG meetings / site visits	No group meetings taking place due to Covid-19 restrictions. Individual contact with group members to ensure required works on Quantock Common are facilitated.	
57) Attend Coleridge Way Steering Group meeting representing QHAONB	Attendance at all Coleridge Way Steering Group meetings	No group meetings taking place due to Covid-19 restrictions.	
58) Support Quantock Deer Management & Conservation Group	Provide advice and support to QDMCG	POSTPONE – information on deer count can be sent out if QDMCG request it to. Meetings to be postponed	
59) Support volunteer rangers to deliver public walks and events promoting the special qualities of the AONB.	Volunteer Rangers lead 4 walks and attend 3 shows / events	Volunteering restricted during Covid-19 lockdown. Currently ensuring all relevant volunteers training is up to date to allow for events to start when safe to do so.	
60) Support existing AONB led volunteer groups to ensure training, support, equipment and materials are provided	VR, WMV, HNV, ET, CEV groups all supported with same level of outputs.	Groups supported with adapted ways of working and enhanced communication during Covid-19 restrictions to allow some volunteering opportunities to continue. As restrictions ease training and further tasks adaptation to ensure Covid-19 secure happening.	
61) Undertake informal assessment of volunteering requirements to allow AONB unit to resource volunteering	Assessment report completed November 20	Continual assessment occurred during Covid-19 to assess when volunteering can start up. Assessment of the online volunteer management system has occurred with SCC looking to commission in-house, due online by end of December 2020.	
62) Through SNC project look to develop new volunteering opportunities and develop journey pathway from SNC to AONB volunteers	Legacy plan developed when new volunteer groups are set up.	Due to delay in start of SNC this element has not progressed. Legacy planning is built into SNC and will be taking place after project start up from spring 2021.	
63) Deliver events to relevant groups / organisations within resources to promote wellbeing activities within Quantock AONB	2 events undertaken with 30 participants	Due to Covid-19 restrictions no group activity occurred during period April – Aug. Currently assessing group activity going forward but will have reduced participants per activity so a greater number of activities will need to take place. Currently assessing resource requirements.	

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING & INTERPRETATION			
64) Lead 10 public events as part of the Quantock Events programme	10 events run with 150 participants in total.	Spring and summer events cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Currently assessing if events can go forward in autumn / winter but due to social distancing and group sizing will not achieve participant target output	☹️
65) Support Plantlife's Building Resilience Project through project promotion and staff resources for training and delivery	Support for 2 forest bathing sessions or public events	Spring 2020 events (2) cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Currently assessing potential to delivery sessions in late spring 2021 with Plantlife (project lead).	☹️
66) Coordinate event notification (groups >20 per) for the Quantock Hills	All notified events assessed, and appropriate advice given. Promotion of event notification process sent to relevant organisations	Due to movement restrictions event notification reduced significantly since March 2020. Some events being submitted which required quick assessment as people start events very soon once access restrictions association with Covid-19 were lifted. Also, some events coming forward for 2012.	😊
67) Run annual photographic competition on agreed theme	Photographic competition run	Postponed. May look to run in winter 2020/21 if resources allow.	☹️
CORE DUTIES / PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT			
68) OWG and JAC reports produced. These reports will provide monitoring against the action plan targets	4 OWG reports and 4 JAC reports produced.	April & July reports produced and submitted.	😊
69) Develop new business opportunities through joint working with relevant groups / organisations. Include development of non-exchequer income generation.	Partnership approval for adoption of income streams.	POSTPONE – funding priorities likely to change after CV19 and national and local government response will direct work streams. Ensure F&I T&F group is ready to start once initial response from government is received.	☹️
70) Write /DEFRA AONB bid with input from OWG and JAC partnership.	DEFRA bid accepted	Work due autumn / winter 2020	😊
71) Host 4 OWG and JAC meetings – April, July, November and February 2014 to allow informed and engaged ownership of partnership by JAC.	4 OWG meetings held. 4 JAC meeting held	April meetings cancelled. July meetings held virtually. Good attendance with agenda items receiving full consideration and discussion. Planning for virtual meetings for rest of calendar year.	☹️
72) Regular meetings of AONB Service team to review AONB Management activities and issues	12 meetings held.	Due to Covid-19 restrictions and working from home team meetings are now weekly and virtual.	😊
73) Membership and involvement in the NAAONB to ensure national and regional liaison and to ensure that the NAAONB represents the views of the Quantock Hills partnership	Attendance at Lead Officers meetings and other meetings where applicable	NAAONB events, including conference, cancelled. AONB continue to engage and input into NAAONB work such as funding and income working group and NELMS (Farming for the Future) and Colchester Declaration.	☹️

74) Annual risk assessment reviews instigate new H&S procedures in line with good practice.		Completed February 2020. Review due in January 2021 so should not be impacted by CV19. New Covid19 risk assessments (premise & outdoor working) approved by SCC. Review regularly.	
75) Undertake finance monitoring and provide reports in various formats to partners, hosts and grant giving organisations		On-going. No impact.	
76) 1-1 management meetings, annual PRaD meetings staff management		On-going. No impact	
77) Develop annual communication plan detailing key messages and delivery mechanisms.	Communication plan signed off by AM Jun20	Communication Plan not developed due to reactive communications requirements of Covid-19. Greater requirement for reactive communications as Covid-19 restrictions changed and more regular newsletters to volunteers, groups, stakeholders updating on key messages and latest information.	
78) Ensure use of SM through liaison and direction of AONB staff	All SM required through communication plan actioned	Social media feeds kept up to date and linked with video messages, e-newsletters and government key messages in relation to Covid-19.	

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. The QLPS is a partnership scheme which is hosted by the Quantock Hills AONB Service. The scheme area is approximately twice that of the AONB, but a number of the actions will be directly delivering elements of the Quantock Hills AONB Management Plan. In future reporting periods outputs and outcomes will be reported against.

Table 4: financial assessment and scheme update (April – June 2020)

QLPS Expenditure		Total Project Budget	Total Budgeted spend to end June 2020	Total actual spend end June 2020	Variance to date/£	Remaining budget	Report
1.1	A View to a Hill	£19,645	£0	£0	£0	£19,645	Not due until year 3
1.2	Digital landscapes	£26,327	£0	£0	£0	£26,327	Cash spend not till year 3, but volunteer input affected from year 1
1.3	In the footsteps of the Romantic Poets	£112,202	£1,500	£500	£-1,000	£111,702	We spent £500 on some additional research by SPAEDA, talking to schools to see when they would be ready to engage in the proposed programme. The feedback was strongly that outdoor and face to face activities would not be possible until spring term 2021 at the earliest, 2 terms later than planned. However, there was strong demand for a teacher's pack referencing existing on-line resources and for a programme involving virtual interaction with LPS staff. The specification has been amended accordingly and was awarded to SPAEDA, the Somerset Environment, Arts and Education organisation and work is underway.
1.4	Quantock Connections	£98,067		£0	£0	£98,067	On hold until social distancing is eased. Conversations have been held with several community partners and we hope to get some activities underway this autumn even if some Covid restrictions remain, but it will be a very reduced programme
1.5	Young Rangers	£86,440		£0	£0	£86,440	Was due to start this autumn, but until Covid restrictions are lifted this will not be possible. A lead-in time to develop relationships is also required. Therefore, start postponed until Autumn 2021

1.6	Quantock Apprentices	£140,958		£0	£0	£140,958	Not due to start for 2 years. However if the Govt restores funding for apprentices, specifically for apprentice salaries, we may be able to increase the planned programme eg to run 2 cohorts of 3 apprentices, each for 2 years, not just 1. But it all depends on whether the Govt makes good on its promise to support young people and training. See separate discussion paper.
1.7	Quantock Events	£40,587	£400	£0	-£400	£40,587	On hold until social distancing is eased. We hope to get some activities underway this autumn even if some Covid restrictions remain, but it will be a very reduced programme
1.8	Quantock Futures	£54,848	£0	£0	£0	£54,848	Not due to start until next year. There was some thought of bringing it forward but Covid has rendered that moot.
2.1	Quantock Follies & Features	£171,124	£0	£564	£564	£170,560	Crowcombe Park Gate car park project is on schedule for completion this winter and the s38 application under the Commons Act 2006 is currently with the Planning Inspectorate. Third party grant offers for several hedge and historic monument works have been made and should allow some spend later this year. Planned works at Dowsborough postponed till 2021. See paper about governance of grant distribution.
2.2	Quantock Hedgerows and Veteran Trees	£165,639	£0	£0	£0	£165,639	On hold due to Covid - significant impact on volunteer time
2.3	Quantock Meadows	£35,102	£0	£0	£0	£35,102	Would have been starting on NT land this spring but postponed until 2021.
2.4	Wild Verges	£4,497	£0	£0	£0	£4,497	£825 committed to the baseline botanical verge survey. Vol engagement on hold due to Covid

							A reduced programme should be possible this autumn. Reduction partly because of Covid but also because of an AONB and LPS operational decision to limit other felling this year because of the amount of urgent ash dieback tree clearance needed and the landscape and PR impacts of this
2.5	Hazel for Dormice	£27,698	£0	£0	£0	£27,698	
2.6	Quantock Orchards	£17,551	£0	£0	£0	£17,551	No activity yet but grant offers should allow spend later this year
2.7	Quantock Community Woodlands	£95,600	£0	£0	£0	£95,600	Major ash die back works at Broomfield Common now underway. Purchase of Alpine Tractor (~£30k) expected in autumn
2.8	Quantock Monitoring Volunteers	£48,156	£0	£0	£0	£48,156	A reduced programme should be possible this autumn.
2.9	Batty Quantocks	£26,546	£0	£0	£0	£26,546	Postponed until 2021
2.10	Quantock Walking	£49,911	£500	£0	-£500	£49,911	This year's Quantock Walking Festival cancelled. Some work may be possible later this year in terms of path improvements and new circular walks.
3.1	Trees in the Landscape	£1,645	£0	£0	£0	£1,645	Start delayed by Covid as it depends on SWHT being able to reopen archives - probably will not now be underway till spring 2021, about 6 months later than planned.
3.2	Quantock Memories	£10,202	£0	£0	£0	£10,202	Due to start in Jan, may be able to stay on schedule.
3.3	Stories of the Hills	£39,017	£0	£0	£0	£39,017	Not due till 2021/22
3.4	Unlocking the Archives	£35,980	£0	£0	£0	£35,980	Due to start in Jan, may be able to stay on schedule but a 3 month delay seem more likely. Project depends on SWHT being able to reopen archives and having capacity (space and staff) to support the project.

3.5	Understanding the Landscape	£163,193	£0	£0	£0	£163,193	LiDAR contract let and will be flown this autumn. Some Archaeological activities may be possible this autumn even with social distancing (field walking, test pits) but digs postponed until 2021
4.1	Programme Management	£70,130	£1,678	£1,589	-£89	£68,541	Website construction is underway - our website will be qlps.org (NB no .uk at the end) . Evaluation contract let and work has started.
4.2	Office	£66,509	£2,700	£0	-£2,700	£66,509	Opening of new office postponed for now as all SCC staff working from home - will review as guidance changes and when the Nether Stowey library reopens.
4.3	Staff - Salary & on costs	£705,526	£11,191	£9,930	-£1,261	£695,596	Savings from delayed recruitment have been used to extend Natural Heritage Officer from 0.6 to 0.8 fte. Recruitment now well underway with 2 of 4 appointments made. Full team should be in post by end October.
	TOTAL	£2,313,100	£17,969	£12,583	-£5,386	£2,300,517	Financial impact is as yet small but will be much more significant over the coming year.

Appendix 1: Quantock Hills AONB Service – Budget and expenditure (April – August 2020).

Notes:

- 1) Pension Deficit and Apprentice Levy are charges levelled by Somerset County Council (host authority) across all teams whether they are core SCC or hosted partnerships. The hosted partnership receive this charge back as a recharge in March of the financial year. As such, while it is shown as it does go through the budgets and feature as expenditure it is a zero budget line item.

Period 01/04/20 - 31/08/20

Budget Heading	Budget	Actual	Eligible
AONB Manager	49,094	20,296	20,296
Development Officer	43,713	18,070	18,070
Landscape Planning Officer	15,600	6,484	6,484
Ranger	35,842	14,861	14,861
Partnership Ranger	32,909	13,754	6,877
Volunteer Coordinator	25,484	10,758	5,379
Support Officer	20,199	8,382	8,382
<i>Pension Deficit (shown but SCC recharge)</i>	<i>18,000</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Apprentice Levy (shown by SCC recharge)</i>	<i>800</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>0</i>
Travel & Subsistence	18,898	11,333	11,333
Training	1,600	0	0
Rents, rates, utilities, premise insurance	11,920	9,161	9,161
Communication - IT, phones, printing, stationary	2,150	814	814
Equipment, maintenance, uniforms	4,600	394	394
Research & Development	0	0	0
Communication - publicity	1,110	352	352
Partnership Meetings	1,200	0	0
Subscriptions / membership	2,800	3,256	3,256
Management Fee (host authority)	9,040	591	591

Forecast 01/09/2020 -
31/03/2021

Expected	Total	Var	Comment
28,798	49,094	0	
25,643	43,713	0	
9,116	15,600	0	
20,981	35,842	0	
19,155	32,909	0	
14,726	25,484	0	
11,817	20,199	0	
18,000	18,000	0	
525	830	30	
6200	17,533	1,365	
1150	1,150	450	
			Overspend due to National Trust (landlords late charging for period Feb – Jul)
5075	14,236	2,316	
1915	2,729	579	Repair of laptops
3200	3,594	1,006	
0	0	0	
400	752	358	
200	200	1,000	
0	3,256	456	Increased NAAONB membership fee
8250	8,841	199	

Core Total Expenditure	294,959	118,811	106,250
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Defra	-166,239	0	
Local Authority Contributions	-22,500	-24,000	
Staff Recharges - Blackdown	-13,600	0	
Staff Recharges - Forestry England	-20,574	0	
Contribution - FoQ	-1,000	-1,000	
Contribution - Others	-1,000	0	
Cost Recovery - swaling	-1,000	0	
Cost Recovery - HPC Projects	-4000	-5,205	
Income b/f (RIA)	-24804	-24,800	
SCC - Contribtion (inc core & PD / AL)	-39,200	0	
Income (events)	-1,000	0	
Core Total Income	-294,917	-55,005	

175,150	293,962	998	
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-166,239	-166,239	0	
0	-24,000	1,500	
-13,600	-13,600	0	
-20,574	-20,574	0	
0	-1,000	0	
0	0	-	
0	0	1,000	
0	0	-	
-2,800	-8,005	4,005	
0	-24,800	-4	
-39,200	-39,200	0	
0	0	-	
0	0	1,000	
-242,413	-297,418	2,501	

OUTRUN -3,456

PROJECTS

	Budget	Act
PROJECT - Nature & Wellbeing	3,943	6,619
N&W income b/f	-3704	-3400
N&W income BH additional	0	-1400
N&W income MH additional	0	0

PROJECT - ELMS T&T	49,485	4,820
ELMS income - Defra	-49,485	0

Expected	Total	Var	Comment
3,662	10,281	6,338	Agreement from all partners to extend project a further 2 months.
0	-3400	304	
0	-1400	-1400	
-1400	-1400	-1400	

OUTRUN 4,081

44,665	49,485	0	
-49,485	-49,485	0	

OUTRUN 0

PROJECT - Landscape & Visual Schemes	45,000	13,371
LVS income - SCC	-45,000	-12,837

PROJECT - Land Management	13,800	5,202
Land Management Income - BPS	0	0
Land Management Income - A/G	-7,720	-5,110
Land Managing Income - b/f	-9,275	-9,300

PROJECT - Access	1,000	261
Access income - b/f	-1,000	-1000

PROJECT - NEW Mires	1854	1854
Mires income - FoQ	-1854	-1854

PROJECT - NEW Nature Recovery	0	0
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PROJECT - NEW Somerset Nature Connection	40,000	0
SNC income - Comm Foundation	-30,000	-30,000

31,629	45,000	0	
-32,163	-45,000	0	

OUTRUN 0

24,180	29,382	-15,582	Overspend associated with roadside ash dieback work. Will be able to recoup some expenditure in 2021 with CS and AG payments
-4,000	-4,000	0	
-3,890	-9,000	-1,280	
0	-9,300	-25	

OUTRUN 7,082

739	1,000	0	
0	-1000		

OUTRUN 0

	1,854	0	
0	-1854		

OUTRUN 0

2,700	2,700	2,700	New project agreed by JAC (July 2020)
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OUTRUN 2,700

40,000	40,000	0	Total project over 3-years is £500k. This element represents yr 1 of QH contribution.
-10,000	-40,000	0	Income from HPC-CF and Somerset County Council Prevent fund.

OUTRUN 0

PROJECT - Quantock LPS	250,000	23,408
QLPS income - various	-250,000	-9,283

226,592	250,000	0
-240,717	-	0
OUTRUN	0	

Appendix 2: Defra's Core duties of an AONB Unit

Core function	Explanation
a) Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the AONB vision and the CRoW Act AONB Management Plan	The management plan is the most significant statutory duty placed upon Local Authorities and in turn AONB managers by the 2000 CRoW Act. Its preparation and review should involve local stakeholders.
b) Raising awareness of the AONB, and promoting the AONB vision and the management plan to help distinguish the AONB from adjacent countryside	Raising awareness of the AONB and its special characteristics. Promoting the partnership's vision of the AONB's future and the plan for securing it. The output could be a glossy publication, a series of promotional events, a local media campaign or any combination of these. The vision needs to explain why the AONB is important and why special management measures are needed to protect and enhance it.
c) Advising upon, facilitating and co-ordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan	Taking positive steps to support the implementation of the actions in the management plan including getting other local and regional stakeholders to play their part too. It will be important to assess performance locally of CRoW Act 'relevant bodies' in respect section 85 of the Act.
d) Advising Local Authorities on their activities within AONBs, to encourage them to go beyond normal levels of service(attain the highest possible standards) in countryside management	This is a nationally significant landscape attracting central as well as local government resources for its continued protection. LA countryside management, rights of way, planning, and other relevant services affecting it need to be encouraged to "go the extra mile" to conserve, enhance and celebrate the special qualities of the AONB in decision making and through prioritising funding to ensure investment in ongoing sensitive management.
e) Monitoring and reporting on progress against AONB Management Plan targets	At the end of the year a published report on progress and achievement of the AONB team against agreed targets is needed. It will enable you to claim credit for success, and can be used to assure funders that AONB funds are being well used and to support fundraising efforts.
f) Monitoring AONB landscape condition	A key activity but one which will run over a long period and will enable an assessment of whether the AONB Management Plan is delivering the LA statutory duty to conserve and enhance the AONB.

g) Accessing resources for management activities	Identifying and making use of a wide range of funding opportunities and securing non financial assistance for the delivery of any AONB purposes.
h) Working with and contributing to the NAAONB activities, participating in and promoting joint working between AONBs and across protected landscapes family.	Using training and developmental opportunities (e.g. workshops, seminars, NAAONB conference), sharing good practice. Seeking opportunities for collaborative working with other protected landscapes, Contributing to objectives of the AONB family and protected landscapes as a whole.
i) Providing a management role to co-ordinate AONB protection through the actions of the AONB unit, the AONB partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level.	Action and management within the AONB team to ensure provision of a first class service in supporting delivery of AONB purposes. In addition helping where appropriate partners in planning their contribution to delivery of AONB objectives. This could be via their business planning processes and other relevant documents (eg Community plans).
j) Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the AONB	Promoting interest, understanding and involvement in the management of the area amongst communities both inside and outside the AONB, by providing mechanisms through which their views can be heard and acted upon.
k) Providing landscape related planning advice	Influencing planning policies (eg, local development documents) and supplementary guidance such as design guides and development control decisions in line with AONB purposes.

Appendix 3: Defra Work Themes (February 2020).

Themes	Key
Conservation of the Natural Environment	1
Conservation of Cultural Heritage	2
Recreation Management and Transport	3
Promoting Understanding, Communications and outreach	4
Rangers and Volunteers	5
Development/Planning	6

RECOMMENDATIONS:
The JAC notes the report.

Summary (year to date): The Core budget is expected to be on target though income is reduced as the AONB Service has not been able to deliver some contracts due to the Covid-19 pandemic, main items of expenditure (staff costs, vehicles, rents) are of course still payable. The project budget is overspent, specifically the Nature & Wellbeing project which ended at the end of August, this is being covered by additional income from the other project partners and the AONB reserves. The Land Management budget has overspent this year due to the ash felling contract associated with ash dieback disease. This had been planned to be undertaken over 3 years but due to the progress of the disease through the stand it had to be done in one year. The overspend will be 'clawed' back in future years from income associated with agri-environment schemes.

The Outturn prediction is for zero balance. Much of the overspend is associated with the Land Management and income will be clawed back in future years.

RECOMMENDATION:

1) The JAC notes the report.

SUMMARY	Budget	Original Budget	Projected Outturn	Variation	Comment
	Core Expenditure	£294,959	£296,762	-£1,803	Reduced income from contract delivery in first 2 quarters due to increase in qu4 e.g. swaling & HPC. Outturn based on in-year savings.
	Core Income	£294,917	£297,468	£2,551	
	Projects Expenditure	£96,282	£102,620	-£6,338	Overspend associated with Nature & Wellbeing Project.
	Project Income	£96,043	£98,539	£2,496	
	Landscape Ptn Scheme	£250,000	£250,000	£0	Budget figure revised down September 2020 as Covid-19 restrictions have impacted on scheme delivery
	Projects [HPC]	£45,000	£45,000	£0	Income claimed retrospectively from SCC under S106 / DCO agreement
	Land Management Expenditure	£13,800	£29,382	-£15,582	£7,000 overspent. Overspend will be 'clawed back' from Agri-environment scheme incomes in 2021/22.
	Land Management Income	£16,995	£22,300	£5,305	
	Total Expenditure	£700,041	£723,763	-£23,722	
	Total Income	£702,955	£713,307	£10,352	
	RIA (b/f 2019/20)	£34,475	£34,475	£0	
	Earmarked Reserves	£24,000	£24,000	£0	To cover 50% of cost of whole team redundancy as agreed in the core funding partners Statement of Intent.
	Reserves	£13,389	£18		

	Measure	Budget	Performance (42% of yr)	Comments	RAG
CORE / REVENUE	£ / % Budget line	£294,959	£118,811 / 40%		
	£/% [salaries, NI, SA]	£241,641	£92,911 / 38%	The budget includes a pension deficit amount and an apprentice levy. This is apportioned by SCC (host authority) and will be funded at year end. Lower as pay award not reflected in figures.	😊
	£/% [training]	£1,600	£0 / 0%	£600 due out for essential training.	😊
	£/% [rent, rates, electricity, water, premise insurance]	£11,920	£9,161 / 77%	Further half-year office rent due.	😐
	£/% [stationary, post, phones, printing]	£2,150	£814 / 38%	On track	😊
	£/% [travel, vehicle costs]	£18,898	£11,333 / 60%	Appears high spend due to AONB Service vehicle lease. Other elements of fuel, maintenance on track	😊
	£/% [Equipment, maintenance, clothing, uniform]	£4,600	£394 / 9%	On track	😊
	£/% [Literature, publications, publicity]	£1,110	£352 / 32%	On track	😊
	£/% [Meeting costs, hospitality]	£1,200	£0 / 0%	No expenditure.	😊
	£/% [Management fee, insurance]	£9,040	£591 / 7%	SCC management / hosting fee. Insurances include property, terrorism & computer / Employer Liability & Public Liability.	😊
	£/% [Memberships]	£2,800	£3,256 / 116%	Membership of National Association of AONBs (NAAONB) and Europarc Atlantic Isles. Additional payment to NAAONB. No further expenditure	😐
	£/% [Research & Development]	£0	£0 / 0%	Funding due out for Nature Recovery Plan development	😐
CORE / REVENUE INCOME	£ / % Grant – Defra	£166,239	£0 / 0%	Interim claim submitted.	😊
	£ / % Contributions – Local Authorities	£42,900	£24,000 / 56%	SWT and SDC contributions received. SCC due end of financial year.	😊
	£ / % Contributions – Friends of Quantock	£1,000	£1,000 / 100%	On track	😊
	£ / % Contributions – Other landowners	£1,000	£0 / 0%		😊
	£ / % Cost Recovery - Contracts	£5,000	£5,205 / 104%	Initial contract income down (swaling & HPC), looking to increase income during Q3 & 4	😊
	£ / % Recharge – Contributions to staff	£34,174	£0 / 0%	These are received in October and January	😊

	posts				
	£ / % Recharge – SCC Pen Def & AL	£18,800	£0 / 0%	To be received at end of financial year.	😊
	£ / % Income – AONB led events	£1,000	£0 / 0%	Due to Covid-19 events currently not being run.	😞
	£ / % Funds from reserves	£24,804	£24,800 / 100%		😊
PROJECTS	Project (in-year budget / spend only)	Budget	Performance	Comments	RAG
	£ / % [Nature & Wellbeing Project]	£3,943	£6,619 / 168%	Final year, project ended August 2020. Overspend associated with extension of project. Additional income from project partners & reserves	😞
	£ / % spend to date [Access]	£1,000	£261 / 26%	On track	😊
	£ / % spend to date [ELMS T&T]	£49,485	£4,820 / 10%	On track	😊
	£ / % spend to date [Mires (FoQ)]	£1,854	£1,854 / 100%	Project complete	😊
	£ / % spend to date [Somerset Nature Connections]	£40,000	£30,000 / 75%	Project hosted by Somerset Wildlife Trust. Funding from external sources as contribution to project.	😊
LPS	£ / % spend to date [Landscape Partnership]	£250,000	£23,408 / 9%	Project budget revised September as Covid-19 restrictions delayed project start up and activity during summer 2020	😊
HPC	£ / % spend to date [HPC - GQLDF]	£20,000	£13,371 / 67%	Anticipated full allocation of fund by March 2021. Claims to be finalised by March 2022. Estimated budget from projects in pipeline and applications received to date	😊
	£ / % spend to date [HPC - LIS]	£25,000	£0 / 0%	One contract released for Ramscombe 1 work, one contract to be released. Expenditure now expected 2020/21	😊
	£ / % spend to date [Land Management]	£13,800	£5,202 / 38%	Significant expenditure committed	😞

To: Quantock Hills JAC

Author: Owen Jones, Quantock Hills AONB & Forestry England Partnership Ranger
& Andy Stevenson, Quantock Hills AONB Ranger

Date: 12/10/2020

Subject: Rangers Report

INTRODUCTION

Since our last report in April, the Rangers have witnessed probably the quietest period of time on the Hills since Foot and Mouth during the lockdown and then the other extreme of exceptionally busy months post lockdown. Huge numbers of people, of all ages and abilities and wishing to carry out a wide range of activities have visited the area; coupled with the fact that the weather was particularly hot and sunny it felt like a permanent Bank Holiday before the schools went back in September. The Hills and coast provided a welcome escape for this large audience from dawn until dusk and sometimes into the night with camping.

To reflect this usage of the Quantocks, the Rangers' roles have essentially concentrated on visitor management without being able to utilise our network of volunteers for long periods of time.

1. Habitat Management

- 1.1 Cothelstone Hill – during the summer months our annual tasks of pulling ragwort, cutting rosebay willowherb, treating the regrowth of sycamore on the open grassland areas, cutting the glade, rides and access paths, watering the memorial trees and supervising contractors cutting bracken on the steep northern slopes continued. Using the water bowser to top up the water levels for the Exmoor ponies and the increased number of horse riders has been a regular task. The new borehole will be connected later this month to reduce the amount of time filling and transporting the bowser. The oak structure on the 'bender' site has been completed and is ready for use by groups wishing to do green woodworking, whittling or bushcraft activities. For the last four weeks a group of students on the International Baccalaureate course at Taunton School have helped us thin out an area of hawthorn in the woodland.

Ash dieback has fast become a problem on the Quantocks and so we have identified trees along the road, around the car park and along the paths to fell. This has resulted in hundreds of ash trees marked to be felled and removed. The Rangers with some volunteer help have felled over 60 trees along the paths that were showing obvious signs of dieback and therefore

posed a threat to safety. The roadside and car park edge trees are currently being felled by a contractor.

A significant area of sycamore trees on the north side of Cothelstone are also being felled at the moment. These trees range in age but were starting to encroach onto the grassland area shading out the ground flora and making it difficult for the ponies to get to.

We have entered into our second year of re-establishing the coppice rotation on the site. One coupe has been coppiced this autumn by the Rangers and volunteers opening up the dense canopy.

- 1.2 Quantock Conservation Volunteers (QCV) – with the various stages of government advice on social distancing and group sizes over the last six months volunteering has been extremely restricted. QCV members have carried out a number of unofficial tasks, mainly litter picking. We are now able to accommodate them following the ‘rule of 6’.
- 1.3 Working Well group – this group consisting of vulnerable people with emotional, mental and physical difficulties have found lockdown particularly hard. Practical activities have only just re-started, and we can accommodate more than 6 participants as they are classed as a therapy group. However, some individuals still feel at risk and so are not attending.
- 1.4 Green Days group – although this centre falls under the category of a therapy group as well they have taken the decision not to carry out work away from their centre and stay as a secure bubble.
- 1.5 Slow the Flow – the postponed slow the flow drainage works were carried out at Cothelstone Hill preventing water runoff onto the road and down several bridleways. A recent visit from a FWAG SW officer to look at previous years’ work highlighted the benefits of the different techniques used including the stone grips, woody dams and coir matting.

2. Visitor Management

- 2.1 Volunteer Rangers (VRs) – as mentioned in the introduction our band of VRs have been very restricted in their duties since April either through safety measures we have imposed or due to their own personal situations. Mostly the role has involved patrols on foot and reporting back to our Volunteer Co-ordinator or the Rangers. After lockdown was eased the high volume of visitors meant that we couldn’t put the VRs in any difficult situations; therefore, they couldn’t engage with the public even if they identified unsociable or harmful behaviour.
- 2.2 Fly tipping and litter – during lockdown and whilst the Council run waste facilities were closed the amount of fly tipping increased dramatically, both small scale and large scale. 11 individual cases were reported to the relevant District Councils as well as numerous smaller cases that the

Rangers dealt with. Litter in the car parks and a surrounding radius of each also increased during the busy period.

- 2.3 Fire risk – despite the long hot dry weeks this summer we only had one incident of a fire taking hold on the common, adjacent to Dead Woman's Ditch car park. Rangers put out the Fire Risk signs at entrance points to the Hills. There was significant evidence of BBQs and campfires across the Hills.
- 2.4 Patrols – the Rangers have patrolled a lot over the summer months educating people about where they can park, where they can carry out various activities and what is acceptable behaviour. Usually we would have the physical support of the local Police force. Communication has been good throughout the last six months and although we cannot share vehicles or patrol together, information has been shared regularly.

Part of the education process has led the Rangers to be involved with more social and traditional media activity. We have produced a series of short videos that were shared on Facebook and Twitter informing people about various topics such as fire, controlling dogs and litter. We have been involved in local radio pieces and updated our website with key issues.

The whole AONB Service team have contributed to the newsletter that was put out every other week during lockdown. The Rangers wrote pieces to reinforce certain visitor management guidance as well as information about wildlife species and habitat management. The general public enjoyed these publications and it was a great way of communicating with our volunteers who we couldn't interact with normally (the Working Well participants particularly benefitted from ongoing correspondence).

- 2.5 Events – no events have taken place.

3.0 Wildlife Monitoring

It is fair to say that during lockdown the wildlife really benefitted from less disturbance from people and dogs. Early emerging butterflies, birds and wildflowers put on a fantastic display. We even had flying visits from a red footed falcon and a ringed ousel.

- 3.1 Pied flycatchers – early on in lockdown the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) issued guidance about what surveys could be carried out this year. Essentially the monitoring could take place but observing the social distancing. The bird boxes across the Combes were checked by individuals and some ringing of the Pied flycatchers was carried out but at a lower level than previous years.
- 3.2 Nightjar survey – Due to Covid the AONB Service only undertook one nightjar survey this year which was undertaken at dusk. 10 km squares were surveyed using staff and volunteers (following Covid government

guidance). A total of 21 churring males heard/seen over the 10km with a further additional 8 heard nearby to these squares. Results will be sent to SERC and to the group (who will include members of Somerset Ornithological Society).

- 3.3 Butterfly transects – as with the BTO, the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme guidance restricted numbers taking part but didn't stop the activity altogether. Transects were carried out at Cothelstone Hill and Fyne Court for the whole 26 week period. An overall report with data is being compiled at the moment.
- 3.4 Tick survey – the annual tick survey was carried out at various locations across the Hills as part of a National survey. Without extensive cold periods in recent winters the tick population appears to have increased in numbers. The samples were sent off in May but Porton Down was shut during lockdown and so the results will be late in coming through.
- 3.5 Dormice – our two dormice surveyors have carried on doing the surveys during the summer at Cothelstone Hill but only on approximately half of the usual dates and without any help from other volunteers. Results from 2019 show that 7 of the boxes were occupied with a total of 13 different individuals identified.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC notes the report.

To: Quantock Hills JAC

Author: Bill Jenman, Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager

Date: 19/10/2020

Subject: Update on the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS) started delivery on 1st April 2020 as planned.

We took an early decision to delay recruiting the rest of the team in light of the pandemic, but restarted recruitment in July. Vickie Sellick is now in post as Project Support Officer (with a Comms and Finance role), working Monday to Thursday mornings (0.6 fte). Vickie is currently getting our social media presence up and running while the new website will go live in 2-3 weeks (www.qlps.org).

Simon Phelps will start as Natural Heritage Officer on 26th October. He has a strong conservation background and is ex All the Moors Butterflies, a Butterfly Conservation/HLF project on Exmoor, Dartmoor, and Bodmin Moor. With the savings from the delayed recruitment we have increased the hours for this post from 0.6 to 0.8 fte and Simon will work Mondays to Thursdays.

Jon Barrett will start on 27th October as full time Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer. He was working in community arts for Contains Art in Watchet.

Dan Broadbent is currently Museums Operations Manager at the Somerset County Museum and will start as full time Historic Heritage Officer on 9th November.

In the meantime, we have let the LiDAR terrain survey contract to Bluesky, who will shortly start laser surveying the project area to give us a topographic survey accurate to 25cm. LiDAR “sees through” vegetation, and if similar surveys elsewhere are a guide, we will discover previously unknown archaeological features from the prehistoric through to WWII. Results will be with us next spring.

The formal education co-ordination contract has been let to SPAEDA, who are adapting the proposed year 1 programme to digital delivery and producing new on-line resources.

The Evaluation contract has been let to Heritage Insider; an innovative company known for their work on Lottery projects. We want evaluation to be part of, and inform, delivery and be about assessing outcomes as much as outputs. HI had by far the best pitch for this approach.

Meantime the LPS had done quite a lot of felling work at Broomfield Common in response to ash dieback and the threat the dead and dying trees pose to the road there. It would be fair to say that the work was not without controversy locally. Tree felling always has a drastic impact on the appearance of a wood, and while replanting with a wider variety of trees will enrich the woodland in the long term the site inevitably looks a mess for a year or two. However now the roadside ash felling has been done, and you

can see into the interior of the wood, it's obvious how badly the remaining ash across the other 95% of the woodland has been affected. Together with some adjustments we made in response to the concerns raised there is now a strong supportive consensus that it had to be done, and we're looking forward with the Parish Council to the winter replanting programme.

The LPS will also be supporting replanting in the recently felled roadside areas of Cothelstone Hill, where similar tree safety work has been commissioned by the AONB.

Finally, although our events programme has obviously been curtailed by Covid, we have just started supporting activities for young people At Risk of Offending in conjunction with the Taunton PCSO team and Kilve Outdoor Activity Centre. We expect further similar groups from Williton and Watchet to come on stream in January.

Like many other projects, the LPS faces considerable uncertainty over the coming months, and an early priority for the new team will be to devise a flexible delivery programme for the coming winter that can respond quickly to changing Covid restrictions. We are still scheduled to end in March 2025 but a decision about any potential extension can be taken in a few years' time. If there is budget remaining to cover the cash costs this might help address the nagging concern about being able to deliver the volunteer numbers required for the financial model (vol time counts as match funding). But for as long as the pandemic lasts, we're simply looking to deliver as much as we can given the current circumstances.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The JAC notes the report.**

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

Author: Iain Porter, Development Officer

Date: 27/10/2020

Subject: Quantock Hills Nature Recovery Plan - update

1) Background

- a. [Colchester Declaration](#) In July 2019 the Quantock Hills AONB committed to the Colchester Declaration. The declaration contained a series of pledges by the AONBs to embed activity that will lead to nature recovery. One of the first pledges is the production of a Nature Recovery Plan. The Quantock Hills AONB, like many others, is aiming to complete the first iteration of the plan by summer 2021.
- b. The plan will be designed to take account of the [HM Government 25-year Environment Plan](#) as well as other relevant studies and reports.

2) Quantock Hills AONB Nature Recovery Plan

- a. Scoping Paper. A scoping paper was presented to the JAC in July 2020. It set out the approach with the AONB Service leading on the development of the plan and commissioning certain elements where this would achieve best value and output. A key explanatory paragraph stated, “The plan will become a key part of the statutory AONB Management Plan and will engage existing and new partners to ensure it reflects the needs of biodiversity not only within the AONB but also on the boundary and in the formation of biodiversity corridors or networks linking habitats across the county.”
- b. Data. One of the first elements is collation of available relevant data that would allow informed decision making. The Quantock Hills AONB Service has significant data provision, largely due to its GIS and monitoring areas of work. An assessment of the held data has allowed us to identify gaps e.g. land-use cover, and we are currently assessing whether it is feasible to obtain these.

3) Contracts

- a. Some elements of the Nature Recovery Plan development will be achieved through contractors as it requires specialisms not currently in the AONB staff unit or it will be more easily achievable by working in partnership with other protected landscapes. In July 2020 the JAC agreed a budget of £3,000 to take this work forward.
- b. AONBs in Somerset and Devon have joined to release three contracts to take forward four distinct elements of work in support of the Nature Recovery Plans.
- c. Element 1. Capturing the vision for a resilient landscape in 2050. Lead - Quantock Hills AONB Service. Partners – Blackdown Hills, Mendip Hills, South Devon. Cost to Quantock Hills AONB = £1,170. This work will produce a set of visualisations that will allow engagement with diverse audiences and groups. The visualisations will allow for a greater understanding of people’s understanding and desires when it comes to what a Resilient landscape contains.

- d. Element 4. Monitoring & Evaluation framework for the NRP. Lead – Mendip Hills AONB Service. Partners – Blackdown Hills, Quantock Hills. Cost to Quantock Hills AONB = £1,604. Development of key performance indicators (KPS's) including tools / resources to allow their measurement accurately and objectively. Support AONBs in data collection and analysis ensuring robust, reliable and transparent reporting.
- e. Element 2&3. State of Nature, Nature Capital Mapping / assessment and connection with national and regional context. Lead – Blackdown Hills AONB. Partners – East Devon, South Devon, Mendip Hills. The Quantock Hills AONB did not join this contract as we have significant data from previous projects / areas of work such as the QLPS and ELMS T&T. We will however be engaged to realise any synergies from this contract and our NRP development.

4) Timeframe

- a. Milestones / key dates – from scoping paper. Updated activity shown in *italics*

Activity	2020			2021			
	Qu2	Qu3	Qu4	Qu1	Qu2	Qu3	Qu4
Produce NRP scoping paper							
Partnership agreement on approach for producing NRP							
Collate required datasets							
<i>Contract – Visualisations</i>							
<i>Contract – Evaluation & Monitoring</i>							
Consultation and agreement on Vision							
Consultation on habitats and species to be included							
Drafting of NRP							
<i>Visualisation produced</i>							
<i>Evaluation & Monitoring Framework produced</i>							
Consultation on draft NRP							
Amendments to draft							
Final draft approved by partnership							
<i>Evaluation & Monitoring Framework review</i>							

Key

Complete	On target	Behind schedule but still expected to complete on time	Behind schedule. Action required
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- b. Opportunities for engagement. In usual times we would have used JAC meetings to run a workshop session on specific activities under the Nature Recovery Plan. i.e. species inclusion, local / regional context etc. With the current Covid-19 guidelines we believe that JAC meetings will remain virtual through to spring 2021. As these meetings have full agenda it is proposed that the AONB set up specific NRP virtual sessions, one in late November and one in late January 2021. These will be hour long sessions and will be an opportunity for you to input rather than the AONB Service reporting back. An invitation will go out and if you wish to take part please accept the invitation.

Recommendations:

- 1) The JAC Notes the report.
- 2) The JAC support the setting up of specific virtual meetings for engagement in the development of the NRP.



**Joint Advisory Committee
27th October 2020**

**Planning for the Future
Government White Paper Consultation
Discussion Paper**

Introduction

A recent consultation on **changes to the current planning system** run by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government closed on 1st October, it was part response to Covid 19 and part preparation for potentially much more wide-ranging changes under a separate consultation considered here.

Fundamental changes are currently being consulted on through the **Planning for the Future** White Paper. Consultation on this White Paper ends on the 29th October 2020 and the full document and on-line response access can be seen [here](#).

Foreword to Planning for the Future White Paper Aug 2020
The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP Prime Minister (extract):

"Thanks to our planning system, we have nowhere near enough homes in the right places. People cannot afford to move to where their talents can be matched with opportunity. Businesses cannot afford to grow and create jobs. The whole thing is beginning to crumble, and the time has come to do what too many have for too long lacked the courage to do – tear it down and start again.

That is what this paper proposes.

Radical reform unlike anything we have seen since the Second World War.

Not more fiddling around the edges, not simply painting over the damp patches, but levelling the foundations and building, from the ground up, a whole new planning system for England."

It is an 84 page document covering a wide range of potential changes, in this discussion document I have pulled out some key protected landscape/environmental issues.

After 7 elements directed at speeding up the planning process the last two of 9 stated aims in the White Paper are:

- promote the stewardship and improvement of our precious countryside and environment, ensuring important natural assets are preserved, the development

potential of brownfield land is maximised, that we support net gains for biodiversity and the wider environment and actively address the challenges of climate change.

- create a virtuous circle of prosperity in our villages, towns and cities, supporting their ongoing renewal and regeneration without losing their human scale, inheritance and sense of place. We need to build more homes at gentle densities in and around town centres and high streets, on brownfield land and near existing infrastructure so that families can meet their aspirations. Good growth will make it easier to level up the economic and social opportunities available to communities.

This is a summary of the proposed changes provided by Land Use Consultants:

1. Replace the entire corpus of plan-making law in England' – this is going to be relevant to anyone involved in the preparation of a local plan, through policy advice, evidence base preparation, or SA.
2. Remove the current NPPF 'Tests of Soundness' for the adoption of a Local Plan and replace with a simple test for 'sustainable development'.
3. Introduce three new 'annotations' (zones) throughout the country:
 - 3.1 **Growth areas** suitable for substantial development, and where outline approval for development would be automatically secured for forms and types of development specified in the Plan (including new settlements and urban extension sites, and areas for redevelopment, such as former industrial sites or urban regeneration sites).
 - 3.2 **Renewal areas** suitable for some development, such as gentle densification. In existing built areas there would be a statutory presumption in favour of development being granted for the uses specified as being suitable in each area.
 - 3.3 **Protected areas** where – as the name suggests – development is restricted.
4. Streamline the DM process according to these 'annotations' in the Local Plans. Areas 'annotated' as 'Growth' would come with outline planning permission (thus removing the need for separate outline permission application);
5. Slim Local Plans down so that they provide clear rules for development, not general policies. Require all LPAs to have a plan in place within 30 months (or 42 months from the date of adoption if the LPA is currently at Reg 19 stage);
6. Drive good design with the creation of local design guides – creating a 'fast track for beauty' for applications that meet these codes;
7. Abolish SA, SEA, and EIA (along with viability assessments) and replace with a more streamlined system based on open data;
8. Digitise planning, create a 'data-driven' planning system that is based on real time information, high quality virtual simulation, straightforward end-to-end processes. It should be based on data, not documents, inclusive for all members of society, and stimulate the innovation of the great British design industry;
9. Overhaul the contributions system, replacing S106 and CIL.

Within the Growth Area zones it appears that market conditions would determine how urban space is used, effectively planning control would be removed.

Renewal Area zones will be more subject to control, although a clear presumption in favour of development is likely to be in place.

In Protected Zones (where development is restricted) it appears any development proposals would come forward as now through planning applications being made to the local authority (except where they are subject to permitted development rights or development orders) and judged against policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. The NPPF will be rewritten (again) as part of these radical changes to the planning system.

It is a concern for the Quantock Hills AONB that our boundaries are very tightly drawn to the highest quality landscape and priority habitats. If Protected zones simply follow AONB boundaries then the areas directly around them will not be gradation, they will immediately fall into one of the other two categories – and with Taunton and Bridgwater so close to the AONB (and getting closer all the time) the pressure for development in these less regulated zones may be very high.

The general thrust of the White Paper is deregulatory, generally it is seen as about speed rather than quality. Beauty is a word often repeated in this document, it's use however relates to development rather than landscapes - *We will...ask for **beauty** and be far more ambitious for the places we create, expecting new development to be **beautiful**, and to create a 'net gain' not just 'no net harm', with a focus on 'placemaking' and 'the creation of **beautiful** places within the National Planning Policy Framework.'*

The National Association of AONBs has a thread on our collective basecamp discussions site that is looking at the implications for AONBs in this White Paper. As that discussion develops a consensus on key elements from an AONB perspective may well appear.

While there is a clear intention from government to see this become legislation quickly, it is nevertheless a broad-brush document and there will be further opportunities to comment on proposals when more detail is available in the future.

Chris Edwards
October 2020



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 The JAC considers this paper and advises on further action to be taken.**

To: Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

Author: Iain Porter, Development Officer

Date: 27/10/2020

Subject: Chalara Ash dieback in the Quantock Hills.

1) Ash Dieback

- c. Ash dieback is a highly destructive disease of ash trees (*Fraxinus* species), especially our native ash species the common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). It is caused by a fungus, *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, which originated in Asia. The kill rate is significant and current assessment is that anywhere between 90 – 98% of ash trees could become infected and die.
- d. The disease is also called ‘chalara’, ‘ash dieback’ and ‘chalara dieback of ash’. Calling it ‘chalara ash dieback’ helps to distinguish it from dieback on ash trees caused by other fungus or pests.
- e. The disease, largely accepted to be untreatable, will have a massive impact across the UK, costing billions, permanently changing the landscape and threatening many species which rely on ash trees.

2) The threat

- a. Common ash is one of the most useful and versatile native tree species. It provides a valuable habitat for a wide range of dependent species. It can grow in a variety of soils and climatic conditions. Unlike some other trees ash has a ‘airy’ crown and this allows light to penetrate to the woodland floor, encouraging ground plants and fauna. As well as being habitat, food and life support for nearly 1000 species, ash trees provide valuable ecological flood defence and contribute to air quality and of course carbon sequestration.
- b. Ash as a timber is strong, durable, flexible and attractive with a wide range of practical and decorative uses such as tool handles, flooring, furniture and sports goods.
- c. Chalara ash dieback can kill young and coppiced ash trees quite quickly. However older trees may resist for some time until prolonged exposure, or another pest or pathogen such as *Armillaria* (honey fungus), attacking them in their weakened state eventually kills them.
- d. On the Quantock Hills, mixed ash and ash dominated woodlands are key landscape components, particularly in the southern AONB over the underlying slate geology. It is the woodland typical of the largest landscape type of the whole of the AONB area, the rolling farmland and settled combes, and in fact this landscape type extends well beyond the designation. As identified in the Quantock Landscape Character Assessment 2019, the wooded valley sides throughout this landscape are predominantly ash and the landscape impact of chalara ash dieback will be significant.

3) Distribution in the UK

- a. Since discovery of infected ash trees in the wider environment in October 2012 Forest Research undertook a nationwide survey to understand the distribution of the disease. All instances of the disease in the wider environment at that time were shown to have been from infected nursery stock.
- b. Since that time its spread has been rapid, and it is now in most 10km grid squares of England and Wales with significant increases in distribution particularly during the period 2015 – 17.

4) Situation on the Quantock Hills

- a. In the Quantock Hills there was one instance in 2013, which was a young recently planted woodland. This was shown to have originated from infected nursery stock. Monitoring of the area did not see a spread from this woodland.
- b. The next wider environment confirmed case was in 2015 on the western Quantock Hills. Since that time the number of confirmed cases has spread across the Quantock Hills and there are many more woodlands where trees are showing the symptoms of the disease.
- c. In 2019 the AONB Service noticed a marked increase in the prevalence of the disease in woodlands it has management interest in. A number of trees around Cothelstone and Broomfield were showing symptoms such as blackening and wilting of the leaves in summer, though the percentage of the crown in infected trees was low.
- d. In early 2020 the situation has worsened considerably. It is not known if this was the natural progression of the disease or whether climatic conditions had increased its prevalence. Particular effort was made by the AONB rangers to assess woodlands for which the AONB Service has responsibility and where there is a significant risk due to access and roads. At Cothelstone Hill for example, the infection rate appeared to be approximately 60-70% of ash trees showing significant levels of crown reduction.
- e. This has led to the recent felling works at Cothelstone Hills where the roadside ash trees are being felled for safety reasons. It is a similar situation at Broomfield Common where the works are being taken forward by the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme as part of a wider woodland management plan.

5) National Tree Health Strategy

- a. Since discovery of infected ash trees in the wider environment in October 2012 Forest Research has undertaken a nationwide survey to understand the distribution of the disease. All instances in the wider environment at that time were shown to have been from infected nursery stock.
- b. Nationally the Forestry Commission is recommending only felling diseased ash for public safety or timber production. This is because there is good evidence that a small proportion will be able to tolerate Chalara ash dieback infection.
- c. By keeping as many ash trees standing as possible Forest Research can identify individuals that appear to survive the fungus and hope to use these to be able to breed tolerant ash trees for the future.

6) Local Strategy

- a. The AONB Service has been reporting sightings of potential cases of Chalara ash dieback to Forest Research via the [Tree Alert](#) website since 2013.
- b. Prior to Covid-19 restrictions the AONB Service, working with the Quantock Farmer Facilitation Group, was going to run an event on Chalara ash dieback for farmers and landowners. This has been postponed but it is hoped to run when restrictions allow.
- c. Public awareness raising has occurred, mainly due to the felling of infected trees at Cothelstone Hill. This has given the AONB Service a good opportunity to raise the issue of the disease and for communities and visitors to see the true impact on the woodlands and landscape.
- d. As well as following the national tree health strategy, where the AONB Service has management input into woodlands we are looking to underplant ash dominated woodlands. This is to increase the resilience of that woodland in the event of significant ash tree death. Underplanting is where small open spaces are created in woodlands and planted with a mix of other native tree species at a relatively high density.
- e. Where the AONB Service does not have a management interest we are keen to support landowners and farmers to be able to manage the impacts of ash dieback. This will complement the existing support supplied by the Forestry Commission through their Woodland Advisors. The AONB Service can provide signposting to existing support such as Forestry Commission or FWAG-SW as well as signposting to grant provision and where possible sourcing grant aid for farmers to underplant where appropriate.

7) The Future

- a. The impact of Chalara ash dieback on the Quantock Hills will be high. A number of significant woodlands have already been heavily affected, with a high proportion of trees dying. The negative impacts in terms of biodiversity and landscape will be significant for a number of years to come.
- b. To ensure woodlands are resilient replanting of felled areas – where diseased trees have been felled for safety reasons – will need to include a variety of native tree species.
- c. Support for landowners and farmers through the existing Tree Health Grants need to be easily available and support going forward through ELMS needs to be maintained.

Recommendations:

- 1) The JAC Notes the report.
- 2) The JAC supports the local strategy with regard to management of Chalara ash dieback.

Further Reading / Resources:

Forest Research – webpage on [Chalara ash dieback](#)

Forest Research – Interactive map [Interactive Map](#)

The Arboricultural Association - [Ash Dieback - Practical Guidance](#)

Forest Research - [Ecological impacts of ash dieback and mitigation methods](#)