



Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee
Minutes of the meeting at Cheddar Caves, Cheddar
16th November 2017

Present:

Partnership Committee

Jim Hardcastle	AONB Unit Manager
Cllr Liz Richardson (Vice Chair)	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Mike Adams	North Somerset Parishes Representative
Ian Clemmett	National Trust
Liz Brimmell	Bath & North East Somerset Parishes Representative
John Flannigan	North Somerset Council Officer
Richard Frost	Mendip Society
Sarah Jackson	Bath & North East Somerset Council Officer
Chris Lewis	CPRE Somerset
Rob Palmer	Mendip District Council Officer
Julie Cooper	Sedgemoor District Council Officer
Pippa Rayner	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Cllr Nigel Taylor	Somerset County Council
Cllr Tom Killen	Mendip District Council
Chris Westcott	Natural England
Cllr Ann Harley	North Somerset Council

Other attendees

Cindy Carter	AONB Landscape Planning Officer
Andy Mallender	AONB Project Development Officer
Sarah Catling	AONB Support & Communications Officer
Judith Chubb-Whittle	Work Placement Planning Volunteer
Becky Collier	Minute Taking
Jean Bullen	Volunteer Ranger
Royette Chapman	Volunteer Ranger
Ian King	Volunteer Ranger
Dave Tranter	Volunteer Ranger
John Lovell	Volunteer Ranger

Apologies

Steve Dury	Somerset County Council Officer
Eric Heath	Avon Wildlife Trust
Roger Dollins	Somerset Parishes Representative
Mike Pullin	Mendip District Council

Summary of Actions

Item	Item	Notes	Action
1	Apologies	See above. Cllr DH was absent so Cllr LR chaired the meeting	
2	Minutes of meeting held 16th March 2017	Accepted as a true and accurate record. No matters arising which were not covered by today's agenda.	
3	Election of Chair for the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership	<p>JH said that Cllr Dawn Hill has served 3 terms as Chair and had worked very hard and done a fantastic job. He also thanked Cllr Liz Richardson for her support as Vice Chair. Both positions are now up for renewal – one must be from a funding partner but one can be independent. JH circulated a role description for the Chair and proposed that this should be advertised widely, shortlisted by end of November by the OSG and a Chair to be appointed by a panel chaired by JH. After some discussion, the following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A role description should also be prepared for the role of Vice Chair • The deadline should be put back to at least mid – December • OSG to shortlist suitable candidates for both roles • Shortlist sent out to the AONB Partnership prior to the March meeting so that the Chair and Vice Chair can be selected at that meeting. 	JH OSG
4	Cheddar Caves & Gorge Presentation - Dave Gillingham, Head of Operations	<p>Dave explained that Leon Troake, Operations Manager, is the man on the ground in Cheddar Gorge but he is away. The key aim at Cheddar Gorge & Caves is to modernise the infrastructure, refresh the identity, attract new day visits from a wider, more affluent spectrum and add more compelling features which are operationally and commercially viable. Cheddar Gorge & Caves is promoted as “naturally magnificent” and the idea of an active day out is now at its heart. Cox’s Cave has been revamped and is now themed as “Dreamhunters – the adventures of early man” and “Beyond the View” is a cinema experience replacing the old double decker buses. New activities include escape rooms, climbing experiences for all abilities, caving, freefall experience and corporate events and seasonal themed events.</p> <p>Signage and interpretation has been improved and there is ongoing investment in rock safety, tree management and conservation work in the gorge. Cox’s Mill will be demolished and an open space for the community will be created in the short term, with the possibility of a new attraction there in the longer term. Traffic calming measures are being considered but must be done sensitively. Accessibility is a difficult issue in this setting but imaginative solutions are always being sought - though the idea of a cable car is no longer on the agenda.</p>	
5	Officer Support Group – Rob Palmer	<p>OSG has met 3 times since March.</p> <p><u>Staff:</u> Norma Newby retired in September after 12 years with the team. Norma did a fantastic job and will be sorely</p>	

	<p>Mendip Hills AONB Unit – Project and Volunteers - Andy Mallender</p>	<p>missed. Sarah Catling is the new Support and Communications Officer; she was welcomed to the team by all.</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Commitment from the Local Authorities is still strong and N. Som. Council has provided core funding of £3000 this year. The Defra funding agreement remains in place until 2020. The Statement of Intent is due for review and a new one will be agreed over the next few months. Non-exchequer funds are being sourced from various places including visitor and business contributions to the Mendip Hills Fund and through fees for training and development. Funding is being sought for practical works such as access improvements on the Strawberry Line and Mendip Way junction at Kings Wood, together with NT.</p> <p><u>Management Plan:</u> The Partnership adds resources and support to multi-partner projects like the Facilitation Fund project from SWT, the Mendip Ponds Project led by the Reptile & Amphibian Group and the NT SW Outdoors Festival. The Management Plan review process is underway. Work is about to begin on a Landscape Character Assessment for the AONB and a State of the AONB report. These will form part of the broader Partnership and community consultation starting early 2018.</p> <p><u>Volunteering:</u> There has been a big increase in volunteer numbers and volunteers have worked 2,136 hours between April and October, which equates to £15,000. This includes volunteer rangers, practical tasks, workshop volunteers who maintain the tools, Young Rangers, event leaders for Mendip Rocks Festival & corporate volunteers. A new walling group is starting up to do wall repairs outside of the main task programme. Practical task work has been done in partnership with AONB nature & wellbeing groups, Cheddar Gorge & Caves, Forestry Commission, Mendip Society, National Trust, Natural England, Somerset Wildlife Trust and SW Heritage Trust. National Grid brought a large group to do a work day on Black Down.</p> <p><u>Young Vols:</u> All Young Ranger volunteers 2015-2017 completed their John Muir Award. 4 are carrying on with the Advanced Ranger Scheme and 2 attended Eurocamp in Switzerland this summer. A new team of Young Rangers has been recruited for 2017-19. 2 young people did a week's work experience with the AONB this summer.</p> <p><u>Walking & Access:</u> Mendip Way route descriptions are now online and videos have been produced promoting the route to different audiences – one for over 55s and for under 35s. The website has links to self-guided walking holidays and the Visit Somerset taxi service which offers baggage transfer. Funding is being sought from LEADER for the Kings Wood & Strawberry Line Explorer Trail, which will create a better easy access trail, suitable for pushchairs, and a play area.</p> <p>Limestone Link – working with Bath Ramblers and B&NES</p>	
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	<p>Planning - Cindy Carter</p>	<p>Rights of Way to waymark the AONB section, update route guides and carry out survey work. Cheddar Parish Access - The AONB Unit is working with Cheddar PC to replace stiles with gates on targeted routes from the village and working with Cheddar Walking to promote routes to local people. Naturally Healthy Month was in May and several events were linked to the theme of health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Since March, CC has examined 44 development management consultations and 12 policy consultations. Comments are provided in cases where there is an adverse impact on the special qualities of the AONB, on cross boundary issues and where the AONB Unit can provide advice to inform decision making. CC proposed that the Mendip Hills AONB Unit, on behalf of the Partnership, should respond more firmly using the term "objection" to planning applications where necessary. Cllr Anne Harley agreed, saying that Cllrs are seeing more challenges in planning and it is vital that Cllrs have the support of the AONB Unit in certain cases – especially where cases end up going to appeal. All agreed that it is vital to provide Local Authorities (LAs) with clear objections with a strong evidence base, giving robust policy reasons. Proposal approved.</p> <p>CC has been commenting on Development Plans and liaising with Parish Councils doing Neighbourhood Plans. Funding has been won to enable some of the power cables in Cheddar Gorge to be placed underground. With the other Somerset AONBs, training is being offered to LA Planning Officers on the impacts on AONBs of agricultural buildings. Work is underway to make Landscape Character Assessments more usable to Planning Officers. Judith Chubb-Whittle is a planning graduate on work placement. Cllr AH mentioned an appeal taking place in N. Som., which involves a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). If the appeal goes against what is in the NP, it will weaken the status of NPs in future. CL said that nationally, CPRE & AONBs are working closer together and a new report just out examines the threats posed by housing to AONBs. SJ added that new housing also brings new recreational pressure on AONBs.</p>	
	<p>Raising Awareness – Jim Hardcastle</p>	<p>SW Outdoor Festival in September – ticket sales were lower than expected, partly due to poor weather forecast and perhaps time of year. Individual events were well attended. AONB arranged for 90 local school children to attend on the Friday. The next NT event will be in Devon in 2018 but plans are being made for a new Top Of The Gorge Festival in June.</p> <p>The AONBs mission is to engage with people at all levels and JH has produced 14 e-newsletters and done 6 talks since the last meeting. The new website is almost ready to launch and the AONB has a growing following on social media.</p>	

		<p><u>Mendip Hills Fund:</u> has over £6000 to distribute and there are 8 applications. New businesses and events are involved in visitor giving eg Mendip Outdoor Pursuits, endurance events.</p>	
6	<p>Mendip Hills management Plan Partner Updates</p>	<p>PR of SWT said the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project ended in September but volunteer groups are still running and doing great conservation projects. SWT is developing a new project nationally, in a partnership led by Plantlife, looking at species-rich grasslands and incorporating health & wellbeing themes. Eleanor Higginson runs the Mendip Hills Facilitation Fund (70% funded by Natural England) which aims to connect habitats around Cheddar Gorge, working with various landowners. SWT has a new Volunteer Coordinator in post. Dormice numbers are still struggling and UWE is planning a project to look at the effects of pheasant rearing in woodlands on dormice populations.</p> <p>CW said NE has 30 Higher Tier agreements in Somerset, Avon & Wilts. Mendips is a focus area and they would like to expand the Facilitation Fund across a wider area of the Mendips. NE worked with AONB volunteers in Ebbor Gorge and Rodney Stoke NNRs. As part of a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement, they plan to carry out capital works this winter, mainly scrub clearance in tricky spots on the Mendips.</p> <p>RF said that Mendip Society membership is up and their level of activity is up. They were pleased to be part of the Mendip Rocks Festival. They have a new Planning Volunteer in North Somerset.</p> <p>CL of CPRE said that having a part-time Planner, Liz Payne, is working well though they will need to raise funds to sustain this position. Planning work is very busy with housing, roads, Local Plan reviews and appeals. CPRE awarded a landscape painting prize at the Bruton Art Society this summer and is keen to do similar with a photography prize. Governance is good with three new Trustees coming forward. National Grid has been challenged by Ofgem re the costing of T-Pylons across the levels so CPRE has had another opportunity to state its case that undergrounding would be a better option. JH said that a NG rep will be at the March 2018 meeting.</p> <p>Cllr N. Taylor offered to take groups on tours of Westbury Quarry, saying there is no charge and a tour could help to raise donations for good causes. There are 7 different types of orchid and a chance to see peregrines nesting. He mentioned that more funding is needed to continue archaeological excavations in Ebbor Gorge.</p> <p>RF asked about the planning application to extend Callow Rock quarry. CC said that the AONB had submitted comments but they were not on the website yet. SCC</p>	

		<p>Minerals Section is short staffed so things are progressing slowly.</p> <p>IC of National Trust is looking forward to planning the Top of the Gorge Festival. NT has a similar approach to Longleat in terms of management of Cheddar Gorge – scrub clearance and rock safety are vital. NT is a partner in the Kings Wood Gateway project as mentioned earlier and they are improving waymarking at Crook Peak.</p>	
7	AOB	none	
8	Date of next meeting	15 th March 2018	ALL
9	Volunteer of the Year Award	JH gave this year's award to Dave & Judith Tranter and thanked them for their long term commitment to the Mendip Hills, their work at Rock of Ages, their role within the Mendip Society and everything they do for the AONB – such as survey work, practical work, welcoming volunteers, organising and running events.	

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership 16/11/17

Paper A: Annual Activity Plan 2017-18

Mendip Hills AONB Unit

Activity Plan 2017-18



National Association for AONBs Key Performance Indicators:

1. **Landscapes for Wildlife (nature)** Hectares of land enhanced for nature through the work of AONB teams.
2. **Landscapes for People (wellbeing)** Number of people engaged through the work of AONB teams.
3. **Landscapes for Culture (history)** Number of Scheduled Monuments that have been protected through the work of the AONB team.

Lead: AM Andy Mallender

JH Jim Hardcastle

SC Sarah Catling

SF Sammy Fraser

1. Conserve & Enhance: Project Development					
Work Area	Action	Lead	NAAONB KPI	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Mendip Way	Upload West and East guide to the AONB website	AM	2	Work Completed East and West guides uploaded	Green
	Commission 2 x promotional videos and promote	AM	N/A	Work Completed 2 videos produced, 1 aimed at over 55s market, 1 x aimed at under 35s market	Green

				<p>October – upload over 55s video January – Upload under 35s video</p>	
	Develop 3 other promotional opportunities to achieve national awareness	AM	N/A	<p>Work Completed: Encounter Walking Holidays itineraries and materials have been completed.</p> <p>October – AONB Mendip Way videos showcased at Visit Somerset/Encounter Walking launch event. Links between AONB and Encounter websites. November – identify other publications, organisations etc. and set up meetings/contacts to plan additional promotion. January – March @WalksBritain and 1 other national promotion delivered.</p>	Amber
Limestone Link	Waymark the AONB section of the route	AM	2	<p>Work Completed Meeting held with B&NES Public Rights of Way, Bath Ramblers contacted as key stakeholder. Use of existing waymarkers agreed (supplied by B&NES).</p> <p>October - Meeting with Cotswolds AONB scheduled for 3 October to plan joint work. November to January - Volunteer Rangers to carry out waymarking of AONB section of L/Link.</p>	Red

	Write route guide in 2 directions. Produce downloadable guides	AM	N/A	<p>Agree work plan and way forward with Cotswolds AONB:</p> <p>October - November – Consult with Bath Ramblers and Bathscape. Issue brief for contractor to walk the route and write directions for route guide, gather GPX data and survey structures.</p> <p>December - appoint contractor</p> <p>December to February - Contractor carry out survey and guide writing.</p> <p>March – produce downloadable guides.</p>	
	Survey route to identify priority improvements. Gather GPS data	AM		See above	
Cheddar Gorge Walk	Work with NT, Longleat, SWT to identify improvements. Plan and execute improvements where necessary	AM	2	<p>Works completed</p> <p>Improvements planned.</p> <p>1 x gate already installed and new link from Black Rock Gate (avoiding road) opened. The Gorge Walk has been waymarked with new discs in both directions.</p> <p>Profit from SWOF to fund future works.</p> <p>Site meeting with Longleat took place in September, works agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tree work to open up the route to be completed by Longleat’s contractor in October- December. - Further work to be completed by Longleat staff with AONB advising on specifications 	Amber

				<p>(timings to be confirmed).</p> <p>October – December liaise with Longleat to maximise benefit of tree work.</p> <p>October – provide cross drain and culvert specs and examples to Longleat and advise on drain locations.</p> <p>October – agree payment rate with Longleat for AONB Volunteer tasks.</p> <p>December – site meeting with SF to plan volunteer tasks (scrub clearance and dead hedging to block desire line routes).</p> <p>January – March – 3 AONB volunteer task days.</p>	
Cheddar Parish Access	Map based scoping exercise with PC reps – identify priorities. Report to SCC PROW officers.	AM	2	November - Meeting with PC reps. Follow this with report to SCC PROW Officers	Red
	Site surveys to draw up specifications for targeted improvements. Confirm where SCC will contribute 25% and draw up costed plan.	AM	N/A	November – December – AM to coordinate survey with Cheddar PC/ Cheddar Walking volunteers. December – produce report and work plan.	Red
	Cheddar PC apply for match funding (Sedgemoor Hinckley funds).	AM	N/A	November – confirm Hinckley small grants fund timescales with Somerset Community Foundation (currently scheduled to open in November) November – AM to complete draft application. December – Cheddar PC or Cheddar Walking	Red

				to submit application including info from survey report.	
	Run training day in gate installation.	AM	2	January – run training day with Cheddar PC, Cheddar Walking and AONB Task Volunteers	Red
	Set up work programme for volunteer tasks – AONB, Mendip Ramblers, Cheddar PC/Cheddar Walking.	AM	2	December – March – Volunteer tasks	Red
North Somerset Community Connections	Promote Cheddar PC framework to North Somerset Communities – Bleadon, Hutton, Banwell, Winscombe and Sandford.	AM	N/A	December – produce report on Cheddar project and send to target PCs. Use as basis for AONB e-newsletter. Send as press release/ Mendip Times article.	Red
	Secure 1 x community sign up	AM	2	January – March – attend PC meetings to promote sign-up for 2018/19. March - at least 1 new community signed up.	Red
	Develop and submit a LEADER bid with NSC & NT for Strawberry Line & Mendip Way junction	AM	N/A	Met with NT and NSC to identify works. NT agreed to submit LEADER bid. November – obtain written consent form all landowners. Complete leader expression of Interest with NT. November – submit leader EOI and confirm timetables for full grant submission. Confirm list of contractors to tender for works. December – complete full project plan with	Amber

				specifications ready for full leader application.	
Working Holidays	Work with NE and Swallet Farm to prepare and promote the offer	AM	N/A	Offer promoted at present via social media and to other AONB volunteers. Need to achieve wider promotion targeting young groups and older people using Wells and Bath as a draw CANCELLED due to low bookings	Red
	Work with partners to successfully deliver the week	AM	1, 2	CANCELLED due to low bookings	Red
Burrington Commons	Work with Langford Ct Estate and NE to identify management solutions, create and instigate an action plan	AM	1, 2, 3	Meeting held with Langford Ct Estate and NE to coordinate works to deliver the management plan for the area.	Amber
2. Raise Awareness					
Work Area	Action	Lead	NAAONB KPI	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Mendip Rocks!	Invite Mendip Society on to steering group and secure financial support from them	AM	N/A	Represented on steering group and MS contributed £500	Green
	Work with SESC & Mendip Society to organise a programme of events aimed at family groups and people with geological interests during October.	AM	N/A	Event list agreed.	Green

	Promote the month to achieve more visitors and more income than 2016	AM	2	Promoted via AONB website, social media, Mendip Times, press releases, posters and leaflets	Amber
South West Outdoor Festival	Represent the AONB Unit on the steering group run by the National Trust and support the publicity of the event	JH	N/A	Attended 7 meetings and 1 test day on site	Green
	Organise local school children to sample climbing and caving in the gorge and visit the festival site on 8/9/17	JH	2	90 pupils visited the gorge and site on 8/9	Green
	Identify and help to organise a legacy 'adventure' event in Cheddar Gorge area	JH	N/A	Partners and visitors to be consulted during the event. Legacy event scheduled for July 2018	Amber
MHAONB Website	Manage the transition to a new look website	SC	N/A	Draft designs agreed. Awaiting draft site to be built in background	Amber
Social media	Achieve 2300 followers on Twitter	ALL	N/A	1928 (31/8/17) 2031 (23/10/17)	Amber
	Achieve 1500 likes on Facebook	ALL	N/A	1364 (31/8/17) 1418 (23/10/17)	Amber
	Achieve 1500 views on YouTube channel	ALL	N/A	1017 (31/8/17) 1844 (23/10/17)	Green
	Start Instagram account	ALL	N/A	Commenced 12/10/17 Followers 73	Green

Enewsletters	Distribute a minimum of 24 newsletters (12 to the public list, 12 to the Partnership list)	JH	2	14 x public, 6 x Partnership	Amber
	Achieve 600 on the newsletter database	ALL	N/A	Currently 500	Amber
Visitor Guide	Design and print an updated visitor guide to establish an 'adventure' based brand	JH	N/A	Produced, currently on 3 rd reprint	Green
	Ensure regular distribution of the guides and find 4 new outlets for distribution	SC	N/A	Distributed. New outlets to be identified	Amber
3. Landscape Planning					
Work Area	Action	Lead	NAAONB KPI	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Planning liaison	Meet key planners in all relevant authorities	CC	N/A	Sandford and Winscombe – Planning Committee Liaison with L Payne from CPRE – linked with Mike. Follow-up with Mike Rolfe periodically. Met with N.Somerset planning officers. Met with Matt from National Grid – further meeting in the diary. Liaison with Laura Horner from SCC.	Green
Applications	Comment on applications as and when necessary	CC	N/A	Monitor up to date (51 DM and 14 Policy) 3 historic app responses for N.Somerset 3 consults in still to look at. Callow went out early August, Blagdon	Green

				Gardens last week and Cheddar NP today.	
Regional	Liaise with other AONB planners and partner organisations via email and face to face	CC	2	Met with Lisa and EJ – potential landscape training in November	Amber
Training	Develop a training programme for planners and parish councillors	CC	N/A	Training session on 24/11/17 in Taunton. Promotion underway	Amber
4. Involve the Community					
Work Area	Action	Lead	NAAONB KPI	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Volunteers (Rangers)	Maintain the rota of site visits, meetings and social gatherings	AM	2	Maintained with good attendance	Green
	Create a walks programme delivered by volunteers	AM	2	2 dates fixed for Christmas walks.	Amber
	Identify new training and development opportunities	CC	2	Judith Chubb-Whittle planning volunteer started October, 3 days/month	Green
	Create 4 new volunteer rangers from areas not covered	AM	2	4 Volunteers recruited from areas not previously covered e.g. Bleadon, Binegar.	Green
Practical Task Volunteers	Maintain a programme of fortnightly tasks focussed around the special qualities	SF	1, 2	Maintained and enhanced with high profile days at Black Rock and working alongside corporate volunteers	Green

Young Rangers	Complete the 2015-17 programme securing feedback from those involved	SF	2	Excellent feedback and PR gained from this programme	Green
	Take two Young Rangers to Europarc camp and promote the benefits of this	SF	2	2 x Young Rangers returned from Switzerland and PR gained	Green
	Promote, select and start the 2017-19 Young Ranger programme with activities aimed at creating environmental decision makers of the future	SF	2	Introduction evening on 5/9/17. New and existing volunteers brought in to help with activities and plan the programme	Green
Mendip Hills Fund	Allocate more than £6000 of grants	JH	1, 2, 3	Currently approx. £6000 in pot. Need to organise collection of badge boxes and identify new fund sources.	Red
	Promote the fund regularly via social media and other outlets	JH	N/A	Current Facebook page has 69 Likes. Recently tried targeted Facebook ad for £18. Gained wide reach but only 2 extra likes. Try again with a different audience when fund is to be opened. 23/10/17 Facebook 97 Likes. 1 new event signed up and high profile company about to do public launch of supporting the fund.	Red
	Administer the panel to meet in November and March	JH	2	Fund open for applications in October. Unsure of how many applications at present. Panel meeting November 29 th .	Amber

5. Partnership, Management, Regional & National Work

Work Area	Action	Lead	NAAONB KPI	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Partnership	Administer 2 x meetings per year minimum	JH	N/A	1 x completed. Discussions needed as Chair's term is complete. New chair needed for November 2017 onwards	Amber
OSG	Administer 4 x meetings per year minimum	JH	N/A	Meetings scheduled. 2 x completed	Amber
Regional representation	Attend SWPLF and Somerset AONB meetings	ALL	N/A	JH attended SWPLF meeting July 2017.	Amber
National representation	Attend NAAONB meetings, contribute to responses, forums and communications	ALL	N/A	JH and AM attended national conference in Winchester, July 2017. JH attending Lead Officers & Chairs meeting, November 28 th , London.	Green
AONB Unit	Create activity plan for Unit and individuals	ALL	N/A	As seen, linked to individual 1:1s	Amber
AONB Unit project management	All to be using Basecamp project management system.	ALL	N/A	Used sporadically, needs commitment for new projects	Red

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership 16/11/17

Paper B: Planning Report

1. Mendip Hills AONB Planning

D1 Working with the local planning authorities, ensure that development in the AONB and its setting is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community need without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.

L1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills AONB landscape is maintained and enhanced.

D4 Ensure issues of importance for the management of the AONB landscape are fully reflected in strategies and plans produced by other agencies and local communities.

- 1.1 Since the March 2017 Partnership meeting, we have received 44 Development Management and 12 Policy formal consultations. All consults and relevant planning documentation is reviewed and comments provided where proposals are likely to have an adverse effect on the characteristics that make the AONB special, where our unique cross border position means that we see issues that straddle district boundaries, and where we can provide advice to help inform decision making.

In reviewing Development Management consultations, it has become evident that to ensure that our protocol, in terms of approach to consultation and comments provided are given the relevant consideration and weight within the decision making process, that we need to be very clear in our responses to local planning authorities (LPAs).

From speaking with different LPA planning officers, we have feedback that whilst we provide advice on policy considerations and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB, if there is an impact on the protected landscape there needs to be more focus on our concerns/objection with reasons for objection. Clear direction is required by the LPA planning officers if there is an objection together with reasons for objection; this would then enable the case officer to consider how weight would be placed on particular considerations and if consideration/s were strong enough grounds for refusal as this could potentially be challenged at appeal.

Clear comments are also required by the LPA planning officers to feedback to developers to consider how improvements could be made to development proposals. This does not mean that we would be opposed to any development etc., but rather focus on providing advice (DPs, SPDs, NPPF, AONB Management Plan, CRoW etc.) where relevant to inform decision making and conditions, when development contributes to a living and working, sustainable landscape supporting the sense of place of the Mendip Hills AONB.

Proposal: The Mendip Hills AONB Unit, on behalf of the Partnership, respond more firmly using the term 'objection' to planning applications where necessary.

- 1.2 In terms of providing comments on Policy documents, we have commented on a range of documents including Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans. In particular we have been effective in joining with Quantock Hills AONB in providing joint responses on consultation documents which include both Quantock and Mendip Hills AONBs.
- 1.3 The Mendip Hills AONB Unit compiled and submitted an application for funding to the Steering Group of the Western Power Distribution Undergrounding Project (within Protected Landscapes) for the undergrounding of existing overhead power lines on land at The Cliffs and Cufic Lane, Cheddar. The undergrounding of overhead power lines within this area not only provides the opportunity to make improvements to Cheddar Gorge which will benefit the landscape character, visual amenity and experience of the surrounding landscape, but also offer the opportunity to make improvement to the historic environment. This application has been approved in principle by the Steering Group subject to the resolution of some outstanding matters. Work to resolve outstanding matters are currently being undertaken.

L2 Provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.

L3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the AONB.

P2 Encourage the involvement of local People and the wider community in the management of the AONB.

- 1.4 The Landscape Planning Officer has attended a range of meetings with the local community from parish council and parish planning committee meetings to site meetings to consider planning matters with different community groups and stakeholders within the Mendip Hills AONB. The Landscape Planning Officer also presented on the Mendip Hills AONB in Neighbourhood Plans during May at the B&NES Neighbourhood Planning Workshop on Landscape, Ecology and Environmental Matters.
- 1.5 The Landscape Planning Officer meets regularly with the landscape planning officers in Blackdown and Quantock Hills to share best practice. The officers have been working together to provide opportunities for planning and other officers to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the nationally protected landscapes and their special qualities. A Workshop on Agricultural Buildings in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, has been jointly organised by Blackdown, Mendip and Quantock Hills AONBs for 24th November 2017 in Taunton and is primarily geared towards Local Authority Planning and Landscape officers who cover all or part of the AONBs as well as AONB staff.
- 1.6 The Landscape Planning Officer further attended the SW, SE and E Protected Landscapes Group Planning Officers meeting which offered the opportunity to liaise with AONB landscape planning officers from across Southern England to network and share best practice.
- 1.7 'Planning Matters' articles have also been written for various newsletters to reach a range of communities and stakeholder groups within the Mendip Hills AONB and the wider area.

- 1.8 The Landscape Planning Officer has met or had discussions with the range of planning and other officers (Landscape and Historic Environment) from all Local Authorities within the Mendip Hills AONB and other planning consultees to discuss planning matters as pertains to the protected landscape.
- 1.9 A Planning Graduate work placement has been set up through Somerset County Council and the Mendip Hills AONB to support opportunities to develop planning graduate skills to support the primary purpose of AONB designation to conserve and enhance natural beauty within the AONBs. The work placement is for 3 days a month over a 6 month period within the Mendip Hills AONB Unit and provides the opportunity to develop a range of planning skills including consideration of the characteristics that make the AONB special and landscape character. We have been delighted that Judith Chubb Whittle started the work placement on 3 October 2017 and this will run to the end of March 2018.

2. Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan

- 2.1 Work has begun on the review of the Mendip Hills Management Plan and consideration of process, procedural matters, consultation strategy and monitoring considerations is underway.
- 2.2 We are working on a paper for OSG consideration at December meeting on evidence base work around the special qualities and landscape characteristics of the Mendip Hills AONB for the review of the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 and to support officers and wider stakeholders. The four local planning authorities (Mendip, Bath & North East Somerset, Sedgemoor and North Somerset) have Landscape Character Assessments which include areas within the Mendip Hills AONB and there is further a Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment dated February 1997 (Countryside Commission 1997) as relates specifically to the Mendip Hills AONB which would provide the LCA evidence base to any further document Mendip Hills AONB specific document. This work will support paragraph 3.1.3 of the current Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan which sets out that the Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment identified 11 distinctive character areas within the Mendip Hills AONB and 'consideration of the landscape needs to take account of the special qualities that make each of these character areas'.

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership 16/11/17

Paper C: Finance Report Interim

Finance Budget Report - Month 6

	Actual Spend	Budget	% Against Budget	Notes
<u>Core Costs</u>				
Staffing	£ 56,457	£ 118,338	48	Includes SF Budgeted figure £9920. Awaiting TJ to Quantock AONB
Staff Training	£ 181	£ 200	90	
Travel Expenses	£ 503	£ 2,250	22	
Staff Clothing	£ 205	£ -		New Staff Member
Staff Subsistence	£ 48	£ 200	24	
SCC Hosting	£ 18,237	£ 18,450	99	
Vehicle Costs	£ 1,754	£ 2,550	69	
Office Postage	£ 3	£ 200	1	
Office Stationery	£ 766	£ 2,500	31	
Digital	£ 361	£ 700	52	
Office Telephones	£ -	£ 2,400	0	
Office Cleaning	£ 900	£ 1,800	50	
Office Tools & Equipment	£ 882	£ 400	221	New Gazebo
Volunteer Costs	£ 1,575	£ 2,000	79	
Insurance	£ -	£ -	0	
Total	£ 81,872	£ 151,988	54	
<u>Partnership Costs</u>	£ 3,832	£ 8,650	44	
<u>Projects</u>	£ 11,037	£ 22,300	49	
<u>Young Rangers</u>	£ 3,447	£ 2,500	138	Income to offset overspend. Expenditure weighted higher in year 1 of 2 year period due to uniforms
	£ 100,188	£ 185,438	54	
<u>Other costs for note:</u>				
Joint Health & Well Being Project	£ 8,561	£ 8,561		Cost covered direct from SCC Public Health
Redundancy		£ 18,000		Ring fenced from Carry F/wd 16/17, not included in budget total
		£ 193,999		
<u>Income</u>				
DEFRA	£ 35,068	£ 153,506	23	
SCC	£ 16,150	£ 16,406	98	
B&NES	£ 8,500	£ 8,500	100	
SDC	£ 8,001	£ 8,001	100	

MDC	£	8,017	£	8,017	100
NS	£	3,000	£	3,000	100
	£	78,736	£	197,430	40
Young Rangers	£	1,600	£	1,500	107
SCC Public Health	£	8,561	£	8,561	
Contingency C/Fwd			£	18,000	
Fees and Charges	£	2,947	£	-	
	£	91,844	£	225,491	41

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership 16/11/17

Paper D: National Association for AONB Report

National Conference

Over 130 delegates attended the Landscapes for Life Conference 2017 in July. Jim Hardcastle and Andy Mallender plus Kristen Lambert representing the 3 Somerset AONBs attended.

Delegates gathered in Winchester from all over the UK for two days of experiencing how to **“Do Different”** *by leading, sharing, learning and inspiring with the AONB Family and partner organisations.*

We were able to engage with people from the corporate, academic, charity and public sectors to

- Learn about doing things differently
- Share ideas on exciting and innovative projects
- Be inspired to think even further “outside the box”

All with the ultimate goal of leading efficient and effective projects to provide a robust and sustainable future for the AONB Family.

Presentations and other activity can be found on [Landscapes for Life Conference 2017](http://landscapesforlifeevents.org.uk/category/conference-2017/), <http://landscapesforlifeevents.org.uk/category/conference-2017/>

Outstanding Week

This is an opportunity for AONBs across the country to collectively communicate. Various target audiences are encouraged to get involved and get out into our outstanding landscapes to enjoy country shows, dark sky discovery nights, walking festivals, archaeology walks, wood fairs, foraging and local food festivals, wildlife walks, coastal and marine days, thatching courses, drystone walling competitions, charcoal making, bioblitz, inspiration through art and many, many other activities.

We hosted a special practical task of drystone walling at the high profile Black Rock gate, Cheddar Gorge, which attracted more volunteers than normal.

Living Landscapes

The NAAONB has collaborated with almost 900 European Nature, Regional, and Landscape Parks to produce a book entitled [Living Landscapes](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Living-Landscapes-with-Verband-Deutscher-Naturparke.pdf) <http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Living-Landscapes-with-Verband-Deutscher-Naturparke.pdf> to demonstrate how protected landscapes are models for the sustainable development of rural areas. The book

was launched at the first European Summit of Regional Nature Parks where a declaration was signed by the NAAONB and 20 other organisations who represent the European Parks.

Farming in the UK – Beyond the Common Agricultural Policy

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – opportunities for the future

Context and opportunities

Farming represents a significant component of the UK economy contributing £8.5 billion and employing 475,000 people across 180,000 holdings. Agriculture is also the bedrock for the broader food and farming sector which employs 3.7 million workers across the UK, 13% of all employment and with a GVA of 108 billion. The agri-food sector as a whole generates around £18 billion of gross export earnings for the UK each year¹. Whilst contribution to GVA from this sector is often quoted relative to that of other sectors, there are fundamental elements of the sector's impact that justify special attention, not least its potential impact on food security and wider sustainable development. Agriculture is therefore a strategically important global industry.

70% of land in the UK is farmed². The impact of farming directly effects key natural resources including water, soil, geology, wildlife, and landscape, and this impact can be either positive or negative. Farming can also impact on natural systems and processes such as flooding and the locking up of greenhouse gasses. The industry therefore has the potential to provide a wide range of highly valued public goods and services in addition to producing food. This demand for multi-functional land management is growing alongside the need to feed an expanding global population. As intensification of production methods reach their environmental limits, sustainable agriculture, with its holistic principles, must be a fundamental goal.

The UK has a predominantly farmed landscape. Its character is the result of generations of human activity. The high quality of this landscape provides recreational opportunities enjoyed by millions of people each year. Overall, an estimated 3.7 billion day visits are made by UK resident adults to the countryside each year. These visits have a direct impact through spend in local shops and on local services, and contribute to indirect savings made through improvements to the population's health and wellbeing. The UK's landscape is also an asset important in attracting overseas visitors to the UK. Visit Britain estimate that about 20% of international visitors visit the countryside during their stays. International tourism is estimated to be worth at least £2 billion per annum to the UK economy³. High quality landscapes are therefore an integral part of the country's economic infrastructure.

Agriculture also has a significant social and cultural impact. Whilst difficult to quantify, the value that agriculture has on landscape character, and the subsequent impact this has on sense of place and identity is significant. Relationships to place are multi-layered and often intangible; they can be historical, familial, emotional, and spiritual and are well documented through art, literature, and song. The collective value the UK's landscapes have on individual and national identity is fundamental.

¹ Development Economics (2017), *Contributions of UK Agriculture*

² Barbers Rural Land and Property Specialists (2015), *Who owns the land?* Available from <https://www.barbers-rural.co.uk/blog/who-owns-land> [Electronically accessed July 2017]

³ NFU (2017), *Farming's value to Britain – Key Facts*. Available from <https://www.nfuonline.com/news/latest-news/farmings-value-to-britain-key-facts/> [Electronically accessed July 2017]

Taking into consideration the broad range of goods and services derived from UK agriculture the net contribution of the sector to the UK economy is valued at £46.5 billion. The net cost to the nation is valued at £6.4 billion, comprising the current £2.8 billion coming through the Common Agricultural Policy to UK farmers in direct payments, damage to air, water and soil valued at £2.6 billion, and carbon costs amounting to almost £1 billion¹. Agriculture, therefore, generates a significant net benefit to the UK economy. Put another way, there is significant flexibility and opportunity for investment in UK agriculture such that it can move towards a far more sustainable future, reduce its harmful effects on the environment, and ultimately improve the value further of the goods and services it provides.

Challenges

The flexibility afforded by the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union provides an opportunity to respond proactively to current challenges:

- Continuing globalisation leading to greater volatility in commodity prices
- Increasing scarcity of natural resources
- Rising world population leading to food security issues
- Climate change impacts
- Issues around rural society and the rural economy
- Energy security
- Pressures on public finances

With a changing climate and the global population set to reach almost 10 billion by 2050⁴, Europe is likely to become more important for food production. We must rethink our approach to agriculture, focusing on environmentally responsible land use. This will mean producing more whilst reversing the decline in environmental quality. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union presents us with a once in a lifetime opportunity to reconcile the demands of food production and environmental regeneration.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

There are forty-six Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covering a total of nearly eight thousand square miles of the UK's rural landscape. Thirty-three are wholly in England, with one, the Wye Valley, straddles the border between England and Wales. About 14% of England is designated AONB and their relative proximity to centres of population means that AONBs have a special meaning to many more than those that live within them. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

AONBs are not wilderness areas or even, paradoxically, areas whose beauty derives from purely natural processes, but a group of distinct and recognisable areas arising from a long history of human occupation and use. The combination of natural processes and land use has resulted in areas of outstanding beauty; iconic landscapes of great natural and cultural importance.

The AONB designation gives a formal statutory recognition to the importance of these high quality landscapes and through legislation and guidance, requires the conservation and enhancement of these nationally cherished areas.

The interdependent relationship between natural beauty and the rural economy is clear and well-understood. Therefore, in pursuing the primary purpose of designation account is taken

⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015), World population projected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050. Available from here <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/2015-report.html> [Electronically accessed July 2017]

of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities.

AONB partnerships work closely with local farmers and land owners to support the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. This activity is defined and integrated in a sustainable way through the AONB management plans which are devised and agreed through local consensus.

Farming in AONBs

Over 1 million hectares of land in AONBs in England attract publicly funded support for their stewardship. This represents 53% of the total land designated as AONB. Consequently, these areas and the support they receive to deliver goods and services attracts significant public interest, locally and nationally.

The UK's exit from the EU has sharpened the interest of domestic taxpayers in how support to agriculture is provided and in what form. With future funding for agricultural support and landscape conservation and enhancement coming from domestic government, most likely the same department, it is essential that agricultural and landscape policies are fully integrated and designed to complement each other in the delivery of a broader vision for sustainable land management.

The opportunity presented by the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, specifically to pursue an integrated approach to sustainable land management, represents a significant step towards the government realising its ambition to be the greenest government ever. Opportunities now exist to recast our ambition for the environment, put in place a more environmentally responsible approach to land use, and reverse the decline in the environmental quality of our land, rivers, and seas.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are an important tool to help turn the ambition into reality.

First principles

Our approach to delivery is framed within our primary purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty and articulated through the AONB management plan.

The AONB management plan is a place-based plan derived through local consensus. It seeks to define the approach to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB through the application of local solutions to local challenges that also respect the national and international importance of the AONB. It is a plan for the AONB, not just the Partnership or Conservation Board.

The AONB Family supports the development of a new overarching UK agricultural policy framework within which devolved policies tailored to local needs can be designed. We recognise that the annual investment in farm support by the taxpayer will be under much closer scrutiny than ever before and benefits to society will need to be more clearly defined and understood. On account of the disproportionate level of public goods provided by designated landscapes (AONBs and National Parks) we assert the view that **these areas should be the highest priority for agri-environment and rural development spend within any new scheme.**

It is essential that we sustain and improve the supply of public goods produced by our AONBs (including, high quality landscapes, biodiversity, carbon storage, water management, opportunities for public access, enjoyment and understanding) and recognise the value of AONB partnerships and management plans in helping facilitate this.

AONB partnerships

- Recognise that agricultural systems, landscape quality, and natural beauty are mutually dependent and that existing standards of environmental legislation should be maintained, and adequate mechanisms for their enforcement and oversight should be put in place.
- Promote sustainable agriculture as paramount; an industry which improves the natural environment whilst producing food and protecting valuable resources for future generations.
- Grasp opportunities to drive demand and exploit new markets consistent with achieving more sustainable agriculture.
- Support a modern and competitive agricultural industry that's able to harness new technology and innovation.
- Recognise the need for resilience in the agricultural industry such that it can manage the risks and volatility it faces in the short, medium, and longer terms.
- Support an agricultural industry which maintains and achieves the highest food safety and animal welfare standards.

AONB partnerships supporting delivery

The following offer is based on our collective experience of working at the local and national levels. It builds on the AONB partnerships' exceptional power to convene, the trust that they have developed at the local level with farmers and land owners, and the insight they have in relation to issues of local importance. This offer represents a natural evolution of the role of the AONB designation.

We propose that

AONB management plans should provide a key framework for the development of a post Brexit agri-environment support scheme.

- AONB Management Plans are statutory documents with a democratic basis rooted in evidence based policy
- The integrated nature of AONB management plans ensures that agricultural policy is cross referenced to wider environmental, social, and economic outcomes, the outcome of which will result in more productive and prosperous rural areas
- Integrated delivery at the local level will improve opportunities for simpler, cheaper, more effective delivery
- The AONB management plan is a plan for sustainability.

The resilience and flexibility of AONB partnerships allow them to provide test-beds for new agri-environmental thinking and experimentation.

- The AONB Family will work closely with Defra in advance of March 2019 to facilitate day-one readiness
- AONB partnerships will mobilise existing networks to support the needs of farmers in less favoured areas, specifically identifying how we can help the sector adjust and adapt to changes in trade agreements

The power AONB partnerships have to convene and build consensus will allow new ideas and thinking to be tested.

- AONB partnerships will utilise their networks locally, and through the NAAONB nationally, to test thinking on the best use of funding to 2020 in order to create a solid base for rural development funding beyond 2020
- Recognising that the UK is a key market for the EU, the NAAONB will develop thinking around improving environmental standards linked to place based environmental management.

The ability of AONB teams and partnerships to be fleet of foot allows for the rapid deployment of new approaches to agri-environmental delivery.

- Utilising existing experience in business to business network development and the development of local brands and marketing AONB partnerships will support the development of markets for local products and services.

In conclusion

Farming is unique industry that both sustains people and stewards the environment for future generations. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union presents us with a once in a lifetime opportunity to rethink our approach to agriculture in the UK. However, that opportunity be missed if government takes its steer solely from agribusiness. There are many stakeholders with a legitimate interest in the United Kingdom's environment and food production systems, many of whom are represented on AONB partnerships that actively care for the 14% of England designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

If government policy intent is to be realised, both relating to the environment and agriculture, there must be no diminution of agri-environment and rural development spend in the Designated Landscapes and AONB Partnerships and Conservation Boards must have the opportunity to play a leading role in its delivery.

People care about where their food comes from and they care about what the countryside looks like. The AONB management plan helps articulate and strengthen this relationship, whilst providing a valuable platform from which we can achieve a more sustainable approach to agriculture in the UK.

The National Association for AONBs
July 2017