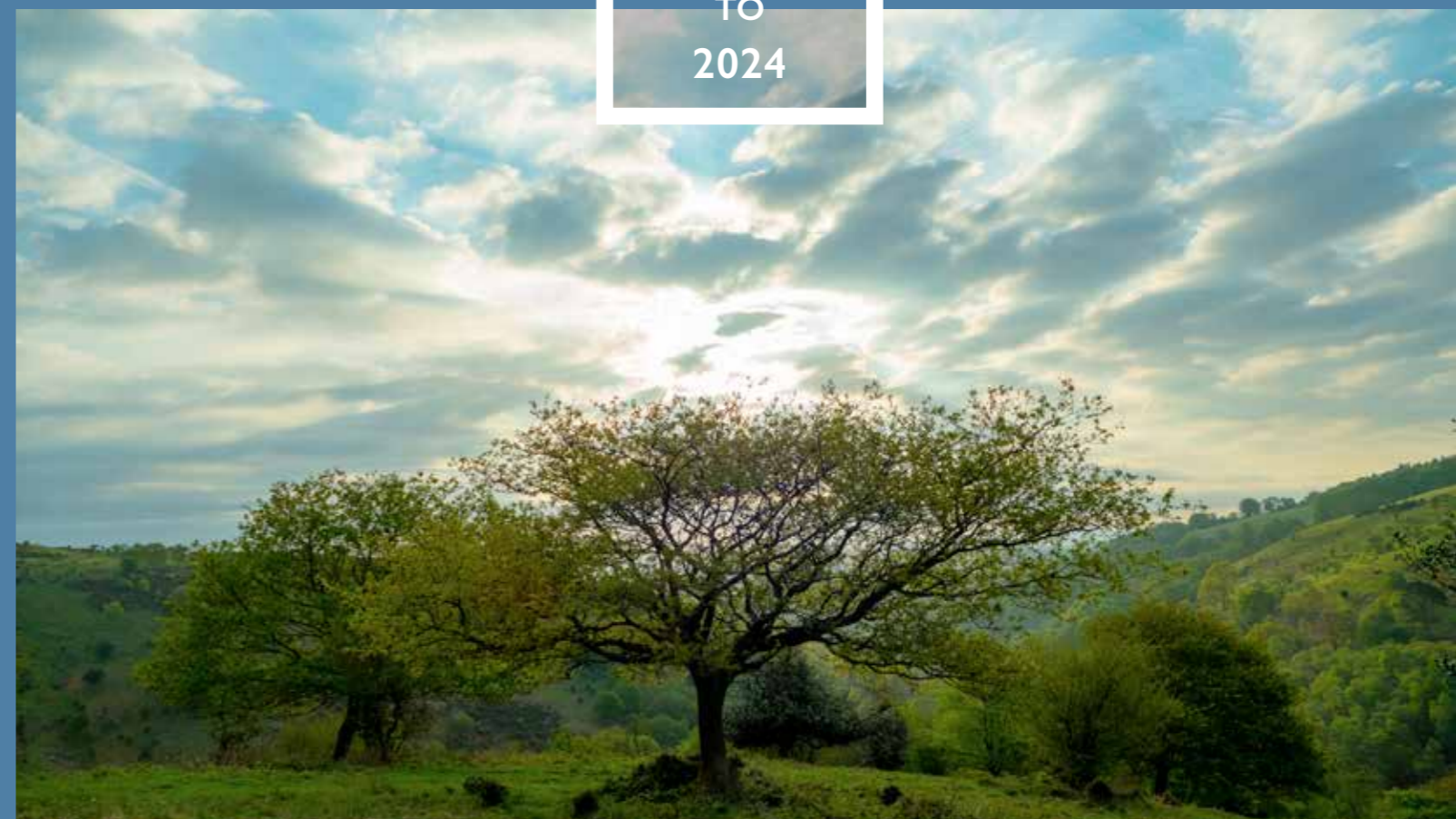




Quantock Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

MANAGEMENT PLAN

2019
TO
2024



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Quantock Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019 - 2024



Front Cover Photo ©Frank Clatworthy
Photography Competition Landscape Winner 2017

Ministerial Foreword

I am fortunate that England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit.

This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover - the first of its kind for generations - will make recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people - farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff - for the beautiful places they live and work. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the Quantock Hills AONB. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value the Quantock Hills AONB. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document, and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.



Lord Gardiner of Kimble

Lord Gardiner of Kimble
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity

Chairman's Foreword

In 2016 the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty celebrated 60 years of AONB designation. Since 1956 society has transformed almost beyond recognition, however the work and care of many people and organisations over those years means that, although subject to change, the stunning coast, heath and combes of the Quantock Hills remain outstandingly beautiful. Those who live and work here have a strong bond with the hills and alongside them the AONB partnership will continue its commitment to conserve and enhance this area into the future.

The last five years have been a challenging time for Local Authorities and the bodies they fund. The AONB Partnership has worked hard and effectively to maintain the necessary funding to carry on the work of protecting and enhancing these hills. April 2019 sees the start of a new chapter in Local Government covering the Quantock Hills AONB with two of our three District/Borough Councils - West Somerset and Taunton Deane - formally closing and a new single body, Somerset West and Taunton Council, taking their place. I hope the new council will continue to provide the AONB with as much support and engagement as it is able.

Since the last plan the health and wellbeing benefits that the environment can evoke have come to the forefront. Over the past 3 years the Somerset AONBs have been successfully running a Nature and Wellbeing Project which specifically engages with communities who are currently not accessing the Hills, but for whom access to the natural environment may be of great benefit. This is an important example of the many practical benefits that protection and enjoyment of our most beautiful countryside produces.

On the ground we have seen many AONB projects come to fruition emerging from the previous plan. There has been reinstatement and proper protective management of wildlife habitats including heathland on the hilltops, support for farmers and land managers and many events enhancing public enjoyment and understanding of the hills.

Looking forward we are excited by the prospect of submitting our final Quantock Hills Landscape Partnership bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund later in 2019 and will hear the outcome by the end of the year. The range of projects and initiatives funded if the bid is successful will complement and enhance the delivery of this Management Plan. Another significant initiative from the Quantock AONB in anticipation of Brexit is a proposal by the AONB Partnership to carry out tests/trials for a new more locally driven Environmental Land Management Scheme. Defra have indicated their support for this and we are keen to start work on scheme development once funding and guidelines are agreed.

Finally I should mention the Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs which was announced as part of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan launched last year. The Review panel is currently collecting evidence on the activities, value for money and effectiveness of National Parks and AONBs around the Country. A report is expected to be published in autumn/winter this year and it will provide the Secretary of State with recommendations for action and I have no hesitation in anticipating an endorsement of the current bodies with recommendations for greater support.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Anthony Trollope-Bellew'.

Anthony Trollope-Bellew
Chairman, Quantock Hills Joint
Advisory Committee

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The Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are special landscapes with distinctive character and natural beauty so significant that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them; there are 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) which together with National Parks make up the finest countryside in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are designated by Natural England under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. AONBs account for approximately 15% of the English landscape and are recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as part of the global network of protected areas.

Designated in 1956 the Quantock Hills became the first area in England to be confirmed as an AONB on the 1st January 1957. The responsible local authorities for the Quantock Hills AONB are Somerset County Council, West Somerset Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council (Somerset West and Taunton Council) and Sedgemoor District Council.

The designation of the Quantock Hills AONB

- Gives formal statutory recognition to this nationally important landscape;
- Requires associated local authorities to produce a statutory Management Plan for the area and revise it every 5 years;
- Requires statutory undertakers to take account of the purposes of designation when carrying out activities in the area;
- Requires special land use planning policies to apply;
- Encourages an integrated approach to land management.

A Vision for the Quantock Hills

The following statements form the Quantock Hills Vision; they describe the AONB we would like to see in twenty years' time.

- The distinctive and beautiful character and diversity of the AONB landscape is conserved, encompassing Quantock heaths, woods, farmland, parkland, coast and villages

- Biodiversity is protected and enhanced through positive management and increased connectivity between key wildlife habitats across the whole Quantock landscape and beyond
- The Quantock historic environment is protected and understood in detail and distinctive man-made elements are retained and conserved both the ordinary and the exceptional
- Design takes account of the Quantock landscape and respects and reinforces local character and scale in both redevelopment and new development affecting the AONB
- High-quality access is available across the AONB through a well maintained network of paths and open access areas
- Productive and sustainable farming and forestry businesses support and enhance the intimate scale, historic character and biodiversity of the Quantock Hills
- Sustainable levels of Quantock tourism and recreation maintain public enjoyment of the AONB and contribute to the local economy without harming landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity
- Quantock communities and pride of place are strong and involvement of local people and volunteers is extensive in managing change and protecting the area

The Plan, Partnership and Team

PLAN

The Quantock Hills AONB is nationally protected as one of the finest landscapes in the country; this Management Plan has been produced as a requirement of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to provide the statutory and policy basis for the protection and management of its natural and cultural assets. The plan builds on the previous 2014-19 Management Plan for the Quantock Hills and has been produced by the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee for the local authorities on whom the duty falls. It is designed to outline a Vision, identify the AONB's Special Qualities and provide Objectives and Management Policies for action across a range of Themes in and around the AONB, once finalised a Delivery Plan with Actions will be developed and published. Preceding Management Plans have relied heavily on working with and listening to local communities along with the strong support of Natural England and the involvement of bodies and groups with responsibilities and interests in the area. This revision to produce the 2019-24 Plan has, in turn, been subject to further consultation.

This plan is for the Quantock Hills AONB and all those who work, live and enjoy themselves in the area - in terms of guidance and inspiration however it is particularly targeted at all the partners and other organisations, individuals, groups and authorities whose work and activities have an effect on the AONB. This includes farmers, foresters and estate owners and managers, local communities and activity groups, small businesses, larger enterprises, and all "statutory undertakers", public bodies and authorities who have a duty under the CROW Act 2000 to have regard to the primary purposes of AONB designation. The Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, the Somerset Local Nature Partnership (Environmental Leaders) and the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board are notable bodies on that list.

The plan is designed to protect the Special Qualities of the AONB and help deliver the vision through bringing partners together with shared aims; defining those qualities and character elements that are special; developing policies and actions to deliver that protection; and providing a basis for public investment and funding. These elements of the plan are based on the statutory aim of protecting and enhancing natural beauty and reflect the principles of Landscape Character Guidance, Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services and Sustainable Development.

PREVIOUS PLAN ACHIEVEMENTS

The AONB Management plan underpins the work of the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership and other contributors. The plan has also influenced targeting of initiatives and funding from national and local government and agencies such as LEADER and agri-environment schemes by providing relevant and up to date evidence. The AONB Partnership, through the AONB Service, was able to attract over £1.5M in direct funding over the last 5-years.

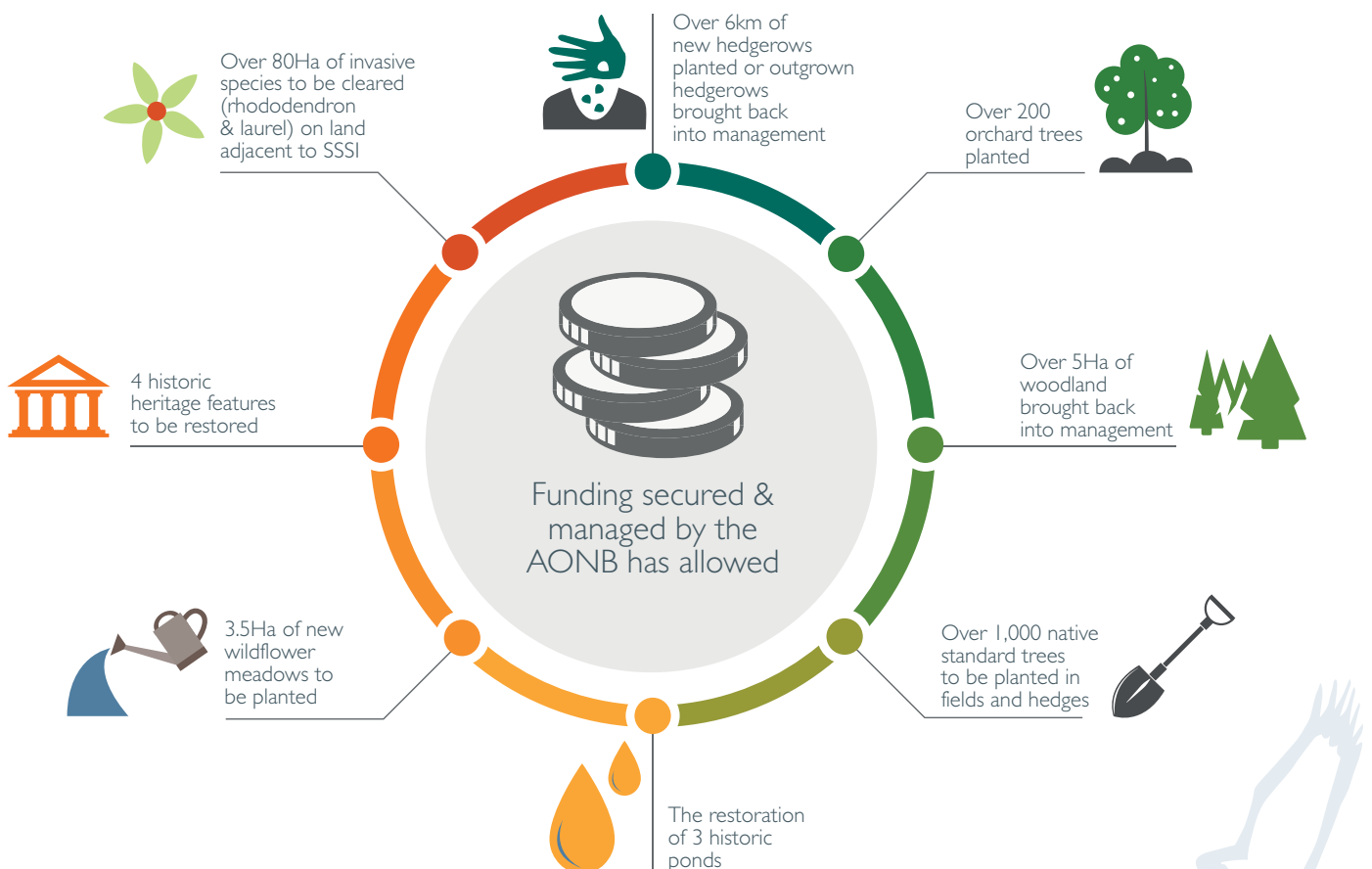
Key achievements of the Partnership guided by the Management Plan include:

- **Quantock Invasive Species Project.** 80% funded project that cleared invasive rhododendron and laurel from over 374Ha of land in the AONB removing a host source of Phytophthora ramorum from land adjacent to the SSSI heathland.
- **Delivery of Landscape Schemes through SCI06 / DCO's.** Associated with major infrastructure development, such as Hinkley Point C, the AONB Service was able to secure nearly £1m of funding and deliver a number of projects to enhance the wider landscape, through schemes such as hedgerow or orchard planting and upskilling of local communities, farmers and land owners in traditional rural skills. To date the schemes

have planted or managed 4.5km of native hedgerow, planted over 600 in-field or hedgerow trees and engaged over 180 farmers / landowners / local community members in rural skills training.

- **Natural Flood Management.** The AONB Partnership has engaged in the Natural Flood Management work being undertaken through the Hills to Levels Project targeting funding through the foothills of the AONB. The AONB Service has also led in NFM projects on the hilltops undertaking works such as woody dams, holding ponds and sediment traps.
- **Nature & Wellbeing.** Through an innovative partnership between Public Health and the core Somerset AONBs more people have engaged with the outstanding landscapes of Somerset. The project has introduced groups and individuals to the AONBs with the aim of improving physical and mental wellbeing and highlighting the correlation between a high-quality landscape and the positive impacts on people.

- **Volunteering.** During the last 4 years volunteer engagement has increased by 70% with over 4,000 volunteer hours undertaken annually. The volunteer offer has also expanded with opportunities in heritage and wildlife monitoring, community engagement and opportunities for young people.
- **Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme.** The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership was the lead partner in a successful Stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Landscape Partnership Scheme. The scheme will attract £2.6M of funding and aims to increase access to and understanding of the Quantock Hills and surrounding area.



PARTNERSHIP

The development and delivery of this Management Plan is carried out at local level and involves a wide coalition of over 100 organisations and individuals with a particular interest in the Quantocks. This broad partnership (the wider partnership or consultative bodies) receives papers and an invitation to meetings of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC); these occur at least four times a year. The JAC forms a constituted leading partnership between the County, District and Parish councils along with representatives from Natural England, Friends of Quantock organisation, the Forestry Commission, The Country Business and Landowners Association (CLA), Somerset Local Access Forum, the Quantock Commoners Association, the Federation of Small Businesses, the National Trust, and the National Farmers Union. The AONB Service reports to this body and to the smaller more technical Officers Working Group (officer representation from core funding bodies); the JAC directs the Service and acts as their watchdog.

The Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee has a purpose statement: “The Joint Advisory Committee, by working with others, aims to be the custodian of the Quantock Hills by safeguarding and enhancing their unique beauty and distinctive character for future generations”.

Significant elements of this purpose include:

- Supporting and improving the viability of the landscape, flora, fauna, community and economy of the Quantocks
- Maintaining broad consensus, agreement and involvement in the development and implementation of the Management Plan
- Further developing the partnership of the JAC and broader partnerships to include all those with an interest in the management and future of the hills
- Working through the AONB Service within achievable resources

TEAM

The AONB Service is the team responsible for delivering or supporting delivery by others of Actions that implement the Objectives and Management Policies in the plan, alongside undertaking ongoing core duties. Some team members and many delivery projects operate collaboratively (with other AONBs or organisations) to make best use of available resources.

Core team posts at the start of 2019 are:

AONB Manager,
Development Officer,
Ranger,
Partnership Ranger
(shared 50% with The Forestry Commission),
Communications and Support Officer
(part-time job-share),
Landscape Planning Officer (part time),
Volunteer Co-ordinator
(shared with other Somerset AONBs).

Externally funded project posts currently are:

Nature and Wellbeing Project Officer
(part-time, 3 AONBs),
Landscape Partnership Development Officer.

The team works with the essential and highly valued support of a large number and wide range of Volunteers.

Beyond the Quantock-specific structures in place the partnership, JAC and AONB Service are members of the National Association for AONBs, the South West Protected Landscapes Forum and Europarc, which bring together the family of protected landscapes at regional, national and European levels. Through membership of the National Association, the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership develops joint initiatives, shares experience, influences policy and lobbies for greater recognition and protection for AONBs.

National Association for AONBs: shared objectives

The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) provides a collective voice for the AONB partnerships in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It represents those involved in the planning and management of 8000 square miles of the UK's finest landscapes. The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership as a member of the NAAONB has signed up to four Common objectives:

- Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future
- Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty

- Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation
- Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and well-being



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I Significance & Background

I.1 A Special Landscape Statement of Significance (Short Form)

See appendix 2: Full Statement of Significance

The Quantock Hills AONB forms a landscape of national importance; its special qualities emerge from the land and the interaction of humans with it. Identified qualities include not only the flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features but also historic and cultural associations along with our sensory perceptions of the area such as views and tranquillity. They include the following:

- The narrow upland plateau of the Quantock Hills is the only AONB based on sandstone rocks of the Devonian Period; the hills reach a height of 381m lifting the AONB above the surrounding lowland plain and providing exceptional panoramic views
- Upland oak-woods (protected: SAC) to the north-east of the AONB that include deep stream-cut combes that climb towards small flower-rich bogs in the extensive high heathland Common (protected: SSSI) of gorse, heather, bilberry, bracken and thorn
- The Quantocks comprise one of the few remaining moorland landscapes in southern Britain of national importance for the legible survival of monuments dating from the Neolithic and especially the Bronze Age. These include numerous cairns resulting from land clearance and bowl barrows dating from around 2400 – 1500 BC, extensive crop mark evidence for settlement and land use and large-scale dramatic examples of Iron Age hill forts and smaller defended enclosures such as Dowsborough Hillfort and Ruborough Camp
- Distinctive beech hedgebanks separating the upland Commons from surrounding farmland, conifer plantations and historic parkland

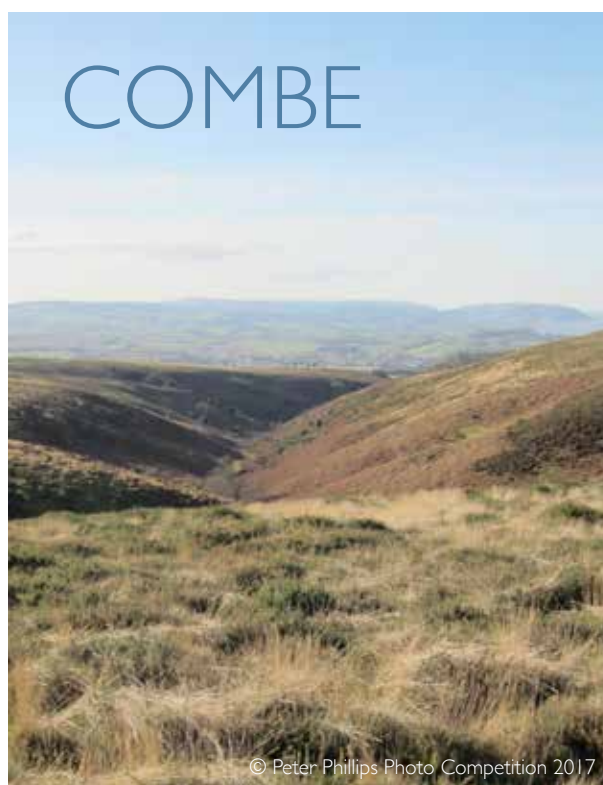


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- Hedged farmland in the southern AONB with copses rising through wide farmed combes and slopes to open hilltops of neutral grassland and scattered scrub, the northern AONB includes coastal foreshore and cliff adding to the area's landscape richness and diversity
- Significant geological interest from the hard sandstones of the hilltops to the internationally recognised fossil-rich Jurassic exposures of the coastal Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Quantock heathland - a combination of lowland and upland types protected as SSSI
- Populations of nightjar are over 1% of the total UK population - a recognised indicator of national importance
- The Ash-hazel woodland mix more Common in the southern hills allows good light levels at the woodland floor leading to a healthy ground flora in some cases including extensive bluebell cover
- Red deer, the largest free-roaming wild animals in the UK, are perhaps the most publicly appreciated element of Quantock wildlife
- The rich built heritage of the AONB based on local building materials, vernacular styles and historic architecture of individual structures and the dispersed village settlement patterns, scattered farms and lanes
- Cultural and artistic contributions include providing inspiration for Coleridge and Wordsworth when they lived on the Quantocks at the end of the 18th century and launched the romantic style of poetry which sets the tone of our current approach to natural landscapes
- The Quantock Hills AONB offers extensive opportunities for quiet outdoor recreation, the area has 3,000 hectares of public Access Land and approximately 250 kilometres (150 miles) of rights of way, 130 km within the open access hilltop area of which 80% are bridleways or restricted byways making this an exceptional area for horse riders and mountain bikers as well as walkers



- The hilltop area has a sense of space, wildness and seclusion; it is a place people value for inspiration, spiritual refreshment, exhilarating views, dark skies at night, unpolluted air, tranquillity and quiet enjoyment
- The Quantock Hills are a living, working landscape with a distinct cultural heritage and varied village communities connected by narrow roads and country lanes, it has no large settlements and is definitively rural



Benefits to Society

Natural Capital and Ecosystem Services

Alongside a descriptive recognition of the AONB's special qualities it is equally valid to assess the wide range of natural, cultural and social benefits it provides to society.

The benefits we derive from nature are technically described as 'ecosystem services', society and sustainable economic growth relies on them. These services are the flows of benefits which people gain from natural systems, and natural capital is the stock of natural ecosystems from which these benefits flow. So, a forest is a component of natural capital, while climate regulation or timber might be the ecosystem service it provides.

These benefits can be broken down as: Provisioning services provided by natural resources such as food, water, fibre, and fuel; Regulating services provided by natural systems including clean water and air, fertile soils, and climate regulation; Cultural services including recreation, cultural heritage, spiritual and aesthetic values, inspiration and education; Supporting services providing the basic infrastructure of life including soil formation, the cycling of water and nutrients, fixation of carbon by plants and the ecosystems themselves.

Some products like timber have a known financial value, but research is ongoing in other cases - such as the role of bees in pollinating crops or the storage of carbon in woodland and heathland - to understand the costs and the potential impacts of damaging them. Understanding the wide range of public benefits provided by the special landscape of the AONB can help us ensure that our natural resources and systems are properly valued into the future. Many of the objectives and Management Policies within the new Management Plan will influence the management of land and natural systems in the AONB and ensuring effective management to help sustain and improve the range and quality of public benefits (ecosystem services) flowing from the Quantock Hills is a priority.

Some key Quantock public benefits of this type are listed below. Quantock natural capital and the ecosystem services it provides are supported through Objectives and Management Policies in this Plan.

PROVISIONING SERVICES

FOOD

AONB farmers produce food including crops, dairy, beef and lamb. Game in the form of pheasant and venison is also significant.

TIMBER

Foresters in the AONB produce timber in extensive plantations, smaller-scale timber harvests come from farm woodlands.

FUEL

Woodlands, including small farm woodlands, provide fuel.

WATER SUPPLY

The AONB has an important water catchment role for Hawkridge and Durleigh reservoirs along with many private supplies. The hills form part of the upland catchment for the River Parrett.

GENETIC DIVERSITY

Local livestock breeds help maintain genetic diversity.

REGULATING SERVICES

WATER FLOW AND FLOOD RISK

Quantock heathland, porous soils and woodlands help to regulate water flow and alleviate flooding.

DISEASE AND PEST REGULATION

Healthy and diverse ecosystems are less vulnerable to pests and disease and can help regulate them.

POLLINATION

Pollination of crops is important for food supply - healthy ecosystems such as lowland heath support this service.

CLIMATE REGULATION AND CARBON STORAGE

Extensive Quantock woodland and well-managed heathland store millions of tonnes of carbon.

CULTURAL SERVICES

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The cultural history of the AONB is to some extent evident in its exceptionally coherent landscapes and historic features.

SPIRITUAL VALUES

The AONB's landscapes and tranquillity provide spiritual inspiration and enrichment from nature for many people.

AESTHETIC VALUES

The AONB is renowned for the beauty of its landscapes that have inspired poets and artists.

SENSE OF PLACE

The distinctive landform provides residents and visitors with a sense of place and cultural heritage.

EDUCATION

The AONB provides a location for educational activity particularly focused around the Outdoor Education centres at Kilve and Great Wood Camp.

RECREATION AND TOURISM

The wide-ranging open access areas and rights of way network within the AONB provide extensive recreational opportunities (visitors in turn support the local economy - 2017 estimate: £7.9m per annum)

SUPPORTING SERVICES

WILDLIFE / BIODIVERSITY

The Quantock Hills contains important and rare habitats and species and their conservation is vital to sustaining the ecosystems that deliver the range of services set out above.

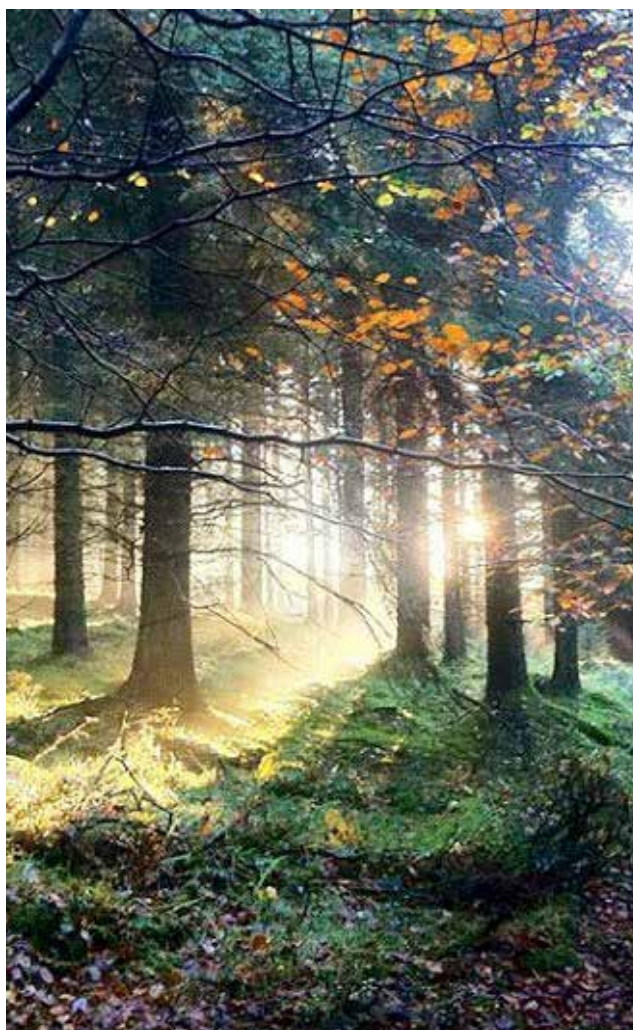
SOIL PRODUCTION

Soil formation is driven by the interaction between plants and micro-organisms and the underlying geology. Many ecosystem services depend on healthy soils.

NUTRIENT CYCLING

Plants, animals and micro-organisms play a crucial role in the cycling of nutrients essential for the delivery of ecosystem benefits.

The Quantock Hills contains important and rare habitats and species



© Ben Howells Photography Competition 2017 Runner up

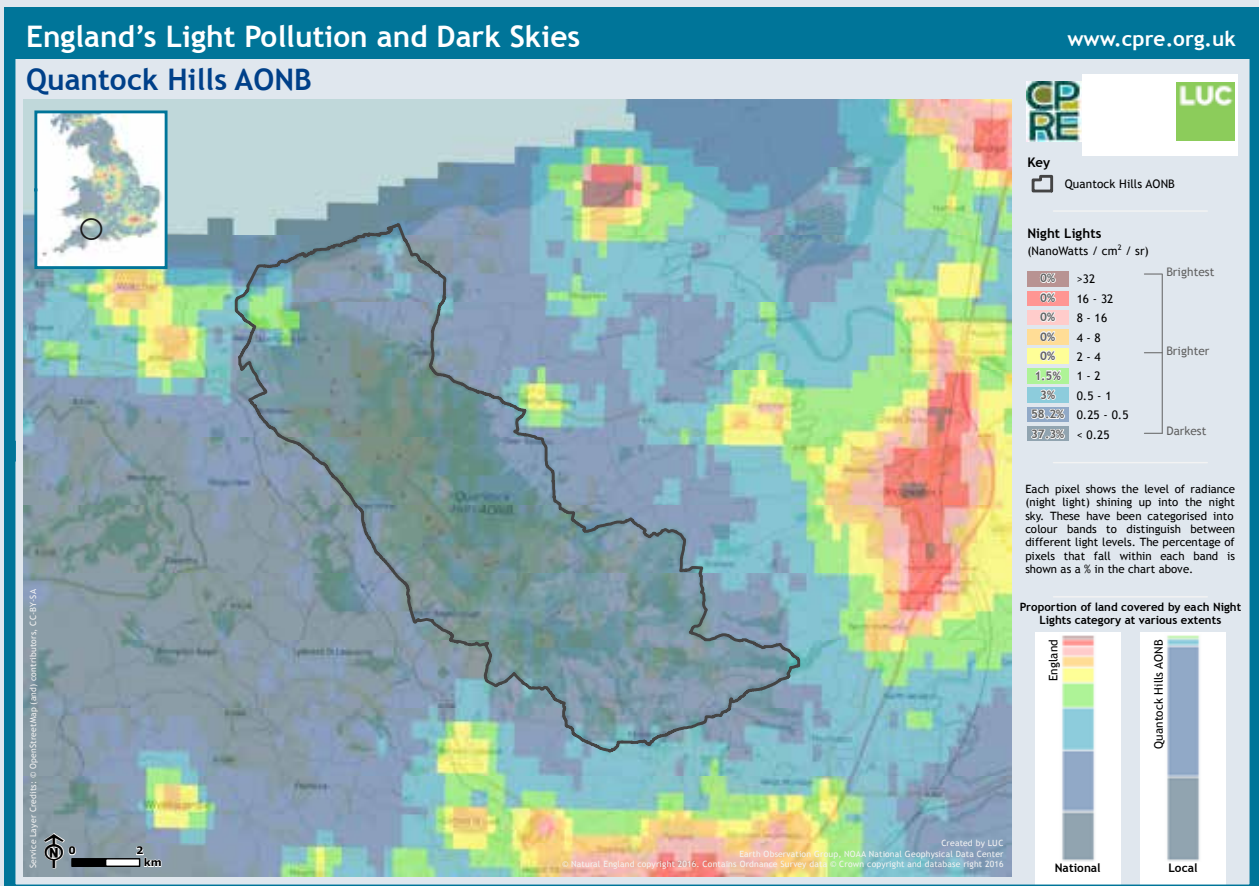
Pressures for Change

Changes affecting the Quantock Hills in twenty-first century rural Britain include the following.

New Development

Development within the Quantocks and their setting is a particularly sensitive issue, as new development can so easily change the character and landscape beauty of the area. This is recognised by Planning Authorities and reflected in statute and government guidance. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in June 2018 and along with Local Plans and emerging Neighbourhood Plans this provides planning policy for AONBs. AONB Management Plans are material considerations in planning.

A significant element of the changes development brings is the cumulative effect of comparatively minor development such as new individual structures or barn conversions - over time a series of such changes can alter the character of the wider area. Beyond the AONB boundary the towns of Bridgwater and Taunton, two of the largest towns in Somerset, are close to the AONB and both are expanding rapidly. The major development of two new nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point impacts on views from the AONB and is contributing significantly to traffic congestion on country lanes and significant light pollution from the construction site.



Leaving the European Union

Economic and policy shifts in farming and forestry continue to drive change in the Quantock landscape, and leaving the European Union will potentially change every aspect from produce markets to agri-environment schemes. The Common Agricultural Policy has never seriously focussed on environmental gain and there is significant potential for real benefit in this area. Much of the UK's environmental regulation and statutory protection is also bound-up in EU legislation and in this respect the effect of Brexit in the medium and longer term is unpredictable. Protecting the landscape character of the Quantocks within the ever-changing pressures on farming and the rural economy is a challenge however opportunities to improve wildlife and landscape (natural capital) conservation and encourage public understanding of the countryside continue to evolve.

Recreation and Access

Public benefit through enjoyment of the hills is a significant objective of this Plan. Carefully managed access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling and horse riding brings physical and mental health benefits, enabling people to enjoy a beautiful landscape, reconnect with nature and provide support to the local economy. Inappropriate levels or types of activity can however impact on the natural capital, particularly landscape beauty, tranquillity and biodiversity, of the AONB reducing others' ability to enjoy and benefit from the area. Changing policies and trends in access rights and countryside activity provide challenges and opportunities to be acted on by the partnership and AONB Service. Large developments can rapidly expand visitor numbers, examples include large increases in local housing and the increased local population for the duration of the 10-year construction phase of the new reactors at Hinkley Point.

Climate Change

There is broad scientific consensus that the global climate is changing. However, the precise nature of these changes and the consequent impacts on the special features of the AONB is complex and uncertain. Landscape, biodiversity, historic landscape condition, recreational use and farming practices will all be affected. One broad challenge is balancing current and future demand for renewable energy sources and new water storage capacity while fulfilling the duty to protect the character and beauty of (particularly upland) AONBs.

Strategic Context

The statutory purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty - this includes flora, fauna, geological and physiographic features. The term landscape also includes cultural dimensions of the landscape, including the historical, intellectual and spiritual elements as well as the physical human shaping of the land. The European Landscape Convention (ratified by the UK Government in 2006) states 'as a reflection of European identity and diversity, the landscape is our living natural and cultural heritage, be it ordinary or outstanding, urban or rural, on land or in water.'

Natural England advice, based on the Wildlife and Countryside Act, gives the following objectives for AONBs:

- *The primary purpose of AONB designation will be to conserve and enhance natural beauty*
- *Recreation will not be an objective of designation but AONBs should be used to meet the demands for recreation as far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other users*
- *In pursuing the primary objective of designation, account should be taken of the need to safeguard agriculture, forestry, other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities* (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

In the year 2000 the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act confirmed the significance of AONBs with section 85 placing a statutory (legal) duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) designates the UK's AONBs as Category V – Protected Landscape/Seascape – 'a protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value'.

More information on AONBs and their status and protection can be found on the websites of the following organisations:

Defra: www.defra.gov.uk

Natural England: www.naturalengland.org.uk

National Association for AONBs:

www.aonb.org.uk

The National Parks and AONBs Review (Glover Review)

Begun in June 2018 and lasting approximately one year, an independent panel led by writer Julian Glover is looking at how these iconic landscapes (NPs and AONBs) meet our needs in the 21st century – focused on how designated areas can boost wildlife, support the recovery of natural habitats and connect more people with nature. The review will also explore how access to these special landscapes can be improved, how those who live and work in them can be better supported, and their role in growing the rural economy.

The review will examine and make recommendations on:

- the existing statutory purposes for National Parks and AONBs and how effectively they are being met
- the alignment of these purposes with the goals set out in the 25-Year Plan for the Environment
- the case for extension or creation of new designated areas
- how to improve individual and collective governance of National Parks and AONBs, and how that governance interacts with other national assets
- the financing of National Parks and AONBs
- how to enhance the environment and biodiversity in existing designations
- how to build on the existing eight-point plan for National Parks and to connect more people with the natural environment from all sections of society and improve health and wellbeing
- how well National Parks and AONBs support communities

The review will report back to government in 2019.

THE PANEL:

Led by **Julian Glover Govt** Special Advisor, Guardian journalist, author, senior-level political speechwriter.

Nicola Blackwood Former Conservative MP, Minister for Public Health and Innovation from 2016 to 2017.

Lord Cameron of Dillington Cross-bench peer, Somerset farmer and landowner, former Chair of the Countryside Agency.

Jim Dixon Writer on countryside issues and former CEO of the Peak District National Park Authority 2002-14.

Sarah Mukherjee CEO of the Crop Protection Association and former BBC environment and rural affairs correspondent.

Dame Fiona Reynolds Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge and former Director-General of the National Trust.

Quantock Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme

Landscape Partnership Schemes are a funding programme of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). They aim to conserve areas of distinct landscape character contributing to rural regeneration and create an holistic and balanced approach to the management of landscape heritage.

In 2017 the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership successful secured a Stage One award from the HLF to further develop a Landscape Partnership Scheme. The initial area of the scheme covered not only the AONB but also the fringing farmland, which when considered under the 2015-17 Landscape Character Assessment work, was viewed as exhibiting similar distinctive landscape character as the adjoining AONB areas. The Stage two application will be submitted to HLF in the summer of 2019 and if successful will provide funding for a wide range of projects and activities supported by this Management Plan.

In November 2017 HLF announced that the Landscape Partnership Scheme, along with a number of other programme would close in 2018. At the time of writing HLF have not announced how programmes will operate in the future but have indicated that they want fewer programmes and a simplified application process. Consultation response from the Quantock Hills AONB Partnership and others in the AONB and National Parks family have indicated the success of the LPS programme at truly delivering at a landscape scale and the desire to see future programmes have the ability to fund these types of scheme into the future.

The following key documents and strategies influence the content and context of this plan:

The 25 Year Environment Plan

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) published early in 2018 is ambitious targeting cleaner air and water; protection for threatened species and richer wildlife habitats. It commits to an environment first approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing. It also announced a review of National Parks and AONBs (the Glover Review).

The following section is included on Pages 64/65 of the 25 YEP:

Conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Some of England's most beautiful landscapes and geodiversity are protected via a range of designations including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Some landscapes are also internationally recognised through UNESCO World Heritage Site and Global Geoparks status (for example the Lake District, the Cornwall and West Devon mining landscape and the North Pennines). Collectively, they comprise some of our unique, most cherished and valuable natural assets. Over the next 25 years we want to make sure they are not only conserved but enhanced. Many of the policies set out in the rest of the Plan will contribute to making all areas more beautiful. In this section, we focus mainly on the designated areas.

European Landscape Convention

The ELC was signed by the UK government in February 2006 and became binding in March 2007. The convention was created by the Council of Europe and promotes landscape protection, management and planning, and European co-operation on landscape issues. The convention highlights the need to recognise landscape in law, to develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes, and to establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies. It also encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies.

Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network by Professor Sir John Lawton (Sept 2010)

The review proposes that England's ecological network must deliver "more, bigger, better and joined up" habitats to help ensure ecological recovery for our terrestrial wildlife sites. The document identifies Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as having great potential "to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network" through projects and activities that:

- Improve the quality of current wildlife sites by better habitat management
- Increase the size of existing wildlife sites
- Enhance connections between sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones'
- Create new sites
- Reduce the pressure on wildlife by improving the wider environment

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011)

This strategy builds on the White Paper and directs biodiversity policy for the next decade. The mission is: "*To halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.*" It identifies a series of priority outcomes for habitats, ecosystems,

species and engaging people and AONB Partnerships are expected to assist delivery of a number of Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) June 2018

In March 2012 (revised June 2018) The National Planning Policy Framework replaced the majority of previous Planning Policy Statements significantly reducing the amount of policy and guidance available to planning authorities. The importance of protected landscapes is recognised in para 172: "*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues*".

National Character Areas (NCAs)

Natural England has produced National Character Area profile documents for each of the 159 NCAs in England. NCA 144 Quantock Hills covers most of the AONB with the exception of the coastal zone and some AONB boarder farmland which fall into NCA 146 Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fringes. The NCA documents include environmental data, analysis of the ecosystem services, and **Statements of Environmental Opportunity** (SEOs) setting out broad opportunities for the future. Quantock SEOs are:

SEO ONE:

Protect, manage and enhance the landscape of wild and open summits, wooded combes and rolling fields, which support a wide variety of habitats and species, helping to regulate water quality and flow, protecting soil structure and storing carbon

SEO TWO:

Protect and maintain the many heritage assets, from prehistoric monuments to 19th century farmsteads, the wealth of geodiversity, the dark skies, and the sense of tranquillity and remoteness found throughout the area, which contribute strongly to the sense of history, recreation and enjoyment of the Quantocks landscape

SEO THREE:

Reinforce and protect the rural and historic character of the agricultural landscape with its distinctively sparse settlement character; scattering of isolated farmsteads, tiny hamlets and small villages. Protect and manage the longstanding agricultural land use for its important role in the local economy, for the habitats it supports and to ensure that it contributes to the regulation of soil and water

SEO FOUR:

Sustainably manage the high visitor pressure associated with this distinctive landscape to ensure that the numerous recreation, education, access and health opportunities continue to be enjoyed by the local community and visitors alike

For a more comprehensive list of strategic context documents see the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) associated with this plan.

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Setting out opportunities for the future of the Quantock Hills

2 Themes

2.1 Landscape Character and Quality

AIM

That the beautiful character, special qualities and diversity of the AONB landscape are understood, conserved and where possible enhanced

a) Significance

The primary purpose of AONB designation is “to conserve and enhance natural beauty”, at its most fundamental level this refers to the protection of the landscape’s character and quality¹(or condition). The European Landscape Convention (ELC) adopts a definition of landscape that is now being widely used in many different situations: *‘Landscape is an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’* It also states that *‘the landscape is an important part of the quality*

of life for people everywhere: in urban areas and in the countryside, in degraded areas as well as in areas of high quality, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty as well as everyday areas’.

In this nationally protected landscape adopting the Landscape Character Approach is a significant step towards providing guidance and advice and adopting management policies based on a real understanding of the shape, nature and character of this special landscape. Importantly it identifies what makes one area of the Quantocks different from another (given the variety of character in a relatively small area). Understanding the key characteristics of the landscape and the sense of place it provides the articulation of the special qualities of the Quantock Hills and scrutinises in detail the landscape that we are working to protect.

Understanding the character of the landscape also allows informed judgements to be made about vulnerability and threats. As a nationally protected area the Quantock Hills are



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¹Landscape quality or condition is based on judgements about the physical state of the landscape, and about its intactness, from visual, functional and ecological perspectives. It also reflects the state of individual features and elements which make up the character in any one place (Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) (2013), *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition*, London: Routledge).

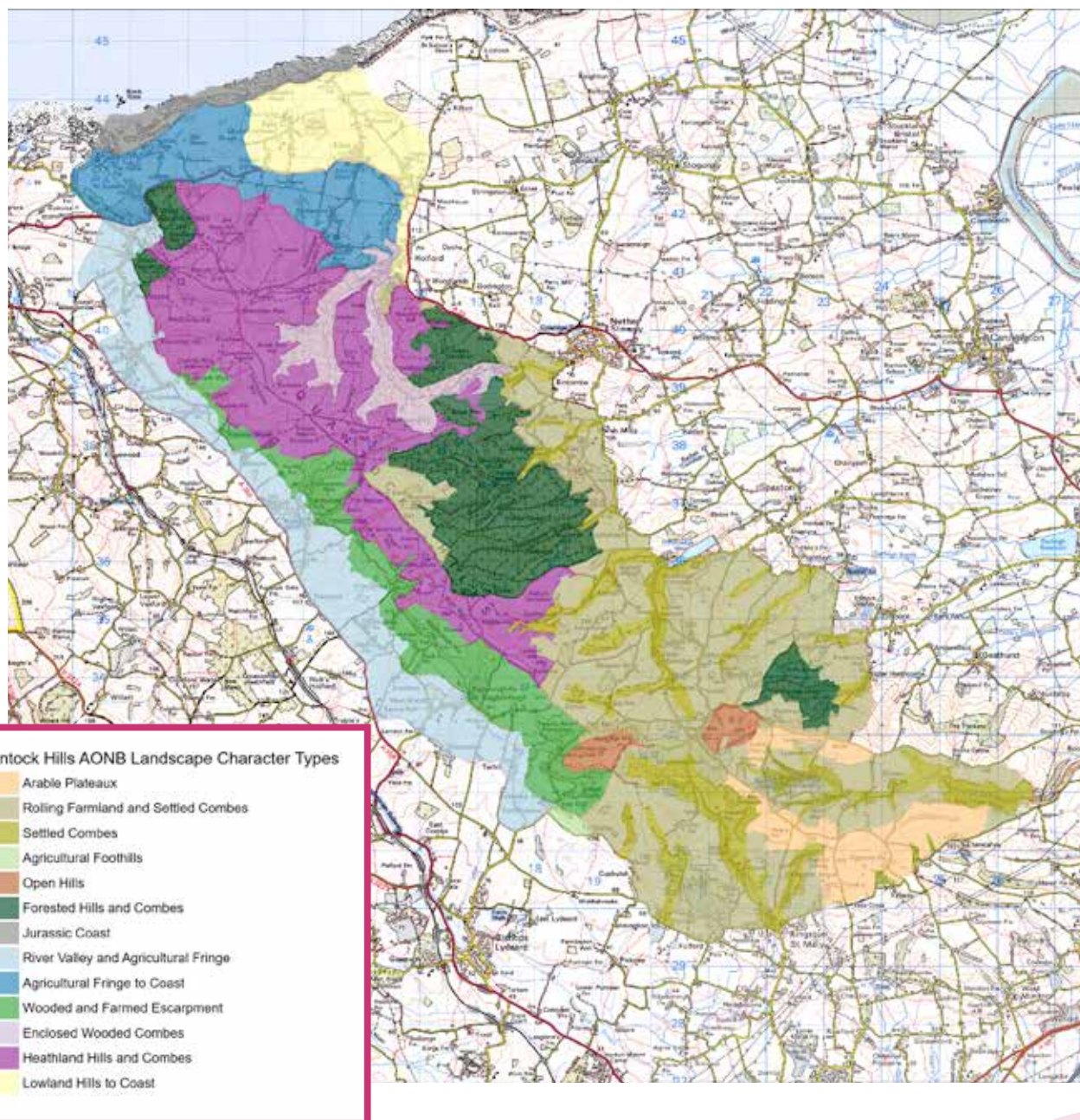
inherently sensitive but landscape vulnerability can also vary according to the particular type of change. Understanding sensitivity allows us to understand the capacity of Quantock Hills landscapes to accommodate change without detrimental effects on the character and quality of this special place.

In January 2003 the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) published a significant document for the Quantock Hills - The Quantock Hills Landscape, An assessment of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ISBN 0 86170 617 X). This assessment

describes why the AONB is of national importance providing analysis of the landscape, history and perceptions of the Quantocks.

The new map-based AONB Landscape Character Assessment draws on that Countryside Agency document along with Natural England's National Character Area profiles for the AONB. The Quantock Hills AONB Landscape Character Map 2017 from the new Landscape Character Assessment (Quantock Hills AONB Service, Emma-Jane Preece 2017) is shown here.

The Quantock Hills AONB Landscape Character Map 2017



Since the previous Management Plan, the AONB Service has focussed on the integration of landscape character into its work by digitally mapping Landscape Type and Character Area boundaries at a scale of 1:25,000 based on desk and field survey. In the full document this Landscape Character Map is accompanied by current descriptions of perceptual character (what the landscape looks like today) and initial assessments have been made in respect of landscape quality. Issues and threats to landscape character have been identified and broad level landscape character visions have been developed as to allow the AONB Service and others to prioritise areas for landscape conservation and enhancement work.

In 2018, as part of the Stage 1 development of the Heritage Lottery Fund Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), further work was done to define the landscape character and special qualities of the area and how they link to the landscape of the surrounding parishes.

The AONB Service will continue to add to the landscape character descriptive material looking in more detail at the natural or physical attributes of the landscape types such as geology, soils, climate and hydrology, and perhaps exploring cultural associations linked to landscape character – such as the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth.

b) Threats and Opportunities

A significant threat to the AONB's special qualities is the accumulation of incremental changes undermining landscape character cohesion. These are impacts from land use change and small scale development activity (often under permitted development regulations), insensitive highways infrastructure and signage.

Larger-scale harmful changes to the character of the setting of the hills and adverse effects on views into and out of the AONB result from changing lowland farming practices and development at a range of scales, from major infrastructure projects such as Hinkley Point C

and major urban fringe extensions to individual barn conversions in prominent eye-catching locations.

Specific landscape threats include changes to sensitive skylines and the decline or loss of landscape features that are key characteristics of the landscape such as beech hedgebanks. In the Quantocks banks of earth (some stone-faced) surmounted by rows or double rows of beech trees, which historically were laid but have in most cases been allowed to grow into standards, form a highly structural element of the protected landscape. These features have lost their practical agricultural purpose and are under significant threat of being uprooted during stormy weather from a combination of their own weight and their unbalanced nature.

Decline in quality and condition is adversely affecting natural beauty in some areas due to illegal and anti-social activities including littering, fly-tipping, and inappropriate off-road vehicle use.

AONB development of the Quantock Landscape Character Assessment can be effectively used to illustrate special qualities, evaluate landscape quality and develop guidance and policies.

Through various funding schemes there are opportunities to promote the development of traditional skills for landscape management that is sensitive to landscape character.

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme is being developed to address landscape threats and opportunities in and around the AONB; if the stage 2 submission is successful in 2019 it will be a major but time-limited source of funding for this work (2020 – 2025).

c) Landscape Objective

LI: To encourage and deliver understanding, conservation and enhancement of the character and quality of the AONB landscape through land use and development management that supports its special qualities.

d) Management Policies

LPI: To protect, understand and enhance the landscape and character of the AONB and support those delivering these elements.

LP2: To promote the highest standards of landscape management in respect of landscape beauty, natural capital and ecosystem services for all land uses.

LP3: To encourage public understanding and support for landscape conservation and enhancement.

LP4: To further develop, promote and utilise the landscape character approach in AONB management and policy, including development of LCA-based design guidance.

LP5: To continue to offer landscape character advice to Local Planning Authorities in strategic and development management consultations.

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Land Management: Farming, Forestry and Catchment

AIM

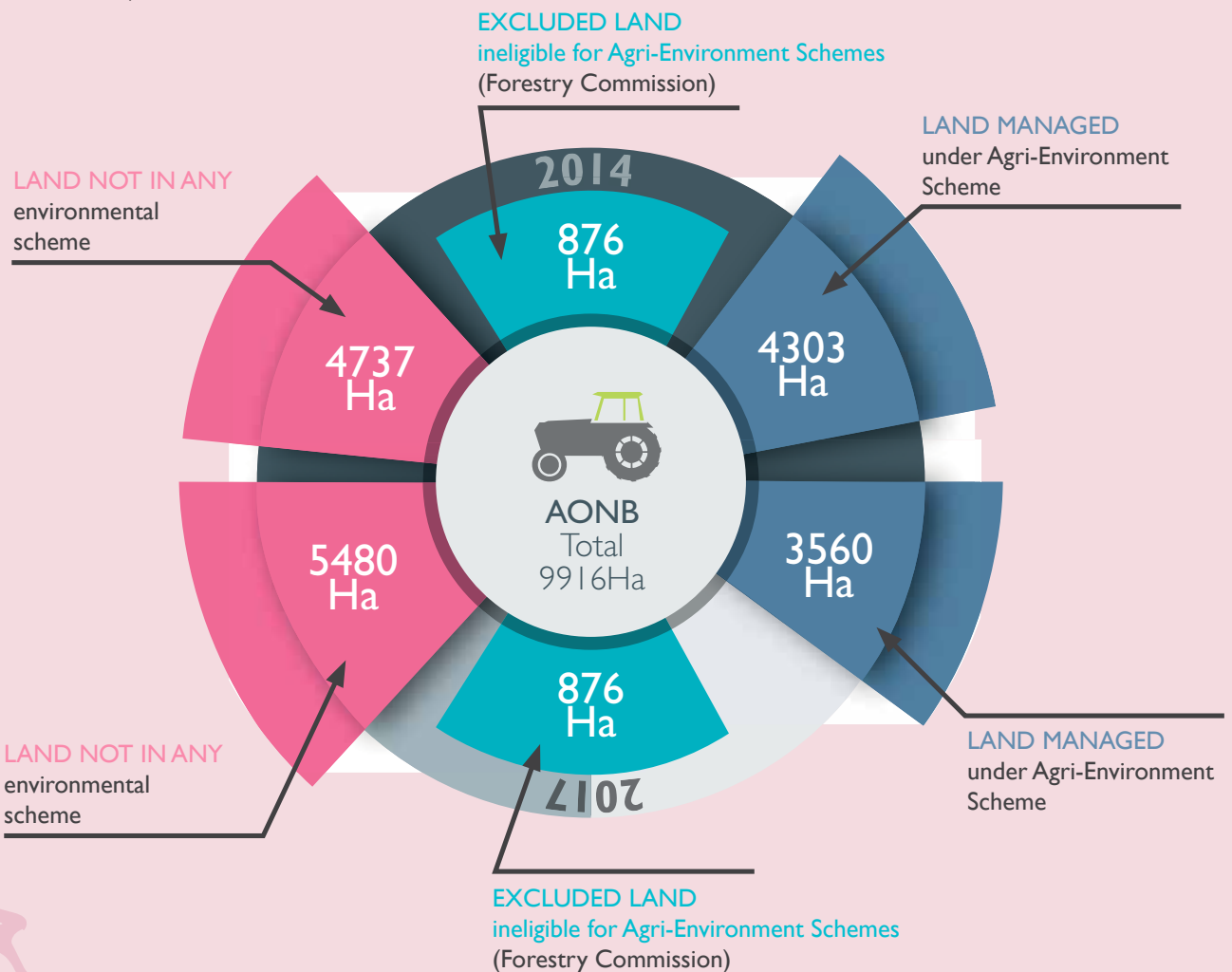
Productive and sustainable farming and forestry businesses supporting and enhancing the landscape beauty, historic character, biodiversity and water management of the Quantock Hills

a) Significance

The highly valued and protected Quantock landscape has been created through the interaction of local geology and landform with thousands of years of land management by people. From the early (prehistoric) clearing of forests with soil exhaustion creating open heathland, to field-creation (enclosures) on lower richer soils and creation of plantations to supplement remaining woodland, the story of Quantock land-management is displayed in its landscape.

Heathland, farmland, coast, forest and woodland within the Quantock Hills AONB are highly significant natural capital in landscape, wildlife, water management, recreational and economic terms – it is critical for the special qualities of the AONB that the landscape, habitat quality and diversity of these areas is maintained and enhanced through appropriate land management. In respect of ecosystem services, the natural benefits provided by healthy ecosystems, it is the management of the land that fundamentally determines whether the potential benefits - from carbon storage to natural flood management, and from timber to the health benefits of access to natural environments - are available.

There are approximately 80 commercial agricultural holdings in the AONB covering 70% of the total; this number rises significantly when the surrounding area is included. Farming includes lowland grazing livestock farms (68% by number of farms) and Less Favoured Area (LFA) grazing livestock farms (8% by number).



The main land use is permanent grassland (53% of the farmed area) and 80% of farms are under 100ha in size (51% are under 20ha).

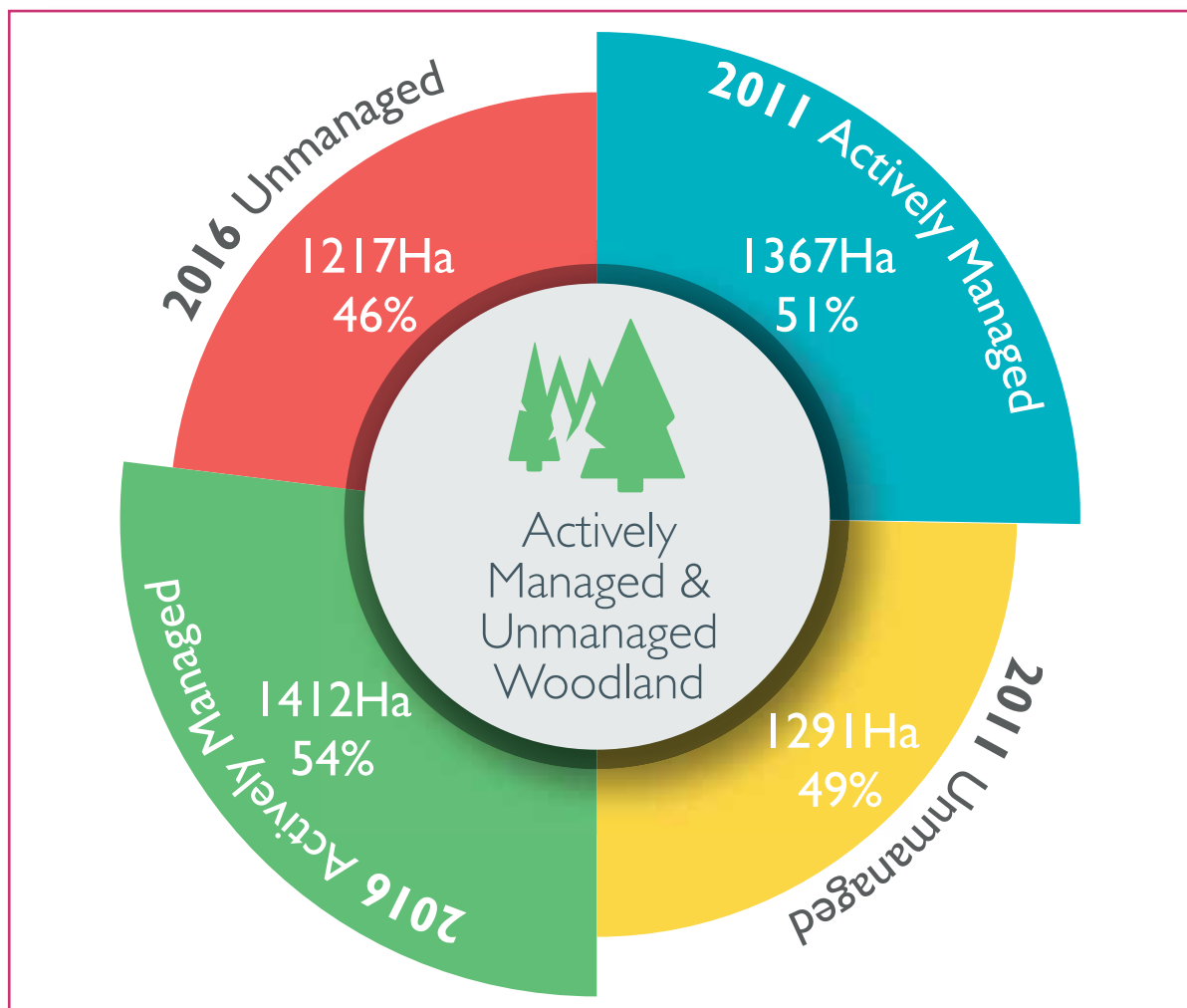
Over 80% of the land in the AONB (excluding the coastal fringe) falls into agricultural categories 3, 4 or 5 making it moderate to poor land for cropping and 27% of this area is wooded with half the woodland recorded as ancient (over two thirds of this is ancient re-planted). Almost half the area is designated a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone. In 2009 81% (2,690ha) of the farmed area was grass and uncropped land with 11% (364ha) in cereals.

The AONB includes 1,567ha of broadleaved woodland, 863ha of coniferous woodland, 83ha of mixed woodland, totalling 2670ha (approx. 25% of the AONB area) including small additional felled and planting prepared areas. 1,412ha (54%) are managed, 1,217ha (46%) unmanaged.



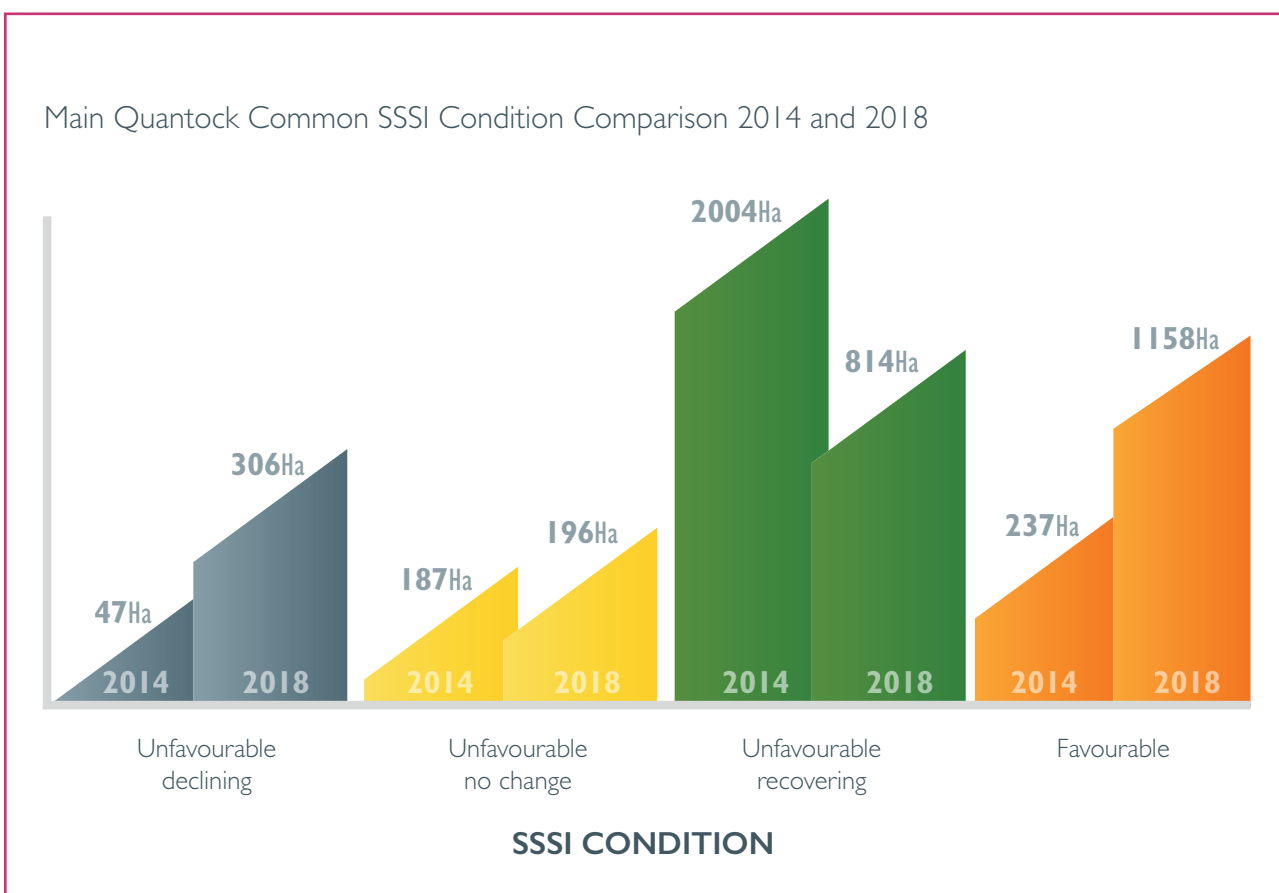
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NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT



Agri-environment payments plus single payment in the Quantock Hills AONB amounts annually to an estimated figure in excess of £3.5m and agri-environment schemes have been a particularly important tool for conservation in the Quantock Hills. In 2015 over 48% of the utilisable agricultural land area in the Quantock Hills was in a Higher Level Stewardship agreement. This figure does not include woodland grants or agreements under the latest Countryside Stewardship Scheme. A water catchment is a whole system; rivers are highly interlinked and flooding in lowlands may be a result of local conditions and activities upstream affecting surface run-off.

As the geography, biology and water cycle of every catchment is unique, Natural Flood Management (NFM) plans are tailored to specific areas using expert and local knowledge. There is compelling evidence that natural flood management projects can make a significant contribution to managing and reducing downstream flood risk. NFM interventions can also significantly improve local environments by creating wildlife habitats, reducing pollution in rivers, creating recreational space and even increase property values and economic potential.







During the winters and springs of 2016-18 the Quantock Hills AONB Service undertook works on land at Lydeard Hill and Aisholt Common with the aim of reducing water flow speeds, volume and run-off and addressing sediment loss and erosion in these priority Quantock habitats. These Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are sensitive habitats and it has been apparent that during high intensity rain events water is able to flow off the land quickly and form gullies or use existing tracks. This has led to erosion of the tracks, sediment / soil loss and flooding further downstream in Durborough and West Bagborough. With guidance from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG-SW) the AONB Service developed a series of works aimed at shedding water from the tracks and gullies onto adjacent pasture land and creating pond areas to store excess water. Works

were completed with minimal disruption to the landowners and visiting public and early indications are that the cross-drains are working well with no flow patterns or stone wash out and woody dams appear to be working, though build-up of sediment is slow on some.

Launched in April 2018 the Quantock Hills Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund has brought together a group of farmers and landowners from around the AONB. The AONB Service is a supporting partner to FWAG in coordinating this Stewardship-based initiative bringing farmers/ landowners together to achieve landscape-scale improvements in the natural environment of the Quantocks. The project runs for the next 3 years and will be driven by the ideas and requests of its farmer/ landowner membership to deliver site visits, demonstrations, workshops and trials relevant to the Quantock landscape and conditions.

Quantock Hills Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund

			
Farm Buildings	Grassland	Heathland	Woodland
Maintenance of traditional buildings	Grassland for wildlife	Heathland management	Assessing your woodlands potential
Managing water in the yard	Surface water management in field		Ancient woodland in the landscape
Managing manures	Improving soil structure, biology and resilience		Woodland creation
	Monitoring soil health		Agroforestry, sheep and woodlands
	Improving grazing management planning		Woodland biodiversity
	Using hedgerows to control flood water		

The level of funding is dependent on the number of farmers who join the group and the group receives £500 for each member. The group controls the budget and decide how it is spent as long as it meets the requirements of the fund that it supports group events. This can include kitchen table meetings, practical demonstrations, village hall meetings or field trips. The events have to focus on the priorities for Countryside Stewardship; subjects that the Quantock Group may cover are shown in the table on page 29.

b) Threats and Opportunities

The ability of farmers and foresters to manage this landscape in such a way that its most valued wildlife and landscape features and other benefits to society are sustained is tied to the financial viability of appropriate land management practices. It remains difficult for many farmers to maintain their incomes from farming alone. This is a particular problem for small and medium sized farms making it a real threat to the intimate scale of the Quantock farmed landscape. Widening economic activities (diversification) is essential in many cases but can further impact on the character of the AONB, diversification takes a range of forms including on-farm food processing, farm shops and "pick your own" enterprises, non-agricultural businesses on-farm (including tourism) and working off the farm.

Post Brexit the current agri-environment schemes and on a larger financial scale the Single Payment Scheme will end after a transition period. This is a very significant threat to the continued protection and enhancement of Quantock wildlife, habitats and landscapes. Different iterations of Stewardship agri-environment schemes and English Woodland Grant Schemes over the last 25 years have significantly enhanced the landscape, wildlife and historic features of the AONB.

The same-age nature of the trees in the upland oakwoods may be of concern. Much of the woodland cover represents regrowth of coppice last cut seventy years ago or more. While it is likely that future storm events will

introduce age/structural variation into these woodlands, it is not clear if intervention (felling/coppicing) is required to accelerate this process. The Exmoor & Quantock Oakwoods are designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and under the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) a Site Improvement Plan (SIP) was developed for the Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods in 2014. The SIP can be seen at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6214125369688064>

Ash woodland is a very significant element of the AONB landscape and biodiversity particularly in the southern hills and farmland fringe. Infection by the fungus *Chalara fraxinea* causing Ash Dieback has reached the AONB, resulting in the loss of some of the ash population, but its full impact cannot yet be quantified. Other diseases and pests are expected to impact on the AONB landscape in the future - *Phytophthora ramorum* has already seriously affected Larch, and other strains can be a particular threat to Bilberry, Sweet Chestnut and Beech.

The Forestry Commission working with the AONB partnership has achieved some heathland reversion in the AONB and the possibility of further reversion is under discussion. Opportunities to work with private plantation owners/managers in the AONB can provide recreational access and other benefits.

There is a potential opportunity provided by Brexit, the government have made it clear that future agricultural subsidy will be more reliant on environmental outcomes and have invited proposals for trial schemes from relevant bodies. The Quantock Hills AONB Partnership has proposed a comprehensive scheme that would deliver across the six key policy areas identified by Defra and a geographical area larger than the AONB. This scheme aspires to bring together landscape, biodiversity, ecosystem and cultural benefits with economic business sustainability. The agreements would be bespoke and flexible, empowering farmers, foresters and other land managers rather

than imposing top-down prescriptions. This proposal is being considered by Defra as one of a number of AONB proposals backed by the National Association of AONBs.

Further opportunities may arise from a developing initiative called Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) where identified public benefits from the natural environment (e.g. carbon storage or flood control) can be funded from public or private sector interests.

c) Land Management Objective

LMI: To support sustainable land management to improve and extend the special wildlife, landscape and ecosystem services of Quantock Commons and farmland.

d) Management Policies

LMP1: To protect, maintain and where appropriate extend the dry acid grassland, acid flushes/mires, open moorland and upland oakwoods with their important bird assemblage, of Quantock Common.

LMP2: To encourage and support the positive management of Quantock farmland, woodland and water catchment through engagement with the development and delivery of a high quality locally responsive land management scheme.

LMP3: To support the understanding, conservation and proper management of Quantock hedges and associated banks.

LMP4: To support the sensitive management of woodland and plantations to enhance and extend the distinctive character, landscape and wildlife of the Quantocks.

LMP5: To encourage and support the creation and positive management of privately owned woodland and orchards, bringing more into management to increase the wide range of ecosystem services provided.

Swaling on the Quantock Common



Biodiversity: Wildlife and Habitats

AIM

That biodiversity is protected in the AONB and further enriched through positive management and increased connectivity between key wildlife habitats across the whole Quantock landscape

a) Significance

The Quantock Hills AONB is a place where people can connect with nature. It offers fantastic opportunities for people to learn more about the natural world, and enjoy the benefits of connecting with it. Every year hundreds of people are involved in volunteering activities to survey wildlife and improve habitats in these hills. Activities provided by the AONB Service, National Trust, Forestry Commission and others help people of all ages and abilities to enjoy unforgettable experiences that bring them closer to our wildlife.

The combination of geology, landform, soils and historic land use in the Quantocks has resulted in a wide range of semi-natural and farmed habitats in close proximity, this makes the AONB a biodiversity resource of the highest significance.

Launched in August 2011 the government's 'Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services' sets out the essential justification for protecting and enhancing biodiversity:

"Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value. A number of ground-breaking studies such as the National Ecosystems Assessment (NEA) have shown this... is the building block of our 'ecosystems'. These provide us with a wide range of goods and services that support our economic and social wellbeing... Biodiversity also provides important cultural services, enriching our lives."

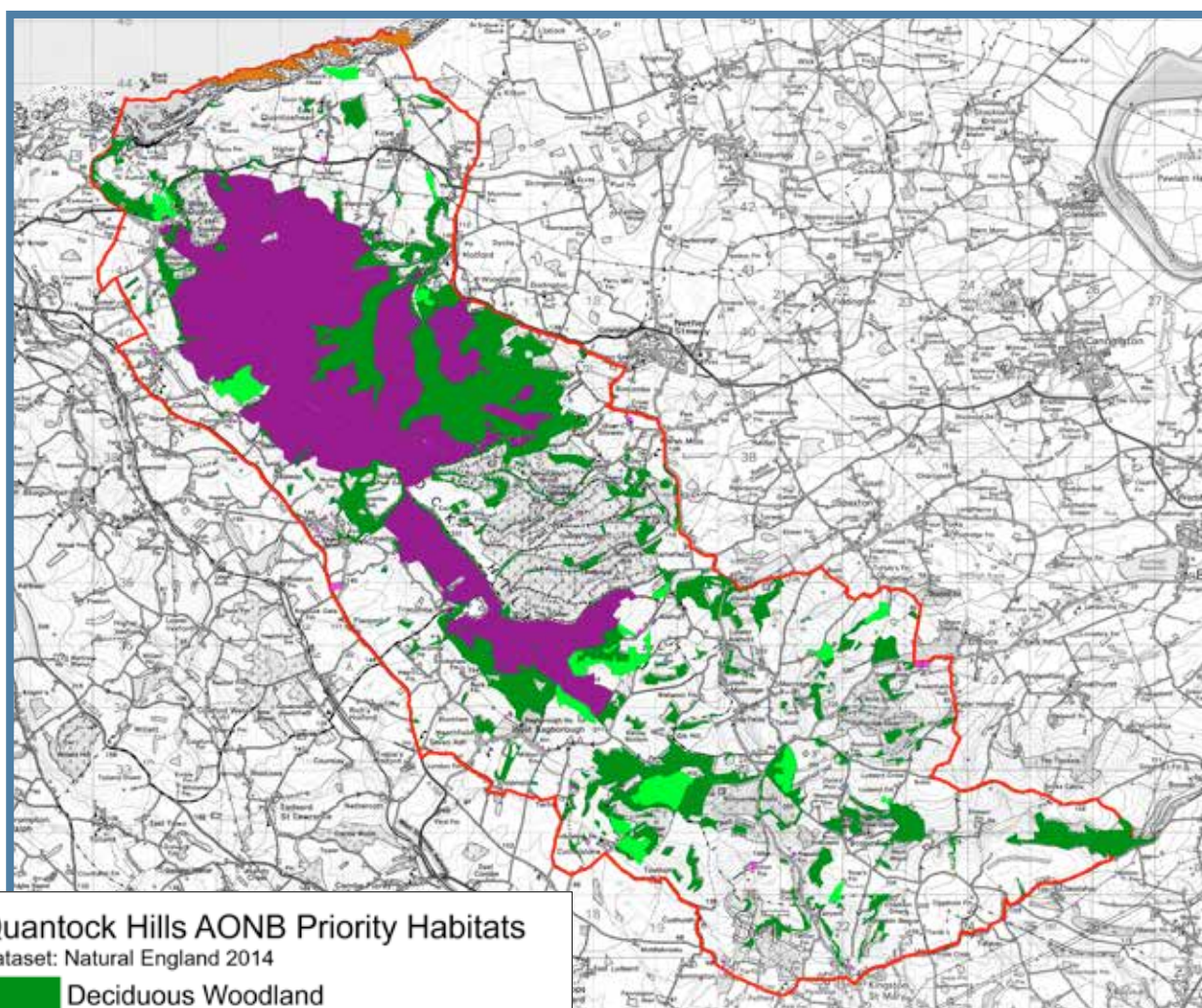


The 25 Year Environment Plan launched by government in February 2018 robustly addresses biodiversity issues in respect of protection for threatened species and richer wildlife habitats. It commits to an environment first approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fishing.

Nature designations in and around the AONB include the main hilltop Quantocks SSSI, Ge-Mare Farm Fields SSSI, Blue Anchor to Lilstock Coast SSSI, Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods SAC, and just outside the southern border the Hestercombe SAC. Details of these sites and much more information can be found by searching at <https://magic.defra.gov.uk>

The Quantock Hills AONB includes examples of 6 different priority habitats as identified in S41 of the Natural Environment White Paper and published in national inventories. These habitats are conservation priorities because of their rarity and rate of decline:

- Upland heathland - 1,448 ha
 - Broadleaved mixed & yew woodland - 1,084 ha
 - Lowland heathland - 539 ha
(1% of UK total - 0.2% of global total)
 - Lowland dry acid grassland - 186 ha
 - Blanket Bog - 15 ha
 - Lowland meadows - 12 ha
- Source: Natural England (2011)



Quantock Hills AONB Priority Habitats

Dataset: Natural England 2014

- Deciduous Woodland
- Heath (lowland and upland)
- Grassland
- Traditional Orchards
- Mudflats
- Maritime cliffs

Further small but significant areas of priority habitat are present in the coastal strip of the AONB. The Quantock Hills Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2009 forms a management and monitoring tool for land managers and the JAC, it includes Habitat Action Plans including Lowland Heath and Upland Oak Wood, and Species Action Plans for nightjars, adders and waxcaps.

Quantock heathland and upland oak woodland habitats together form one of the most extensive areas of semi-natural habitat in south west England and fall chiefly within the main Common "CL10". They are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the oak woodland is listed at European level, along with parts of Exmoor, as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Between 1990 and 2002 the AONB Joint Advisory Committee established a partnership of interests called the Commons Management Group and with the support of English Nature (now Natural England) the AONB Service started working at a landscape scale with these key habitats. In 2002 the AONB Service developed and led an ambitious partnership project that successfully achieved the largest Countryside Stewardship agreement in the south west, again working at landscape scale but covering the large northern block only. This agreement is managed through a group including Quantock Commoners, landowners, the AONB Service and Natural England and has directed the active management of the area since 2002, with a new Higher Level Stewardship agreement taking over in 2012. The southern area of the Common was also brought into a stewardship scheme during this time.

In 2009 the failure of 71% of the main Quantock SSSI to meet the government condition target of 'favourable' or 'unfavourable recovering' was seen as a very significant threat. The 2018 survey results show that a significant % of the SSSI has improved in condition, with over 1100Ha now being classed as in favourable condition. This covers 46.8% of the site, compared to the 9.57% favourable in the previous Natural

England assessment (2014). Large areas of open heath and grassland are in good condition due to the small scale rotational swaling (controlled winter burning) programme, extensive grazing and bracken control that is working well. There are still challenges facing some areas of the SSSI that were found to be in unfavourable condition. Scrub invasion, bracken spread and track erosion are significant issues in some units. The woodlands were not assessed in the latest round of surveys.

Other significant wildlife sites in the AONB include the enclosed mantle of grazed pasture, hedgerows, arable land and historic parkland with veteran trees along with southern hilltops at Cothelstone Hill and Broomfield Hill. The coastal edge of the AONB, designated as SSSI largely for its Triassic and Jurassic geology, including foreshore and cliff habitats supports specific ranges of flora and fauna, primarily due to the alkaline, limestone cliffs. Specialised cliff-top biodiversity includes orchids, limestone grassland and invertebrates. These important habitats are recognised as a Local Wildlife Site.

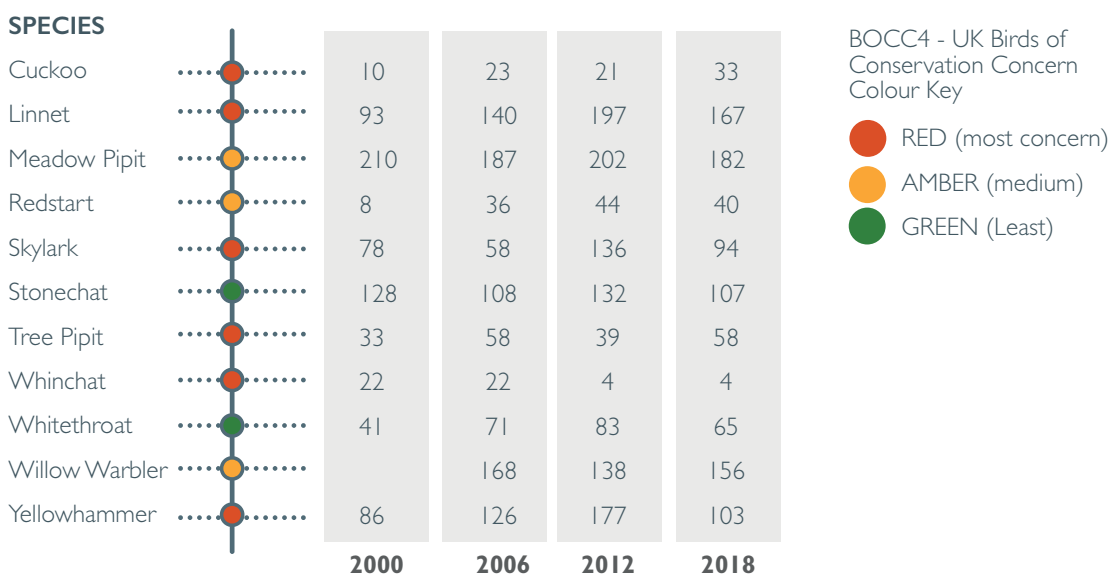
Nationally red deer are thriving, they are the largest free-roaming wild animals in the UK and their continued presence in the Quantocks has strong local support. While lower than in previous years deer numbers in recent annual surveys run by the Quantock Deer Management and Conservation Group show a fairly steady population, although numbers of mature stags may be low. Periodic reductions in red deer numbers can allow recruitment of saplings in woodland if the reduction in grazing lasts long enough for young trees to exceed 1.8 metres in height.

b) Threats and Opportunities

The State of Nature Report 2016 produced by a partnership of over 50 nature conservation organisations reported that "Large-scale loss of habitats such as lowland heathland (80%) and unimproved neutral grassland (97%) means that the remaining areas are crucial for many specialist species, such as heath tiger beetles and pink waxcaps" these habitats and species are a part of the special character of the Quantocks.



Bird Monitoring in the Quantock Hills AONB 2000 to 2018



Potential impacts from climate change are varied including the threat of increasing summer fires harming heathland and summer migrant bird species arriving in the spring to find they have missed the flush of caterpillars to feed their chicks. Biodiversity adaptation to the changing climate of the AONB will need a degree of coherent changes in habitats and ecosystems, requiring flexibility and imagination on the part of land managers and relevant organisations.

There are risks to biodiversity from increasing visitor pressures – wheel, hoof and foot traffic can erode and ultimately destroy fragile and vulnerable habitats and disturb vulnerable species. Measures are needed to protect these habitats and species along with appropriately placed interpretation to encourage the visitor to appreciate their importance to the AONB.

There is an important opportunity for working with the Forestry Commission and others to enlarge priority habitats and significantly increase the ecological connectivity between the two main Quantock heathland areas. The key heathland habitats of the Quantocks fall into two main areas with the extensive Forestry Commission Great Wood plantation forming a large block between them. In the interests of nature conservation and landscape enhancement the Forestry Commission are working with the AONB Service to increase habitat connectivity and in some areas create heathland reversion from plantations. This work is achieved with the support of funding from EDF in mitigation of the visual impacts of the new reactors under construction at Hinkley Point. Consideration needs to be taken where barbastelle bats are present or potentially present to ensure that biodiverse and structured broadleaved woodland is developed rather than heathland, which is a habitat avoided by the species.

The need for new post-Brexit Environmental Land Management and Agri-environment schemes is clearly an opportunity to learn from previous schemes and establish more effective support for biodiversity. The loss of current schemes without replacements ready for implementation is however a risk.

The 5-year delivery phase of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, if approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund in late 2019, will include projects to address several of these threats and realise some of the opportunities. It aims to increase understanding and conservation of hedgerows, parklands and orchards as well as creating large scale volunteer monitoring programmes for bats and other species.

c) Biodiversity: Wildlife and Habitats Objectives

BWH1: To maintain and enrich the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Quantocks at the landscape scale.

BWH2: to increase knowledge and understanding of the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Quantocks and their linkages to the surrounding area.

d) Management Policies

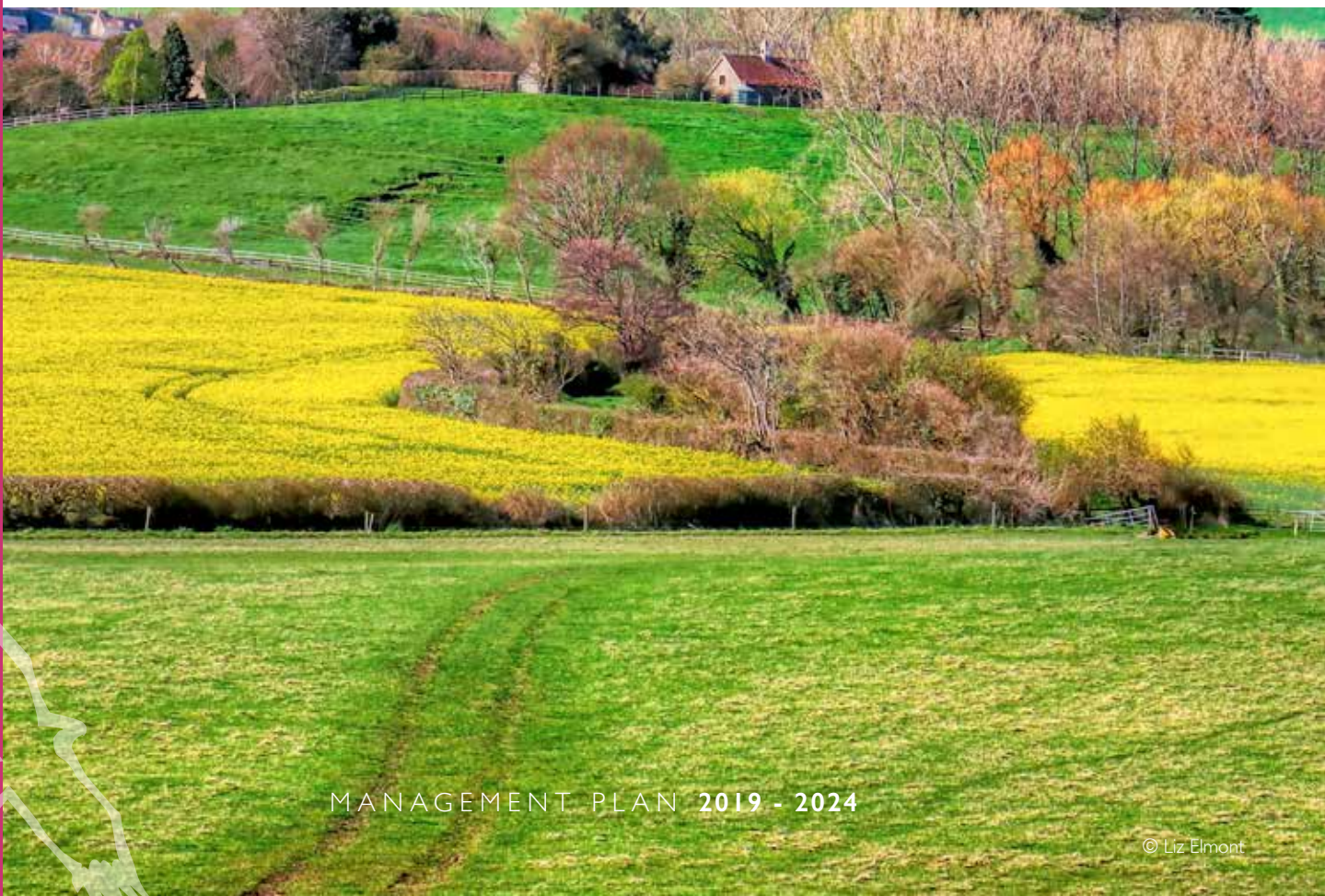
BWHP1: To engage with development of land management, agri-environment and/or other innovative schemes to protect, connect and expand valuable Quantock habitats both inside and outside the AONB boundary.

BWHP2: To monitor biodiversity through regular surveys of key species across the AONB

BWHP3: To monitor and manage harmful invasive species and diseases across the AONB.

BWHP4: To support the managed conversion of plantations (wholly or in part) to heathland or semi-natural woodland where this strengthens the existing network of habitats.

BWHP5: To research and monitor the populations and ecological networks of key Quantock species and use the information gained to inform management actions that will maintain or restore robust populations of these species.



Maintain & enrich the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Quantocks



Historic Environment and Cultural Influences

AIM

That the AONB's historic environment is protected and understood in detail, that both characteristic and exceptional man-made elements are conserved and the cultural contributions of the Quantock Hills to society are recognised

a) Significance

Each generation of human occupancy has inscribed its own impression on the Quantock landscape, and overlain the marks of earlier generations. This Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the result of thousands of years of human endeavour creating a landscape which possesses not only the beauty associated with long and slow development, but an inexhaustible store of information about human activities in the past. The Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century Romantic Movement, and our subsequent appreciation of the natural environment, is indebted to the Quantock Hills for the inspiration this landscape offered Coleridge and Wordsworth.

'So much more than the view...' published by England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks in 2015, highlights the wide range of benefits these iconic areas provide to society. It featured the quote "All this altering year you've called me from the hills above Nether Stowey, in the shifting of fossils and siltstones that clutter Kilve's wilderness shore" An extract from 'Coleridge Changes his Library Books' inspired by the Quantock Hills AONB, it was included by kind permission of Deborah Harvey. It also made the very relevant comment: "The evidence of farming lives and methods across the ages lives in the landscape and also in present-day communities through deep-rooted festivals and traditions."

The Quantock Hills make up an important historic landscape with a wide variety of highly significant archaeological features. These range from the upland Common, which has particular prehistoric significance, to the surrounding farmland, much of which is Saxon in origin and shape. Superimposed on this are the mainly 17th and 18th century parklands, and the enclosures and boundary modifications of subsequent years, evolving as marginal land came into, and drifted out of management. The Quantock coastal belt includes important medieval manors at Kilve and East Quantoxhead, and an early 20th century oil retort at Kilve Pill. Abandoned harbours can be found at Kilve Pill and Lilstock and there are a number of lime kilns to be found along the coast.

In 2014 English Heritage and NAAONB renewed their commitment to work together to promote the conservation, understanding, and public enjoyment of heritage in AONBs. This was enshrined in the 2014 Joint Statement on the Historic Environment in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty:

Shared Principles:

- The landscapes of AONBs have been created by centuries of interaction between people and nature,
- The historic environment is fundamental to the distinctive character and sense of place of each AONB,
- AONBs are national assets,
- The principles of the European Landscape Convention (ELC) underpin our actions and aspirations, and
- By working together the parties can further the understanding, conservation and public enjoyment of the historic environment in AONBs.

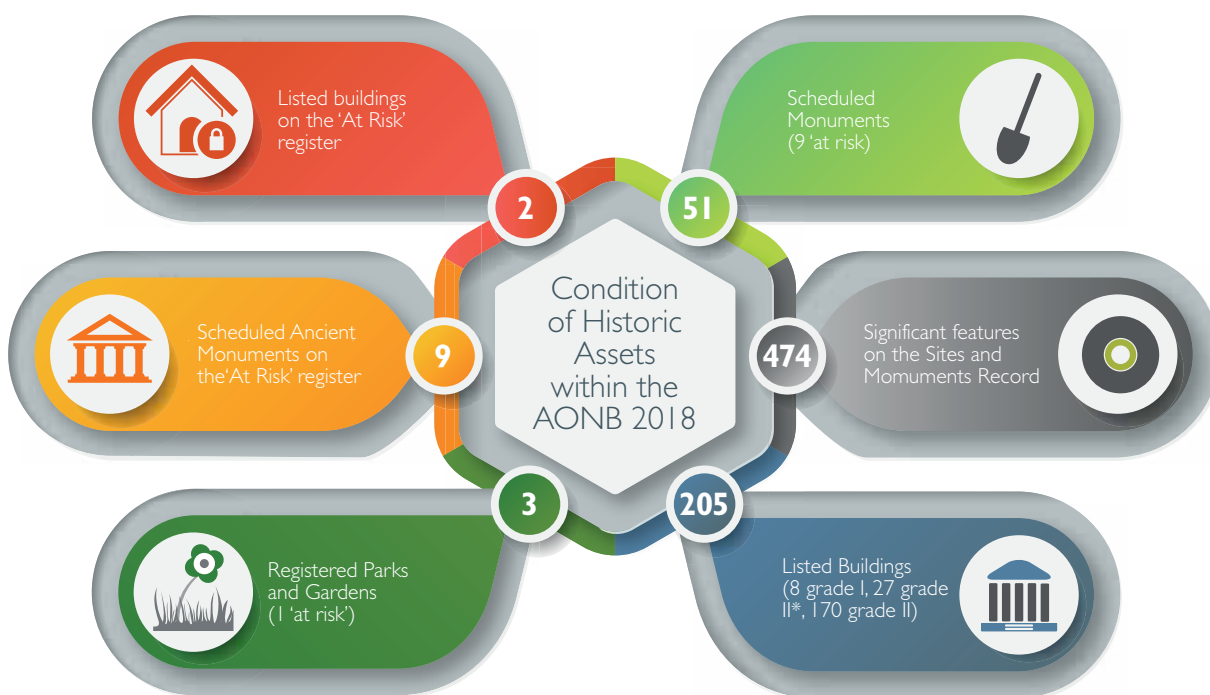
Principal cultural influences on the hills include:

- Neolithic (4000-1750 BC) - emergence of pastoral farming, clearance of post-glacial forest.
- The Bronze and Iron Ages (1750 BC - 450 AD) - social and agricultural development, some basic patterns of current countryside. Hilltop barrows, hill forts and defended enclosures.
- Roman (43AD - c.410AD) - substantial southern Quantock Roman Villa.
- Romano British to the Early Medieval (450 - 700 AD) – restructure post Roman Empire. Iron Age character of landscape pretty intact.
- Saxon and Medieval (700 - 1350 AD) - population growth and developing markets, influx of new wealth and new systems of land tenure. Growth of villages, shaping of the field and farm patterns we see today.
- Late medieval (1350 – 1540) - collapsing manorial system, decades of cool wet weather, epidemics of Black Death, some desertion of land.

- Post medieval (1540 – 1900) - enclosures and intensification of land use (use of lime). Increased sheep farming, charcoal burning and bark-stripping for tanning. Managed landscapes, big houses, parkland. Coleridge and Wordsworth.
- The 20th century – extensive coniferous plantation, agricultural intensification. Late C20 sensitive agri-environment policies ie Stewardship initiatives, increasing development and visitor pressures.
- The early 21st century – continued agricultural intensification and further increases in development and visitor pressures. Agri-environment schemes mitigate but fail to reverse continued biodiversity loss and landscape degradation leading to policy development that looks towards selective payment for public goods over straightforward agricultural subsidy.

The AONB has 474 sites on the Sites and Monuments Record including:

Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings, Grade I listed buildings, Grade II* listed buildings and grade II listed buildings.



Parkland is a managed landscape forming an important part of the overall character of the Quantocks. In addition to the scenic beauty and wildlife importance of parkland, it is a significant element of the historic environment. A distinctive feature of parkland is the high number of large old trees sometimes known as veteran trees. These provide an increasingly rare habitat for wildlife including bats, birds, invertebrates and fungi, and are important enduring elements of the landscape connecting past and present. The Ancient Tree Inventory managed by the Woodland Trust currently records 209 ancient, veteran and "noble" trees in the area of the AONB.

The most extensive survey of Quantock archaeology to date culminated in 2006 with English Heritage publishing *The Historic Landscape of the Quantock Hills*, a highly readable and comprehensive book written by Hazel Riley, the senior survey researcher. The work included academic research, the study of aerial photography, and extensive fieldwork; it remains definitive.

b) Threats and Opportunities

A number of the AONB's Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings are on English Heritage's Register of Heritage at Risk. Without progress towards improving their condition they will decline further harming the special qualities of the AONB.

The archaeology of the upland oakwoods is not comprehensively understood - this can be seen as a threat as such a key AONB feature needs to be fully explored and understood to protect and promote understanding of the landscape. In particular extensive recording of features relating to historic coppicing, charcoal burning, and woodland boundaries would give a stronger understanding and appreciation of these areas.

Similarly parkland, orchards, ancient woods and hedgerows are significant features of the enclosed landscape - bridging the gap from more distant periods of historic interest to a more recent past including industrial activity

and cultural distinctiveness, local traditions and ways of life. Significant work has been achieved to understand and map the historic extent of Orchards in the AONB, similar work in respect of parkland, woods and hedgerows would valuably extend our understanding of the special character of this landscape.

Warmer wetter winters and hotter drier summers may present threats to the archaeology of the hills, this risk needs to be investigated and better understood.

Plant roots and burrowing mammals can cause real damage to archaeological interest and visitor pressure can erode and ultimately destroy fragile and vulnerable features. These features need safeguarding measures and appropriately located interpretation to identify impacts and encourage visitors to appreciate their importance to the AONB.

The collection and preservation of archives - historic and current - related to the Quantocks is not currently managed by a single body. It would be beneficial for the historic record and researchers/heritage managers/others if this was the case.

The mitigation funds that have come to the AONB from EDF in respect of visual impacts from construction at Hinkley Point are provided for enhancement of the landscape. The terms landscape and historic landscape are in many ways interchangeable and elements of historic interest in the AONB are benefiting from this funding.

The 5-year delivery phase of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, if approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund in late 2019, will include projects to address several of these threats and realise some of the opportunities, and it particularly aims to increase understanding and conservation of parklands and orchards as well as undertaking archaeological excavations and interpretation.

c) Historic Environment Objectives

HE1: To ensure the historic and culturally significant landscape and features of the AONB are protected, conserved and understood in detail.

d) Management Policies

HEP1: The protection, conservation and reinstatement of historic and culturally significant Quantock landscapes and features, particularly assets on the Heritage at Risk Register.

HEP2: Promote public understanding of the significance of the Quantock historic and cultural landscape through community engagement and appropriate interpretation.

HEP3: The further investigation and recording of historic and culturally significant Quantock landscapes and features.

© Jenny McCubbin
The Chantry Kilve - Photography Competition 2017

AIM

That the distinctive geological diversity of the AONB landscape is identifiable and understood; that potential climate change impacts are considered in respect of the resilience of the AONB's special qualities.

a) Significance

There are four broad geological types in the Quantock AONB:

- The northern plateau, underlain by the hard Hangman Sandstones
- The central area where the varied Ilfracombe Slates, a mix of slates, siltstones, sandstone and bands of limestone, overlie the Hangman Sandstones
- The southern area where the Ilfracombe Beds are overlain by the softer Morte Slates which have weathered to create lower, more rounded hills
- The fringes of the ridge composed of younger rocks mainly of the Triassic Period - including the most significant geological sites in the AONB, the Triassic and Jurassic exposures along the coastal cliffs

The Quantock ridge is formed mainly by rocks of the Devonian Period which produce the soils of the AONB, setting the parameters for farming and other land-uses, giving rise to many of the special qualities of the AONB while providing distinctive stone for many of the buildings and settlements of the area.

The Quantock cliffs and foreshore are internationally recognised for their special geological interest; they include an International Stratotype "Golden Spike" (internationally agreed reference section for a particular boundary on the geologic time scale) at East Quantoxhead and the AONB coast is entirely within a designated Geological Site of Special Scientific Interest. The highly visible cliff stratification and foreshore "pavements" come

from alternating limestones and shales known as Lias, they are punctuated by ammonite and other fossils and have a strong and distinct landscape beauty. Blocks of this stone have been used locally as a building material.

The coastal Site of Special Scientific Interest - Blue Anchor to Lilstock Coast Geological SSSI - is protected under the "earth heritage" heading. All sections are in favourable condition with Natural England assessment (2011/12) comments including "Unit is in superb condition – a teaching and research resource – controlled entirely by natural processes"

Climate change mitigation describes measures or actions aimed at reducing the long-term risk and hazards of climate change. Climate change adaptation describes measures or actions that help individuals, groups and natural systems to prepare for and respond to changes in the climate. Alongside other organisations and individuals, the AONB will support and promote mitigation and adaptation measures wherever practicable.

UK climate projections suggest a change in rainfall patterns, and it is predicted that events now considered 'extreme', such as the exceptionally wet 2012 UK summer, will become more commonplace. It has been estimated that by 2035 an additional £20 million of spending on flood defences annually will be needed to maintain current levels of flood risk. Adaptability to climate change is a key consideration for future flood and coastal erosion management plans. However, the Committee on Climate Change has recently warned of national underinvestment in long-term adaptive flood management.

There are predictions for climate change impacts on the natural environment - if hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters materialise some species may disappear from the AONB and others may start to colonise including new pests and diseases. Timings of biological events may also alter; hatching times for some moth species are already thought to be changing in the AONB, affecting the breeding success of pied flycatchers in the

upland oakwoods. Frequent summer droughts and an increase in wildfires may lead to significant species change in our heathland and the upland oakwoods could be subject to increased storm damage and disease. The risk of flooding of all types may be increasing with potential landscape-specific impacts such as rising sea levels affecting coastal and intertidal habitats, while storm surges could lead to an increased level of coastal erosion.

Arable farming may increase with farmers able to grow new crops or varieties and extend the growing period for current ones, however farming is likely to become more challenging with greater extremes of temperature and rainfall and more frequent damaging storms. Water resources are likely to be stretched with more severe drought periods, perhaps leading to pressure for new reservoir storage capacity in upland catchments. Drought will also have implications for the management of hill livestock, with limited natural watering places.

According to “Making Space for Nature”, the 2010 ecological review by Sir John Lawton, ecological networks are best adapted to climate change in four ways:

- Ensure that all parts of the network are in the best possible management.
 - Increased resources would be required to be fully active beyond the core priority habitats, a Quantock-specific Land Management Scheme could make this achievable.
- Increase the population sizes of vulnerable species.
 - Monitoring of key species in the Quantocks (eg nightjars) and careful habitat management helps meet this action, extension of existing priority habitats would be a significant further step.
- Reduce the risks of local extinction.
 - Maximising the quality and extent of priority habitats reduces these risks, however at a species level the best approach will vary.
- Provide colonists for new sites.

© Ron Carlson



b) Threats and Opportunities

Other than the superb exposures at the coast, visible Quantock geology occurs mainly in disused quarries many of which are small and vegetation-covered. To provide for public understanding and more structured education opportunities it would be beneficial to identify key exposures, and where appropriate protect and maintain them in an accessible state with public interpretation.

Fossil-collecting along the coastal fringe has not in the past been considered harmful to the fossil resource, though it is important that significant finds are recorded. Private collection is however subject to the consent of landowners, and does raise safety issues in respect of rockfalls and fast-moving tides. There is a Natural England Code of Conduct to guide such activities.

The commercial exploitation of fossils, a problem elsewhere in the country, can be damaging due to scale and lack of recording and will need to be addressed if it becomes an issue in the coastal AONB.

Potential threats from climate change are varied including increasing summer fires in the heathland and summer migrant bird species arriving in the spring to find they have missed the flush of caterpillars to feed their chicks.

Natural England has developed and is further updating a Climate Change Adaptation Manual (NE546) to help conservation managers and advisors to make informed decisions about resilience and adaptation. It brings together recent science, experience and case studies and provides or signposts a range of resources and tools that can support practical adaptation. NE have produced this manual for local and national government, statutory agencies and NGOs to support those involved in the management of land for conservation and amenity.

c) Geology and Climate Objectives

GCI: To maintain, protect and promote understanding of the coastal SSSI and a representative sample of other visible Quantock geology.

GC2: To identify and reinforce adaptation strategies and resilience to climate change in respect of the special qualities of the AONB.

d) Management Policies

GCPI: To maintain representative example exposures of Quantock geology with public access where safe, and interpret them for the public where appropriate.

GCP2: To protect the high quality of Quantock coastal landform and their distinctive landscape contribution from inappropriate development and activities.

GCP3: To assess the climate change adaptation priorities and possibilities in respect of the special qualities of the AONB through implementation of the Natural England Climate Change Adaptation Manual (NE546).

GCP4: To take a strategic landscape scale approach to the creation, restoration and maintenance of habitats in the AONB to maximise Quantock wildlife and landscape resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Waterfall at St Audries Bay



2.6 Development, Planning and Infrastructure

AIM

That development affecting the Quantock Hills respects and reinforces local character and the special qualities of the AONB in scale, location, design and detail

a) Significance

The prime objective of the AONB is conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the landscape. The Quantock Hills AONB is visually very vulnerable, with much of the landscape having a pronounced physical form – the open slopes, prominent ridgeline and exposed summits are visible from considerable distances. Equally the more intimate landscapes such as the combes, foothills and coastal areas and landscape features such as irregular hedged fields and small stone-built hamlets and villages, can be stripped of their special character by insensitive development and the cumulative effect of smaller changes over time.

Development policy for AONBs is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF revised June 2018) provides specific planning guidance for plan makers and decision takers in relation to AONBs, it states in paragraph 172 that “Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas...”

The great weight test is significant and one of the most stringent legal tests that can be applied under planning law. The NPPF also states that planning permission should be refused for major developments in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances, what constitutes “major development” has not been defined and will be assessed on its merits, according to local circumstances. In such a small and intimate area, large developments of any kind within or close by the AONB impact heavily on the AONB’s special qualities, exacerbated by secondary impacts including traffic generation or the needs for new infrastructure provision.



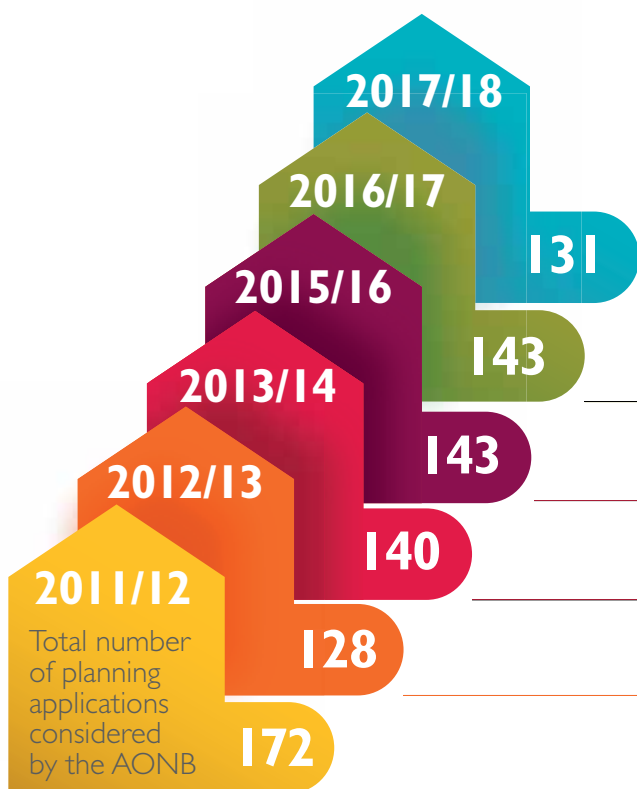
Local and Neighbourhood Plans should set out policy for AONBs locally and define significance of the area. This should include AONB policy reference in Core Strategies and in specific Development Plan Documents (DPD) where relevant, and they should specifically cross reference the relevant AONB Management Plan. Further to this the existence of an AONB designation should influence the plan in terms of the strategic location of development, access issues, green infrastructure, Community Infrastructure Levy and other mitigation funding, use of natural resources, and in terms of landscape and environmental protection.

AONB management plans are material considerations in the planning process. This Management Plan has been adopted by the County and District Local Authorities that cover the AONB.

The network of small roads and lanes around the lower slopes of the hills forms a distinctive element of the AONB. The organic nature of these routes, their rural character and distinctive traditional road signs are a significant element of the attractiveness of the area; rapid growth in the level of traffic using them at peak times is a significant issue impacting on AONB character and sense of rurality.

b) Threats and Opportunities

While maintaining an overtly rural character, the Quantock Hills are not free from the pressures of 21st century living that threaten the landscape character and special qualities of our countryside. These social and economic changes include building and development pressure - heightened by the presence and influence of growing urban areas close to the hills, particularly Taunton and Bridgwater. The Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee is aware however that protection of the landscape needs to be considered in the context of the social and economic needs of rural communities.



Development in the AONB

	INSIDE AONB	OUTSIDE AONB boundary
2017/18	73	58
2016/17	81	62
2015/16	76	67
2014/15	96	44
2013/14	72	56
2012/13	74	98

Old locally distinctive barns and farmsteads make an important contribution to the AONB countryside and many are being lost to conversion and redevelopment. Conversion to domestic use is often less acceptable than small-scale rural enterprise due to changes in character and use - converting an agricultural landscape element to a domestic one with associated features such as gardens, vehicles and day/night artificial lighting makes that landscape disjointed and hard to read. While sometimes necessary for the ongoing management of the farmed landscape new agricultural buildings need careful consideration in respect of their location and design if they are not to have a negative effect on the landscape. New structures that do not respond to the physical and cultural nature of the landscape change the character of that place. Permitted development (not solely related to agriculture) is a significant threat to the AONB as the lack of consultation in respect of such changes can allow inappropriate development without scrutiny from the AONB partnership.

Construction of the two new nuclear reactors being built at Hinkley Point by EDF Energy will continue over the next decade and has brought significant change. This major infrastructure project impacts on views from the Quantocks and on bats roosting in the Quantock woodlands in response mitigation packages have been negotiated with EDF to create new habitat (outside the AONB) for bats and to provide significant funding (managed by the AONB Service) for landscape enhancements within the AONB. Small scale development associated with this project has become apparent during the last plan period with an increase in applications for accommodation (through new build, conversion and static caravans) to house the temporary workforce.

Urban extensions particularly to Taunton and Bridgwater are a concern to the AONB as built-up areas expand further into the setting of the protected landscape – reducing the area of transition between urban environment and high quality protected landscape. It is important that consideration is given to the change this brings to the setting of the protected landscape,

impacts on the AONB's amenity value, and on views both to and from the AONB.

The impact on the AONB's special qualities by development in the setting of Quantock Hills needs to be fully considered in the planning process in line with NPPF paragraph 172. The setting of the Quantock Hills AONB is the area within which development and land management proposals, by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design can be considered to have an impact, positive or negative, on its natural beauty and special qualities. This includes threats to tranquillity from light pollution, recreation and tourism pressures, traffic and noise.

Prominent vertical structures such as pylons, masts and wind turbines are serious threats to the open hills and highly-visible skyline of the Quantocks.

Trends for a move away from agriculture to more recreational uses of land such as keeping horses or hobby farming can also bring adverse changes to the character and condition of the landscape. Changes in land use need sensitive consideration to ensure they do not negatively impact upon the special qualities of the AONB.

The protection of the undeveloped Quantock coastline is a high priority, major new developments or enlargement of caravan or chalet parks would be a severe threat to the landscape character of this area and on views from the heathland and foothill landscapes.

Highways infrastructure must be sensitive to the special qualities of the AONB in line with the Highways Authority's duty of regard to the purposes of AONB designation in section 85 of the CROW Act 2000. Where this has not happened in the past it has damaged the character of the AONB through urbanisation and intrusive signage, concrete kerbing, road markings and signage." Traditional cast iron road signs at junctions in and around the AONB are significant locally-distinctive features that are suffering from a lack of Highways maintenance funding.

Opportunities can arise with new development - in the case of Bridgwater a Country Park is being carefully planned as a softer Quantock-side feature of new urban development and the extensive Staplegrove development planned north of Taunton includes green infrastructure and possible cycle/walking routes connecting to the AONB.

c) Development, Planning and Infrastructure Objective

DPII: To ensure development and infrastructure conserves and enhances the AONB; that it is compatible with its distinctive character described by the LCA, not compromising the special qualities of the AONB outlined in the Statement of Significance.

d) Management Policies

DPIPI: Protect the special qualities of the AONB through appropriate recognition in forward planning documents and significant planning applications reflecting AONB Service consultation, comments and advice.

DPIP2: Ensure development and infrastructure in the AONB is appropriate in location, landscape sensitivity, scale and design respecting its distinctive character described by the LCA and its special qualities outlined in the Statement of Significance.

DPIP3: Protect local distinctiveness in AONB settlements and Quantock lanes and roads.

DPIP4: Consider the impacts of Permitted Development on the special qualities of the AONB and whether they can be mitigated.

DPIP5: Ensure development in the AONB maintains or delivers nett gain in biodiversity, protects significant trees and other important landscape features and promotes the conservation of the historic environment.

DPIP6: Ensure development in the setting of the AONB does not harm the natural beauty, character and special qualities of the AONB or otherwise prejudice the delivery of AONB purposes.

DPIP7: Protect the dark skies and tranquillity of the AONB.

DPIP8: Protect the views in to and out of the AONB through involvement in the planning process.

AIM

That sustainable levels of Quantock tourism maintain public enjoyment of the Quantock Hills and contribute to the local economy without harming the special qualities of the AONB

a) Significance

Public enjoyment of the AONB is a significant element of the AONB Vision, promoting understanding and providing many public benefits, alongside this, visitor activity also supports the local economy and bolsters the viability of local businesses. Landscape and wildlife protection continues to be the priority for the upland core of these hills, and managing the balance between this and public enjoyment is a core task of the Joint Advisory Committee and AONB Service.

The “Outstanding Contribution to Tourism Award 2018” was won by the Protected Landscapes of the South West at the regional Tourism Excellence Awards event attended by over 450 industry representatives. In his presentation speech Chairman of the South

West Tourism Alliance Alistair Handyside made some generous and significant points: “The critically important South West visitor economy, so wonderfully and diversely represented here tonight at the South West Tourism Excellence Awards, owes a huge debt and vote of thanks to the winner of the Outstanding Contribution to Tourism Award... The teams that work at this brilliant award winner range from volunteers on one hand, to key staff who run and manage the assets. I have been privileged to have worked with several of them at close quarters and know also the pressures that they are under to retain funding to maintain the Natural Capital that we all love and cherish. Today, Tourism in the South West would like to recognise the ‘Outstanding Contribution to Tourism’ that the Protected Landscapes make, that in turn, enables us to deliver such wonderful and varied visitor experiences for our guests. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Protected Landscapes...”

The West Somerset Railway, one of the best-used and most popular private railways in the country, and Hestercombe, one of the nation’s most successful garden restoration projects are key Quantock attractions despite being just outside the AONB boundary. Other popular



attractions include Ramscombe, the Forestry Commission trails and barbeque site in Great Wood and Fyne Court, the National Trust property in the southern hills which features an information centre and waymarked trails for a range of abilities, it is also the headquarters for the AONB Service.

In 1992 66% of visitors to the Quantocks lived within Somerset, and by 1998 that figure had gone up to 81% though it had dropped slightly to 77% in 2018. Many visitors to the Quantocks are day-trippers rather than tourists from further afield and this proportion has increased, rising from 75% in 2003 to 87% in 2018. While it is arguably a strength of the Quantocks that recreational use largely takes the form of the enjoyment of a much-appreciated local resource rather than a tourist area it is worth noting that on average day visitors only spend 5% as much per day as staying visitors.

As with the 2003 Quantock Hills Visitor Survey the 2018 survey gives detailed information on where visitors are coming from, how they arrive and what they do once on the hills. It also provides the following broad information some indicating how strongly the Quantocks are valued:

- The Quantock Hills now receive 4,200 users per day compared to 3,070 in 2003
- Nearly 9 out of 10 users of the Quantock Hills are on a day trip
- The level of satisfaction has increased with 95% of users rating their visit to the Quantock Hills as good or very good, up from 85% in 2003.
- 62% of Quantock users visit at least monthly, a huge increase on the 2003 figure of 36%
- The average length of visit is just over 3 hours, a significant increase of 61% over the 2003 length of visit.
- Almost 10% of visitors specified that they have a disability or long standing health issue



TOTAL daily visits estimated from surveys at busy times

1998 3,200 per day
2003 3,070 per day
2018 4,200 per day

- The average amount of money spent per visitor day is £10.33
- In 2017 the direct visitor related spend was estimated to be £7,943,000 considerably higher than the 2003 estimate of £1.1m, this may in part reflect updated methodology used to calculate these figures.

Appropriate forms of tourism in the AONB are those based on the area's special qualities and include quiet outdoor recreation (walking, cycling, horse riding), wildlife and heritage tourism and cultural tourism such as Coleridge and Wordsworth related activities. The AONB is keen to promote responsible rural tourism in the Quantock Hills to the benefit of the local economy. Many of the tourism "offers" in and around the AONB provide information to help visitors make a conscious connection between their experience and the value of this special landscape.

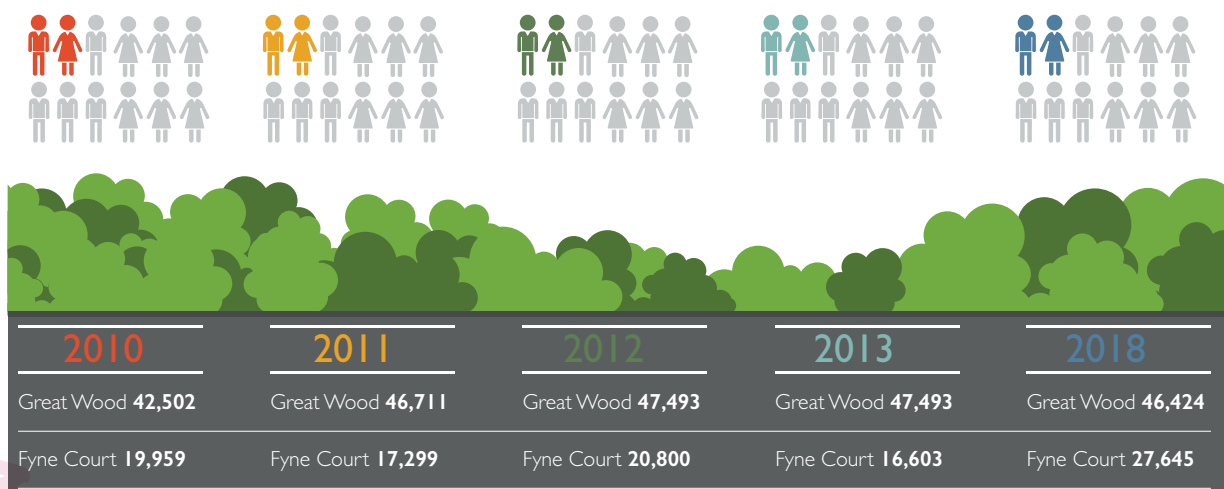
b) Threats and Opportunities

There is a risk to local support for the AONB and the perceived benefits to local communities from the location of local shops and services, almost entirely in settlements around the base of the hills. This gives hilltop visitors no opportunity to buy goods or services in the AONB meaning that Quantock villages often experience the problems of visitor traffic without the benefits of visitor spending.

The local economic and health and wellbeing benefits of public enjoyment of the hills are key services provided by the natural capital of the AONB, however these benefits do need to be balanced with the core AONB purpose of protecting the outstanding quality of the landscape that attracts people to the hills. Monitoring and mitigation of impacts on the special qualities of the AONB is an important element of changing visitor numbers and profiles.

Mitigation funding to the AONB from the current Hinkley Point C development was agreed particularly on the basis of impacts on views, however the management of significant increases in visitor numbers from their temporary construction workforce and from major increases in housing around Bridgwater and Taunton requires resources - perhaps best provided by responsible developers. Working in partnership with local businesses, landowners and land managers to encourage and support sustainable growth in the local rural economy linked to the special qualities of the landscape is an important element of AONB activity. Modern telecommunications, including access to fast broadband, and good mobile phone coverage are vitally important to a successful rural economy and the development of local businesses. The erection of masts and cables in nationally protected countryside areas need to be sensitively located, however this rural broadband infrastructure is essential.

Car Counter Visits to Great Wood and Fyne Court 2010 - 2018



c) Local Economy and Visitors Objective

LEVI: To support tourism and economic activity across the AONB where it is environmentally sustainable and benefits businesses in local communities.

d) Management Policies

LEVPI: To work with local businesses and support new markets for farmers that promote sustainable growth and the special qualities of the AONB.

LEVP2: To provide evidence for decision making through monitoring visitor trends and activities, including economic benefits and impacts on the special qualities of the AONB.

LEVP3: To Support landscape-sensitive delivery of fast broadband throughout the AONB.



Access, Recreation and Wellbeing

AIM

That sustainable levels of access and recreation maintain widespread enjoyment of the Quantocks and contribute to public mental and physical health and wellbeing without harming landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity

a) Significance

Access to the natural environment and public enjoyment of the AONB is a significant element of the AONB Vision, fostering a sense of importance of the area, promoting understanding and providing public benefits, particularly in respect of public health and wellbeing. Landscape and wildlife protection continues to be the priority for the upland core of these hills, and managing the balance between this and public enjoyment is a core task of the Joint Advisory Committee and AONB Service.

Annex 1 (section 4) of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan published in February 2018 states: Engagement with the outdoors brings many benefits to health and well-being and offers opportunities to raise awareness about the value of nature and the challenges it faces. The evidence also shows that increasing the use of green space, even if motivated by health reasons, provides wider societal benefits such as great community cohesion and reduced social isolation. There is low awareness amongst the general public and health professionals of the evidence on the links between the environment and health, both physical and mental. ... Supporting interventions to encourage volunteering will contribute towards achieving multiple benefits, for people, plants, wildlife and our natural landscapes. The Plan will provide the leadership and direction to drive cross-sector working between health and environment. It will implement a programme to promote the use of the natural environment as a resource for good health and wellbeing including through nature-based social prescribing and the development of tools for service providers.



In February 2016 a two and a half year Nature and Wellbeing Project began, hosted by the Quantock Hills AONB and working across Somerset's 3 main Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Quantock, Mendip and Blackdown Hills). It was established to tackle some of the barriers that prevent people from experiencing the health and wellbeing benefits that the natural environment can offer and reached out to nearby towns and communities across Somerset. Fully funded by Public Health at Somerset County Council the project has a particular focus on supporting mental wellbeing and physical activity, working with specific groups and individuals who may benefit from such engagement. It has involved developing partnerships between the natural environment sector and health professionals, two groups with very little previous contact. This work is directly delivering, to a very high standard, the 25 Year Environment Plan objective quoted above.

In its first year project achievements included 721 participants attending project activities, 66 new groups and activities established, presentations to 763 professionals (environment/health) at 31 events, 48 new volunteering opportunities and 44 relevant staff/volunteers attending training.

Health and Community partners have included: The Alzheimer's Society – Watch Project - Clinical Commissioning Groups - Get Set - In Charleys Memory - Mind - Walking for Health - Zing Somerset - Knightstone Housing Association - Somerset Partnership - Cheddar Patients Group - Wellington Patient Group – Discovery - Green Days Day Care

Natural Environment delivery partners have included: the 3 AONBs - Huntstile Farm - National Trust - Natural England - Forestry Commission - Private Landowners - West Country Man - The Hive Café - Yeo Valley - Somerset Wildlife Trust - Watchet Visitor Centre - Young Wood – Folly Farm - Fern Animal Sanctuary

The outstanding success of this project has led to a recent extension for a further year, and the Somerset AONBs are currently developing a Big Lottery bid with the Somerset Wildlife Trust to deliver a follow-on project with increased scope.

The Active Travel Routes to approach has shown significant success in encouraging people to walk or cycle when by default they would be driving, generally this is achieved by developing clear and safe routes for walking and cycling. While there is very high quality access for walkers and cyclists once on the open hills visitor surveys show that the overwhelming majority of visitors and users arrive by car. There would be a range of clear benefits if it were possible to implement the Active Travel Routes approach for people wishing to access the hills. These routes do need careful design and planning and the inclusion of railway station and/or park and ride links is worthy of consideration, but the results of increasing the number of journeys made on foot and by bicycle align with many identified AONB benefits and objectives. While improving health and wellbeing and reducing physical inactivity are not core objectives (currently) of AONB designation, they form such important benefits

Working Well Volunteer Group at Cothelstone Hill



(an example of ecosystem services) from the positive management of landscape and access that it is appropriate for the partnership and team to focus significantly on this subject area. Improving the walking and cycling environment creates places less dominated by motor vehicles and more welcoming for people - environmental benefits include cleaner air less greenhouse gas emissions and reduced congestion, social benefits include better physical and mental health and more equitable access to the AONB for visitors irrespective of car ownership.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 legally defined a new and extensive category of Access Land. The AONB has some 3,000 hectares of Access Land comprising all the registered Common land and other heathland, Cothelstone Hill and Great Wood. People have a right to walk anywhere on Access Land, but cyclists and horse-riders must keep to Public Bridleways. Certain conditions apply to this land such as dogs being kept on leads during the nesting season (March to July). There are approximately 250 kilometres (150 miles) of rights of way in the AONB, 130 km within the open access hilltop area and 120km in the surrounding farmland. In the open access areas approx. 20% are footpaths, 65% bridleways, and 15% restricted byways. In the surrounding farmland approx. 75% are footpaths, 20% bridleways, and 5% restricted byways.

A fundamental aspect to be considered in the provision and maintenance of access is inclusiveness – considering everyone including less-able people when developing routes, access arrangements, and rights of way management. This aspect is considered as a matter of course in AONB access activity and the partnership has completed work to deliver easier access at Quantock sites, this work continues.

The coastal area of the AONB has long been a popular visitor/recreation destination as it offers good access to the beach at Kilve and East Quantoxhead and gentle, cliff top walks with broad sweeping views across the Bristol

Channel and back into the hills. This is the location for one of several circular waymarked trails managed and promoted by the AONB Service alongside the Quantock Greenway which circumnavigates the hills. The England Coast Path (ECP) section following the AONB coastline is open and links to other regional trails such as the Coleridge Way, the Macmillan Way and the River Parrett Trail. The provision of waymarked trails continues to develop and The Castles and Coast Way, a new regional walking trail linking Nether Stowey to the England Coast Path, is planned to open in 2019.

The AONB Service attends local shows and events to promote appropriate access and the special qualities of the AONB and provides guided walks and events with various themes.

A wide range of events including orienteering, school groups, horse riding events, sponsored walks, training for the military or emergency services, hunting and guided walks take place throughout the year on the hills. Large or clashing events can have focussed environmental impacts in respect of wildlife disturbance and erosion (particularly when the ground is wet), and affect wider public enjoyment of the AONB. Proposals originating in the 1990 plan included notification of intended events on the hills allowing the AONB Service to monitor activity and offer advice on appropriate scale, timing and activities for events. This service from the AONB Team continues to be provided and is respected by the majority of event organisers reducing overall impacts and giving some protection to Quantock landscape, wildlife and other users. Other organisations have similar notification systems, in the case of the Forestry Commission managed by our shared Partnership Ranger, this helps ensure a coherent approach in the AONB.

b) Threats and Opportunities

Heavy recreational use in the AONB continues to take place in the sensitive upland areas, based on parking locations on or adjacent to Quantock Common. Public transport to these sites is not available and visitors step out of their cars straight into a sensitive Site of Special Scientific Interest where wildlife disturbance and erosion are significant concerns. The Greenway which travels around the hills and AONB Service circular trails have helped spread the use to a limited extent, however the attraction of the hilltops is difficult to override.

A specific health risk that can affect recreational hill users is tick-borne diseases, particularly Lyme Disease which we are aware can be carried by Quantock ticks. We provide information on how to avoid being bitten and what to do if you are but for the last 4 years we have been participating in a Public Health project looking into the risk levels. Over the 4 years ticks were collected annually across 6 popular Quantock sites and our ticks were shown to have a less than 1% infection rate – this is at the lowest level (safest) both regionally and nationally. England & Wales Tick Survey 2014 – 2018, Medical Entomology Group, Public Health

Maintenance of the rights of way network is the responsibility of Somerset County Council. The priority of landscape protection in the wider open landscape of the hilltop Commons has led to a sensitive minimum-impact waymarking scheme for the Quantock hilltops. Signposting has a role in some of the wooded combs where rights of way junctions can be confusing and destinations not visible.

Off road driving in the sensitive hilltop heaths and oakwoods remains a significant threat although it has reduced since the CRoW Act 2000 clarified the legal position with no rights for the public to drive on tracks in the open hills. The Quantock Hills have historically suffered an exceptionally high level of this activity causing damage to the landscape and nature conservation interest as well as considerable user conflict. Commoners have the right to check their stock by vehicle and some landowners give permission for certain events (mainly hunting) to have vehicle access on their land. As the hilltops are almost entirely SSSI designated this involves gaining permission from Natural England. High levels of mountain biking in the AONB can raise issues of public safety and all heavy recreational uses can give rise to wildlife disturbance and erosion issues.



Halsway Manor Summer Fair

© Dave Pusill

A potential scheme spearheaded by Friends of Quantock organisation to reinstate natural vegetation at the badly eroded parking area at Crowcombe Park Gate, replacing it with a more sensitively located parking area nearby is reliant on the success of the AONB Stage 2 Landscape Partnership bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund next year.

There are clearly opportunities for more Health and Wellbeing activities, including popular mindfulness sessions, particularly in the quieter parts of the hills. There is a distribution of levels of use around the hills and without disturbing the very least visited areas the AONB Service is in a position to advise on the most suitable locations for different types of activity.

The Heritage Lottery funded Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) area has been drawn much wider than the AONB boundary and will facilitate greater access opportunities in the less sensitive areas fringing the hill as a way of relieving pressure on the more sensitive Common land (if the Stage 2 grant is approved, the LPS will start delivery in early 2020 and run for 5 years).

c) Access, Recreation and Wellbeing Objective

ARWI: To provide high quality public access in appropriate areas of the Quantocks, promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of recreation in the AONB while minimising adverse environmental impacts.

d) Management Policies

ARWPI: To actively seek opportunities maximise the health and wellbeing benefits the AONB can offer through partnership working and projects.

ARWP2: To pursue high quality sustainable access to popular AONB visitor locations through the Active Travel Routes approach.

ARWP3: To ensure public access areas, Rights of Way and promoted routes are useable and maintained to a high standard.

ARWP4: To reduce user conflict and limit damage to rights of way and landscape quality from recreational uses including off-road driving.

ARWP5: To maintain practical AONB staff on the ground to support volunteers, manage Rights of Way misuse and reduce access problems such as sheep worrying and summer fires.



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opportunities for
more Health &
Wellbeing, activities
& mindfulness



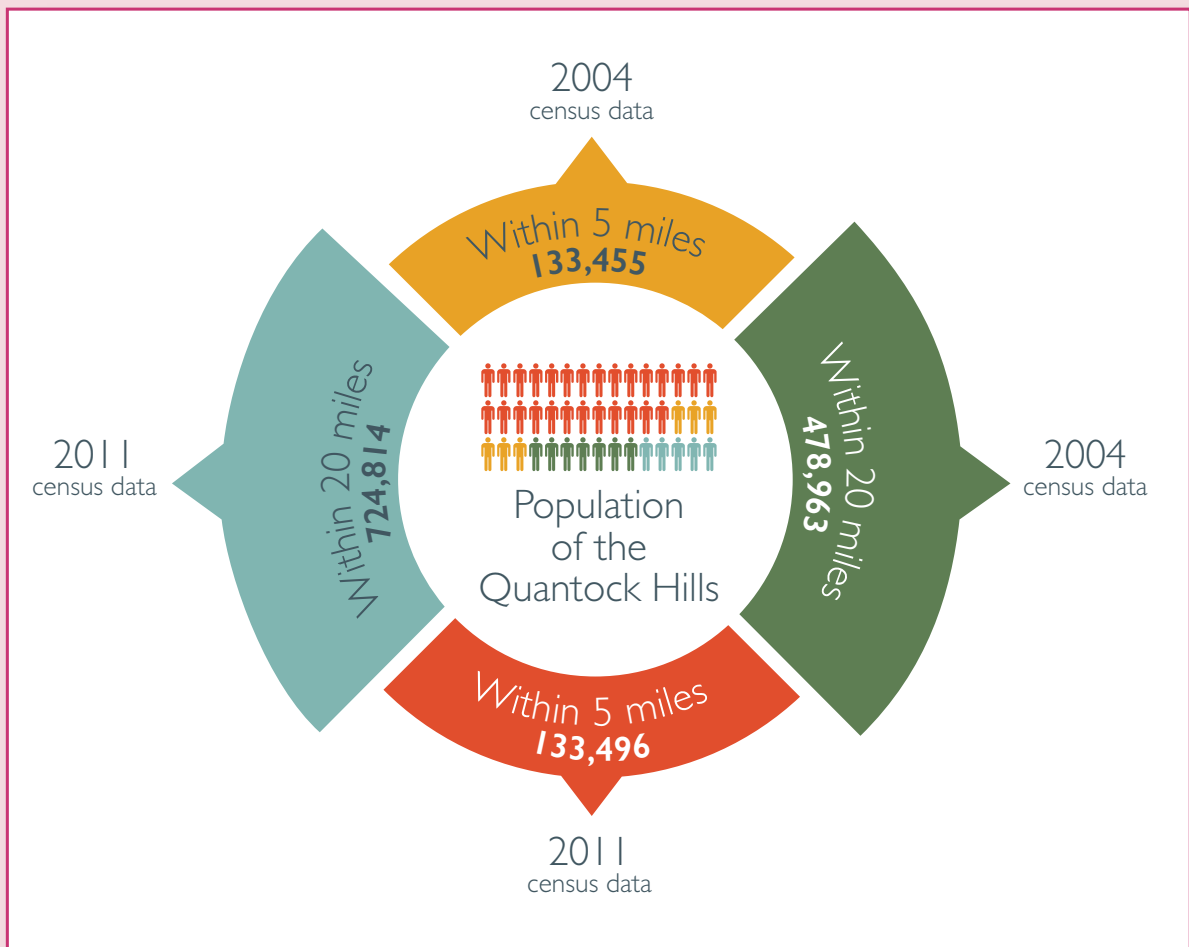
Community and Volunteering

AIM

That Quantock communities are resilient and involvement of local people and volunteers is extensive in managing change and protecting the area.

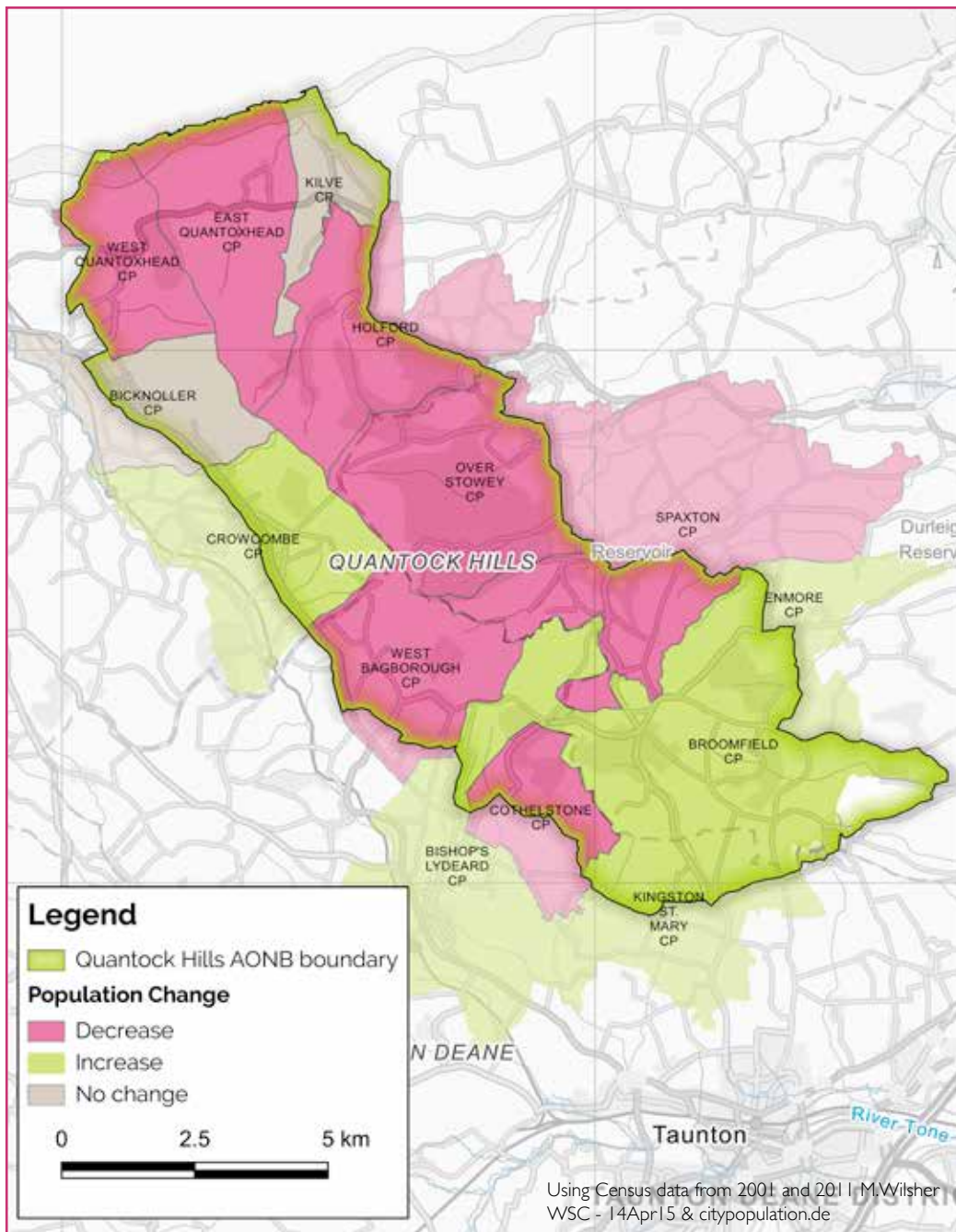
a) Significance

The Quantock Hills has a very small population living within its boundary (5,655) and there are less than 5,000 people of working age (16-74) living in the wards covering the Quantocks, with only 58% of those people economically active, either full or part-time. Local employment opportunities have diminished, and with the steady reduction of numbers in agricultural employment and local services, there has been a shift in the working population away from the Quantock area to larger towns, while the overall population continues to grow.



Poor access to key services for Quantock residents shows the effect of centralised services at the expense of rural areas. Lack of access to services is a significant quality of life indicator and can reflect economic vitality of the area.

The positive role played by the AONB volunteers in supporting conservation management, historic landscape, wildlife surveys, visitor information and health and wellbeing work on a voluntary basis is outstanding. It provides an important focus for community involvement in the conservation and public enjoyment of the AONB. Wherever possible opportunities for people to get involved, learn about and actively participate in the conservation of the area is supported, expanded and widely promoted.



The Quantock Hills AONB has a shared Volunteer Coordinator Post with other Somerset AONBs helping to develop and manage this vital part of our extended team. Our volunteers are divided into separate groups to deliver different aspects of protection of this special area:

Volunteer Rangers (16)

Active volunteer rangers who act in an 'eyes and ears' role, taking part in patrols at popular sites throughout the hills and reporting back any issues such as fly tipping and damage to visitor infrastructure. These are then fed back to the full-time Rangers who will ensure the issues are addressed. The volunteer rangers also play an active role in our public engagement work - leading guided walks, helping run community events and acting as ambassadors.

Heritage Monument Volunteers (33)

Volunteers monitoring 51 scheduled monuments (listed as nationally important) throughout the AONB, some well-known such as Trendle Ring, Dowsborough Hill Fort and Dead Woman's Ditch and others harder to spot. This is a partnership project with Historic England and feeds into their 'Heritage At Risk' monitoring programme.

Estates Team and Swaling (15)

Swaling (controlled heather burning in winter) is an essential part of Quantock heathland management and requires an active and trained team available at reasonably short notice to carry out planned burns when the weather allows. A smaller group from the Estates Team and carry out habitat management work most Tuesdays with one of the AONB staff Rangers, because of their training they are able to undertake a different range of work to other volunteer groups such as the QCV.

Quantock Countryside Volunteers (QCV - 27)

This is a joint volunteering project between the National Trust and the AONB. The volunteers undertake a task once a week for National Trust and once a month for the AONB. Tasks are very varied and have included fencing, hedge laying and vegetation clearance.

Wildlife surveys

Volunteers also assist with a range of wildlife surveys throughout the AONB, some are specialists and others are AONB volunteers who have received training. Regular monitoring includes bat, butterfly, dormice and deer surveys along with other surveys such as the summer heathland breeding bird survey.



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Nature and Wellbeing Project

There are a team of community engagement volunteers who have been working to support this project by attending and supporting the project officer to run these sessions and providing extra support for those participating. This has included work with the 'Working Well' group at Cothelstone, supporting school sessions at Fyne Court and the Taunton Symphonies project.

Quantock Hills AONB volunteers carry out significant tasks delivering elements of the Management Plan, appropriate training is therefore provided. In 2017-18 volunteer training has included: Mental Health Training provided for some Community Engagement Volunteers, People Engagement Training for Volunteer Rangers, Plantlife Lichen ID training for Volunteer Rangers, Fungi ID training for Volunteer Rangers and QCV, IT based training for some Volunteer Rangers, Emergency 1st Aid (outdoor) for Volunteer Rangers, brushcutter ATV for Estates Team, butterfly and bat ID training for Monitoring Volunteers.

Between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018 these groups collectively gave four thousand one hundred and sixty-nine work hours (over 560 days) to their voluntary activities on the hills. The AONB Service simply could not deliver the amount and range of activities currently undertaken without this freely-given support.

b) Threats and Opportunities

Challenges facing communities of the Quantock Hills include limited housing availability and high house prices, an aging population and sometimes difficult access to services. Thriving and vibrant communities have been shown to need good access to services, social and community links, places to meet and interact, places for recreation and work, links beyond the immediate community, access to jobs, good digital connectivity and community activities and engagement. In the context of a protected landscape these community needs should be met in ways which support landscape character.

AONB volunteer support is currently strong with good numbers and lots of engagement and training, all overseen excellently by our Volunteer Coordinator. Maintaining and building further on this level of activity into the future is a challenge with reducing funds – however properly supported volunteering can be part of the solution to resource issues. If successful the Heritage Lottery Landscape Partnership project programme will be developing many new volunteering opportunities in the AONB.

c) Community and Volunteering Objective

CVI: To support and promote active communities and volunteer involvement in the AONB.

d) Management Policies

CVPI: To support sustainable village and rural projects which address AONB Management Plan related issues.

CVP2: To support, within available resources, Quantock communities in the development and delivery of Community and Neighbourhood Planning where there is no conflict with AONB objectives.

CVP3: To further develop the role of community groups and volunteers in the management of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2.10 Public Understanding and Interpretation

AIM

That appreciation of the special qualities of the Quantocks is strong in communities, visitors, businesses and individuals and public interest in and understanding of the area is wide-ranging

a) Significance

Promoting awareness and understanding of the special qualities of the AONB, the benefits the area provides and the need for its sensitive and effective management stimulates interest and a sense of value in visitors and residents. The provision of high-quality, engaging and stimulating information and interpretation with limited resources is a challenge; however the employment of the full range of digital media provides comparatively low-cost opportunities for presenting information and reaching new audiences (printed information available on request).

Robert Blake School - Quantock Hills and Duke of Edinburgh Photography Competition Winning Expedition Entry 2017



Current AONB activities promoting understanding include:

Website and blog regularly updated, weekly updates posted on social media channels, regular e-newsletter, range of interpretative communication materials, press releases, information on quiet recreation within the AONB, guided walks and events celebrating the special qualities of the AONB, stands at local fetes and flower shows, and talks and presentations to interested groups and organisations.

Engagement with local schools can have multiple benefits including supporting future generations in valuing and understanding the natural environment. Natural England information on education includes: "Evidence from our Monitoring of Engagement with Natural Environment (MENE) survey has told us that in an average month during 2013-15 only eight per cent of school-aged children (aged 6-15) in England visited the natural environment with their schools. Why is that so low? Well, we know from research undertaken by Kings College London that the lack of confidence teachers have in taking children outdoors is the big issue. The Nature and Wellbeing project has linked with local schools getting children out into the Quantock countryside, but more importantly helping teachers to build their confidence and local knowledge for bringing classes to the hills.

b) Threats and Opportunities

Opportunities to build relationships through social media conversations and provide an open 'community forum' through Facebook and Twitter pages, reaching new audiences, whilst also recognising those audiences who do not use digital media. Traditional methods such as press releases for local papers are becoming less relevant.

Communicating AONB key messages consistently and in varied media helps to establish the AONB vision in the minds of the local community and regular visitors. Any communication undertaken should appeal to the range of audiences who are familiar with the Quantock Hills, as well as aspiring to inform less familiar audiences.

The provision of leaflets and on-site information remains popular with people spending time in the hills and is an important element of information provision. The Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme will offer the opportunity for a step change in public information and understanding about the Quantock Hills.

c) Public Understanding and Interpretation Objective

PUI1: To continually update and improve the relevance, quality and accessibility of Quantock information and interpretation for AONB visitors and local communities, within available resources.

d) Management Policies

PUIPI: To maintain varied, regular and stimulating social media outputs, promoting core messages.

PUIP2: To further develop and populate the AONB website as a public source of information and interest.

PUIP3: To develop and deliver interpretation and activities that increase visitors' understanding of the landscape and heritage of the Quantocks and encourage them to actively care for the area.

Promoting awareness & understanding of the AONB

3.1 Delivering the Management Plan

The Management Plan is the product of a review of the 2014-19 Quantock Hills Management Plan and a delivery plan has been developed in table forms to implement the Management Policies it contains. A wide range of people, communities, authorities and organisations will be involved in ensuring that the agreed Policies and Actions of this Management Plan are achieved. This reflects the extent of participation in raising the issues covered in this document. The Joint Advisory Committee and broader partnership will oversee implementation of the Plan, guiding and developing appropriate partnerships, activities and projects particularly through the work of the AONB Service.

The AONB Service will directly drive the implementation of the Management Plan with staff individually heading-up specific projects and Themes with the practical support of the Quantock volunteer groups. Local people and communities will be involved in these activities often through practical partnership working on projects, and through support and involvement informed by a range of means including the digitally available e-newsletter.

Many organisations and agencies such as Natural England, the Forestry Commission, DEFRA and the National Trust are directly implicated in delivering the Management Plan, through policies affecting land management, heritage protection and public access and the need for partnership funding and support. Local authorities at county, district and parish level continue to have a major role, including active involvement in the JAC, financial and officer support for the AONB Service, co-ordination

of policies and plans across the AONB, and involvement in projects implementing the plan. Landowners, Commoners, farmers, foresters, and local organisations, particularly Friends of Quantock each have a particularly important role to play in the support and implementation of the Management Plan.

The Management Plan will be implemented through a five-year delivery plan, available from the AONB office see Appendix 1, which identifies stakeholders/partners and when the actions will be delivered. This is further expanded with the Annual Project Plan, which goes into more detail with timings and funding to achieve the action points from the Management Plan. This Project Plan will be updated on an annual basis allowing it to take account of new funding opportunities or joint working ventures presented during the life of this Management Plan.

3.2 Monitoring

Robust state of the environment reporting is the foundation for all AONB management plans and is often both qualitative and quantitative. A State of the AONB condition monitoring report has been compiled to form a baseline for monitoring trends and changes in the Special Qualities of the Quantock Hills AONB. This condition report will be published for reference alongside this consultation draft of the Management Plan.



Appendix I

Delivery Plan 2019 - 2024

Introduction

The Quantock Hills Delivery Plan draws together all the objectives and Management Policies from the Quantock Hills AONB Management Plan 2019-24. The full Delivery Plan is a stand-alone document that will be reviewed and adapted throughout the life of the 2019-24 Management Plan. The full Delivery Plan can be viewed on the Quantock Hills AONB website (www.quantockhills.com).

This Headline Delivery Plan provides a summary of actions currently being considered to achieve the Management Policy. It should be seen as an indication of the types of actions to be delivered by the AONB Partnership, partners, stakeholders and other rather than the exhaustive list of actions.

Landscape Character & Quality

LI: To encourage and deliver understanding, conservation and enhancement of the character and quality of the AONB landscape through land use and development management that supports its special qualities.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
LP1: To protect, understand and enhance the landscape and character of the AONB and support those delivering these elements.	Five actions which include direct delivery by partners, seeking external funding to deliver projects and further research into visual intrusion and local community views on the future landscape of the Quantock Hills.
LP2: To promote the highest standards of landscape management in respect of landscape beauty, natural capital and ecosystem services for all land uses.	Three actions which link the AONB Management Plan to national policy and initiatives, such as NELMs. The actions also look to engage land managers through existing mechanisms such as the Quantock Facilitation Fund.
LP3: To encourage public understanding and support for landscape conservation and enhancement.	Three actions that will deliver publicity / promotion through a range of activities such as walks, talks, events, social media feeds and landscape based campaigns.
LP4: To further develop, promote and utilise the landscape character approach in AONB management and policy, including development of LCA-based design guidance.	Three actions that will enhance the linkages of the LCA's with relevant plans and strategies and the furtherance of Design Guidance built on the foundations provided by the LCA's.
LP5: To continue to offer landscape character advice to Local Planning Authorities in strategic and development management consultations.	Two actions that look to the resourcing of landscape planning advice.

Land Management: Farming, Forestry & Catchment

LMI: To support sustainable land management to improve and extend the special wildlife, landscape and ecosystem services of Quantock Commons and farmland.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
<p>LPI: To protect, maintain and where appropriate extend the dry acid grassland, acid flushes/mires, open moorland and upland oakwoods with their important bird assemblage, of Quantock Common.</p>	<p>Six actions which will look to provide evidence and promote the Quantock Commons for targeting under future Agri-Environment Schemes. The actions also include direct delivery by the Partnership / partners for some projects</p>
<p>LMP2: To encourage and support the positive management of Quantock farmland, woodland and water catchment through engagement with the development and delivery of a high quality locally responsive land management scheme.</p>	<p>Two actions concentrating on developing a local NELMs based scheme in consultation with local landowners / farmers and working through the Quantock Facilitation Fund to provide advice and training opportunities.</p>
<p>LMP3: To support the understanding, conservation and proper management of Quantock hedges and associated banks.</p>	<p>Four actions aiming to increase knowledge through research projects and undertake restoration through direct land management, where appropriate, and through provision of specific grants.</p>
<p>LMP4: To support the sensitive management of woodland and plantations to enhance and extend the distinctive character, landscape and wildlife of the Quantocks.</p>	<p>Three actions which aim to provide training and undertake research into Quantock woodlands with the aim of better understanding the appropriate management which can feed into Woodland Management Plans.</p>
<p>LMP5: To encourage and support the creation and positive management of privately owned woodland and orchards, bringing more into management to increase the wide range of ecosystem services provided.</p>	<p>Four actions which will provide training and resources for private woodland owners to better manage their woodlands. Actions also identify the role of Community Supported Forestry groups and looks to support these where appropriate.</p>

Biodiversity: Wildlife & Habitats

BWH1: To maintain and enrich the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Quantocks at the landscape scale.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
<p>BWHPI: To engage with development of land management, agri-environment and/or other innovative schemes to protect, connect and expand valuable Quantock habitats both inside and outside the AONB boundary.</p>	<p>Three actions that will allow testing of NELMs and undertake research to ensure any new scheme is appropriately targeted.</p>
<p>BWHP4: To support the managed conversion of plantations (wholly or in part) to heathland or semi-natural woodland where this strengthens the existing network of habitats.</p>	<p>Two actions that will aim to encourage conifer conversion to broadleaf / open space through engagement with woodland management plans and through direct delivery by the partnership in partnership with Forestry Commission.</p>
<p>BWH2: to increase knowledge and understanding of the biodiversity and ecosystems of the Quantocks and their linkages to the surrounding area.</p>	
<p>BWHP2: To monitor biodiversity through regular surveys of key species across the AONB.</p>	<p>Three actions working with existing monitoring schemes run by the Partnership or partner organisations.</p>
<p>BWHP3: To monitor and manage harmful invasive species and diseases across the AONB.</p>	<p>Two actions that will prioritise invasive species control through existing agri-environment schemes and engage community groups in direct control</p>
<p>BWHP5: To research and monitor the populations and ecological networks of key Quantock species and use the information gained to inform management actions that will maintain or restore robust populations of these species.</p>	<p>Two actions that aim to collate the results of actions under BWHP2 and provide results to inform site / area Management Plans</p>

Historic Environment and Cultural Influences

HEI: To ensure the historic and culturally significant landscape and features of the AONB are protected, conserved and understood in detail.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
HEP1: Support the protection, conservation and reinstatement of historic and culturally significant Quantock landscapes and features, particularly assets on the Heritage at Risk Register.	Two actions with the partnership undertaking direct action, supporting community engagement through signposting to existing initiatives, such as the parish road sign project, and supporting partner organisations in project bids
HEP2: Promote public understanding of the significance of the Quantock historic and cultural landscape through community engagement and appropriate interpretation.	Three actions with public engagement and school based activities looking to promote the importance of the historic heritage of the Quantock Hills to local communities.
HEP3: The further investigation and recording of historic and culturally significant Quantock landscapes and features.	Three actions which will continue existing monitoring schemes and look to expand to include other heritage features such as physical heritage not scheduled and cultural heritage.

Geology & Climate

GCI: To maintain, protect and promote understanding of the coastal SSSI and a representative sample of other visible Quantock geology.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
GCPI: To maintain representative example exposures of Quantock geology with public access where safe and interpret them for the public where appropriate.	Two actions that will provide interpretation on-site and through web-based / printed media of Quantock geology.
GCP2: To protect the high quality of Quantock coastal landform and their distinctive landscape contribution from inappropriate development and activities.	Two actions undertaking seascape assessment and using it to promote importance of geological SSSI and inform planning and development on coastland landscapes.

GC2: To identify and reinforce adaptation strategies and resilience to climate change in respect of the special qualities of the AONB.

GCP3: To assess the climate change adaptation priorities and possibilities in respect of the special qualities of the AONB through implementation of the Natural England Climate Change Adaptation Manual (NE546).	Three actions the will undertake a climate change adaption assessment, using the assessment to inform land management plans, targeting of agri-environment schemes and provide advice to landowners / farmers on resilience planning for agriculture and forestry.
GCP4: To take a strategic landscape scale approach to the creation, restoration and maintenance of habitats in the AONB to maximise Quantock wildlife and landscape resilience to the impacts of climate change.	One action to undertake habitat connectivity study and use results to prioritise actions under other Management Priorities such as hedgerow creation of woodland creation.

Development, Planning & Infrastructure

DPII: To ensure development and infrastructure conserves and enhances the AONB; that it is compatible with its distinctive character described by the LCA, not compromising the special qualities of the AONB outlined in the Statement of Significance.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
<p>DPII1: Protect the special qualities of the AONB through appropriate recognition in forward planning documents and significant planning applications reflecting AONB Service consultation, comments and advice.</p>	<p>Two actions that aim to ensure adequate resource to be able achieve Management Policy. Actions will engage partnership on forward planning strategies as well as investigate better use of planning resources throughout AONB 'family'.</p>
<p>DPII2: Ensure development and infrastructure in the AONB is appropriate in location, landscape sensitivity, scale and design respecting its distinctive character described by the LCA and its special qualities outlined in the Statement of Significance.</p>	<p>Two actions that will ensure adequate resources are available to the partnership to promote special qualities of the Quantock Hills, undertake appropriate assessments of impact of proposed development and make relevant representation to the local planning authority or relevant organisation.</p>
<p>DPII3: Protect local distinctiveness in AONB settlements and Quantock lanes and roads.</p>	<p>Two actions that will produce relevant design guidance in partnership with local planning authorities.</p>
<p>DPII4: Consider the impacts of Permitted Development on the special qualities of the AONB and whether they can be mitigated.</p>	<p>Two actions, one to research impact of GPDO developments on the Quantock Hills and based on outcome of research to take appropriate action such as development of an Article 4 Direction.</p>
<p>DPII5: Ensure development in the AONB maintains or delivers net gain in biodiversity, protects significant trees and other important landscape features and promotes the conservation of the historic environment.</p>	<p>Two actions, first to undertake research of biodiversity loss / gain of historic development and based on research undertake training in partnership with local planning authorities to look at good practice with regard to the purpose of the AONB.</p>
<p>DPII6: Ensure development in the setting of the AONB does not harm the natural beauty, character and special qualities of the AONB or otherwise prejudice the delivery of AONB purposes.</p>	<p>Two actions, ensuring resource is available to the partnership to provide landscape planning advice and pursue production of relevant design guidance.</p>
<p>DPII7: Protect the dark skies and tranquillity of the AONB.</p>	<p>Two actions promoting existing work undertaken by CPRE and others on importance of dark skies and the production on design guidance on lighting.</p>
<p>DPII8: Protect the views in to and out of the AONB through involvement in the planning process</p>	<p>Two actions that will undertake a community based approach to assessment of views and use the assessment to inform responses to forward planning documents and other relevant planning guidance.</p>

Local Economy & Visitors

LEVI: To support tourism and economic activity across the AONB where it is environmentally sustainable and benefits businesses in local communities.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
LEVPI: To work with local businesses and support new markets for farmers that promote sustainable growth and the special qualities of the AONB.	Two actions to run workshops through partners to promote appropriate diversification opportunities which promote the special qualities of the Quantock Hills.
LEVP2: To provide evidence for decision making through monitoring visitor trends and activities, including economic benefits and impacts on the special qualities of the AONB.	Two actions that collate user data and develop low resource monitoring systems to ensure up to date data collection.
LEVP3: To Support landscape-sensitive delivery of fast broadband throughout the AONB.	Two actions, to develop community led solutions to provision of fast rural broadband through good practise guidance from other protected landscapes and signposting to relevant organisations.

Access, Recreation & Wellbeing

ARWI: To provide high quality public access in appropriate areas of the Quantocks, promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of recreation in the AONB while minimising adverse environmental impacts.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
ARWPI: To actively seek opportunities that maximise the health and wellbeing benefits the AONB can offer through partnership working and projects.	Three actions to develop new project to deliver more nature and wellbeing work through the partnership and other partners and to embed nature and wellbeing lessons from pilot project into existing work streams where relevant.
ARWP2: To pursue high quality sustainable access to popular AONB visitor locations through the Active Travel Routes approach.	Two actions to investigate non-car routes from local urban centres of Bridgwater and Taunton, through new development or highway projects.
ARWP3: To ensure public access areas, Rights of Way and promoted routes are useable and maintained to a high standard.	Three actions that will engage communities in monitoring rights of way and promoted routes, work with local authorities in prioritisation of maintenance.
ARWP4: To reduce user conflict and limit damage to rights of way and landscape quality from recreational uses including off-road driving.	Three actions that will engage relevant organisation in a liaison group to allow full discussion of issues and solutions. The partnership will have a key role in communication of key messages through media and events.
ARWP5: To maintain practical AONB staff on the ground to support volunteers, manage Rights of Way misuse and reduce access problems such as sheep worrying and summer fires.	One action ensuring adequate resource to achieve Management Policy.

Community & Volunteering

CVI: To support and promote active communities and volunteer involvement in the AONB.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
CVPI: To support sustainable village and rural projects which address AONB Management Plan related issues.	Two actions to acquire funding for provision of small grants pot or signposting to funding for local community projects and ensuring adequate resource to support communities.
CVP2: To support, within available resources, Quantock communities in the development and delivery of Community and Neighbourhood Planning where there is no conflict with AONB objectives.	Two actions to ensure special qualities of the Quantock Hills are easily transposed to local neighbourhood / community plans and to allocate resource to engage with the planning process.
CVP3: To further develop the role of community groups and volunteers in the management of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.	Three actions to resource volunteer groups and look to develop further opportunities to undertake action in the Quantock Hills in support of the Management Plan.

Public Understanding & Interpretation

PUII: To continually update and improve the relevance, quality and accessibility of Quantock information and interpretation for AONB visitors and local communities, within available resources.

Management Policy	Summary of Actions
PUIPI: To maintain varied, regular and stimulating social media outputs, promoting core messages.	Two actions to run social media campaigns and train AONB staff and other relevant organisations in the effective use of social media.
PUIP2: To further develop and populate the AONB website as a public source of information and interest.	Two actions to run public competitions which promote the special qualities of the Quantock Hills and allow community input into web-based content.
PUIP3: To develop and deliver interpretation and activities that increase visitors' understanding of the landscape and heritage of the Quantocks and encourage them to actively care for the area.	Five actions that promote undertaking events, talks, walks, etc to engage the general public and schools promoting the special qualities of the Quantock Hills. Emphasis is on working in partnership with other relevant organisations to deliver events.

Appendix 2

Full Statement of Significance

Dramatic Landscape

The narrow upland plateau of the Quantock Hills is the only AONB based on sandstone rocks of the Devonian Period; the hills reach a height of 381m lifting the AONB above the surrounding lowland plain and providing exceptional panoramic views. The ridge landform of the Quantock Hills with its deep folds and varied land cover gives the landscape a highly distinctive identity separating it from the lowlands in which it sits. This narrow upland plateau is imposing above the surrounding agricultural plain and provides a dramatic backdrop feature over a wide area.

In the southern AONB rolling hedged farmland with numerous copses, hamlets and villages climbs through wide hedged combes and slopes to open hilltops of neutral grassland and scattered scrub. The western flank of the AONB is a steep scarp slope of pasture, hanging woods and historic parkland with ancient trees above the string of settlements and large houses lining the bottom of the slope. Deep stream-cut combes to the north east contain extensive oak-woods that climb towards small flower-rich bogs in the high heaths of gorse, heather, bracken and thorn. This virtually unbroken hilltop heathland has in many places distinctive beech hedgebanks separating it from surrounding extensive grass enclosures, woodland and conifer plantations. The coastal edge of the AONB provides foreshore and cliff features that add to the area's landscape richness and diversity.

The whole landscape is a watershed laced with streams and brooks while distinctive beech hedgebanks, tree lines and avenues link farmland to higher heaths. A network of country lanes ranges mainly around the lower contours connecting distinctive villages often built from the hard red sandstone that shapes the higher hills.

Dramatic landscape Elements:

- Hilltop Common - unenclosed semi-natural grazed heathland (and upland oak woods), these areas are of the very highest landscape and wildlife value.
- Unimproved hill land - rough grazing grassland outside the hilltop Common - a rare resource valued for its biodiversity and wild and open character.
- Improved hill land - green grass areas high in the hills with comparatively low levels of biodiversity.
- Farmed combes - mixed management often hedged pastures with streams, springs and small woodlands, important for biodiversity and landscape.
- Lower farmland - varies from areas of intensive arable with little interest to small-scale mixed farming with high biodiversity and landscape value.
- Farmed coastal strip - mixed arable, miscanthus and improved grazing with areas being returned to low input extensive grazing/arable. This area is adjacent to narrow cliff edge zone of unimproved grass/scrubland. Wildlife and landscape interest mixed - some very high.

Dramatic Landscape Field Boundaries:

Field patterns and the hedges that enclose Quantock farmland are important structural and historic features, creating rhythm and form in the agricultural landscape. The combination of topography and landform means that their importance is magnified, as the farmland fringes are often looked down upon or across to from the summits and hillsides.

- Saxon or older hedgerows and banks - these hedges are mainly of Saxon-medieval origin sometimes created directly from woodland and other unenclosed wastes, with possible vestiges of the older Iron Age landscape pattern represented by some smaller enclosures.
- Significant historic boundaries e.g. parish or Common - in the combes, boundary banks are a Common feature, often bordering the steep, narrow lanes: earth banks (some stone-faced), with or without a hedge on top.

- Banked beech hedgerows - highly distinctive C18 and C19 features consisting of earth banks topped with a row/double row of beech trees, many surrounding rectangular parliamentary enclosure fields. They create distinctive and visually prominent landscape features on the edges of the central/northern hilltop plateau and on lower ground further south taking in previously unenclosed land. Occasionally, beech trees have also been planted along far older boundaries such as the Drove Road, which runs along the central spine of the hilltop.
- Established species-rich hedgerows and new native-species hedges - typically composed of hawthorn, blackthorn, ash, elm, oak and hazel.

Dramatic Landscape Woodland:

Quantock woodlands have very significant wildlife and landscape value while providing other benefits including timber products, local employment and access, recreation and tourism opportunities. Woodland and plantations in and around the AONB form a multifunctional green infrastructure network of an exceptionally high standard. ("Green infrastructure is the network of high quality green and blue spaces and other environmental features. It needs to be planned and delivered at all spatial scales from national to neighbourhood levels." www.naturalengland.org.uk)

- Small farm woodlands - in the lower enclosed landscape are broadleaf and/or conifer and in some cases are on ancient woodland sites. Small woodlands and copses are significant elements in the farmed Quantock landscape, they also have biodiversity interest.
- Ash-hazel woodlands - are found in the lower lying areas on the less acid rocks of central and southern parts of the AONB. Examples include the Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve of Aisholt Wood and part of Buncombe Wood on the lower southern slopes of Cothelstone Hill. The Ash-hazel mix allows good light levels at the woodland floor leading to a healthy ground flora sometimes including extensive bluebell cover.

- Western sessile oak woodlands - are dominated by sessile oak, with rowan, birch, holly, hazel, alder, willow, ash and hazel also represented. These woods cloak the deep combes which cut into the hard sandstone rocks of the north east hills, placing them mainly within Quantock Common. The cool, moist conditions support a moss, fern, fungi and lichen community of international importance. The sessile oak woodlands are designated SSSI and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) at European level; they are absolutely key elements of AONB landscape and biodiversity significance.
- Coniferous plantation - largely planted in the early 20th century dominate a large area of the central upland plateau at Great Wood, with other significant plantations throughout the AONB. The Forestry Commission has significantly softened the landscape impacts of plantations through special design interventions over the last ten years, however these extensive areas of mixed and non-native tree species can impact on the special qualities of the AONB. More positively these forests provide an important habitat for red deer and a distinct range of invertebrates and birds and provide other benefits including timber; carbon storage, and in some areas very high access and recreation value.

Spectacular views

Views from the hilltops extend across the distinctive wetlands of the Somerset Levels in the east to the Mendip Hills AONB, to the Blackdown Hills AONB in the south and across the Brendon Hills to Exmoor National Park in the west. The coastal boundary of this otherwise predominantly upland area forms a further exceptional landscape feature from the northern Quantocks leading the eye across a coastal strip of fields, small woods and abrupt cliffs, all within the AONB, then beyond to the Bristol Channel and the Welsh coast. Internal views are constantly changing with steep combes flanked by overlapping spurs allowing glimpses of open areas above and a recurring feature of wooded slopes with open hilltops. From a distance the hills form an important backdrop landscape for this part of the south-west.

Geology

The Quantocks are the only upland AONB based on sandstone rocks of the Devonian Period and provide great geological interest from the hard sandstones of the hilltops to the Jurassic exposures of the coastal margin.

These hard rocks have had significant economic value in the past and are generally only exposed at redundant quarry sites which provided road-surfacing materials and distinctive raw materials for many of the buildings and settlements of the area and beyond. The fringes of this ridge are composed of younger rocks mainly of the Triassic Period and perhaps the most significant geological sites in the AONB are the Triassic and Jurassic exposures at the coast.

The Quantock cliffs and foreshore are internationally recognised for their special geological interest; they contain the Stratotype for the first and second stage boundary of the Jurassic Period, are a Geological Conservation Review site and a designated Geological Site of Special Scientific Interest. These marine deposits, consisting of alternating limestones and shales, are known as Lias (layers). They create the low cliffs along the coastline constantly being cut back by the sea, while on the foreshore the folded bands of limestone form curving and sweeping terraces and ledges. The limestones are renowned for their fossil remains, particularly ammonites, and blocks of stone have been used locally as a building material. The rocks have also been exploited as a source of lime and a number of limekilns can be found along the coast.

Rare and precious wildlife habitats and species

The Quantock Hilltops and upper slopes provide highly significant semi-natural habitats of national and international importance for biodiversity:

Western sessile oak woodlands cloak the steep sided combes which cut into the hard sandstone rocks, they support a distinctive range of bat and bird species (monitored)

including the summer migrant species of wood warbler, pied flycatcher and redstart that fly to the Quantocks from sub-Saharan Africa each spring to breed. The assemblages of lower plants - bryophytes, epiphytic lichens and fungi of these woodlands are of international importance.

Quantock heathland is a combination of lowland and upland types, it blankets the hilltops and includes heather, whortleberry, bracken, bell heather, western gorse and cross leaved heath along with bristle-leaved bent and wavy-hair grass. The combined upland/heathland bird assemblage is strong with surveys showing Quantock populations of nightjar are over 1% of the UK population, a recognised indicator of national importance. Adder populations are monitored and healthy. Within these habitats there are boggy areas known as acid flushes, botanically the richest habitats in the AONB, with streams flowing from them through wooded combes to the farmland below.

The enclosed mantle of the Quantocks surrounding the heath-covered ridge makes up more than half of the AONB. It includes grazed pasture, arable land (particularly on the better soils found on the northern coastal plain and around the southern hills) and historic parkland containing fine specimens of oak, ash, chestnut and beech. The unsprayed hedge bottoms and verges provide a habitat where hedgerow plants can thrive and the margins around the larger arable fields between Quantoxhead and Kilve are known to harbour populations of declining arable plants. Veteran trees are an important landscape feature and a significant biological resource for the bats, rare invertebrates, lichens and fungi that are associated with the mature bark and standing dead wood. The Ash-hazel woodland mix more Common in the southern hills allows good light levels at the woodland floor leading to a healthy ground flora in some cases including extensive bluebell cover. Dormice are present and monitored at some locations.

The coastal edge of the AONB provides foreshore and cliff habitats that add to the area's richness and diversity, it is very different to other parts of the AONB. Whereas much of the AONB supports vegetation on acidic soils (such as heathland), the coastal stretch is primarily alkaline due to the limestone cliffs. Specialised biodiversity interest including orchids and invertebrates are found on the cliff tops.

Red deer are the largest free-roaming wild animals in the UK, their continued presence in the Quantocks carries symbolic weight and they are perhaps the most publicly appreciated element of Quantock wildlife.

Rich sense of history

This apparently unchanging and ancient place is an important historic landscape with a wide variety of highly significant archaeological features.

The upland Common forms one of the few remaining moorland landscapes in southern Britain of national importance for the legible survival of monuments dating from the Neolithic and especially the Bronze Age. These include numerous cairns resulting from land clearance and bowl barrows dating from around 2400 – 1500 BC, extensive crop mark evidence for settlement and land use and large-scale dramatic examples of Iron Age hill forts and smaller defended enclosures such as Ruborough Camp and Dowsborough Hillfort. The surrounding farmland, much of which is Saxon in origin and shape has mainly 17th and 18th century parklands superimposed on it, and the enclosures and boundary modifications of subsequent years, evolving as marginal land came into, and drifted out of management.

There is considerable interest in Quantock settlements including particular features such as the early C16 Church House in Crowcombe. The Quantock coastal belt includes important medieval manors at Kilve and East Quantoxhead, and an early 20th century oil retort at Kilve Pill. Abandoned harbours can be found at Kilve Pill and Lilstock and there are a number of lime kilns to be found along the coast.

Quantock communities and settlements
The Quantock Hills are a living, working landscape with a distinct cultural heritage and varied village communities connected by narrow roads and country lanes, it has no large settlements and is definitively rural. The Quantock Hills AONB has a small population of around 3000 people living within its boundary and many Quantock communities are strong and vibrant assertively seeking to conserve and enhance the place that they live in.

Settlement is sparse, consisting of isolated farms, hamlets or small villages located along the spring line or tucked into the narrow combs and valleys with the exception of Broomfield, higher in the southern hills. The pre-enclosure settlement pattern below the moorland can still be seen today. Scarp-foot villages lie along the western edge and there is scattered settlement on the gentler eastern slopes, while large country houses often sited to take advantage of far reaching views sit within their estates around the AONB. Larger villages like Nether Stowey lie at the junction with the Vale of Taunton. The villages, while small in number are surprisingly diverse in character, most having made strong use of local geology including the red sandstones, Blue Lias and distinctive grey-green Cockercombe Tuff formed by the compression of volcanic ash.

Cultural contribution

This landscape has inspired many cultural and artistic contributions both historic and modern from poetry to pop videos. A particularly strong example is the inspiration it provided to Coleridge and Wordsworth when they lived here at the end of the 18th century and first launched the romantic style of poetry which still influences the arts and set the tone of our current approach to natural landscapes. The dark skies of the Quantocks inspired Arthur C Clarke's nightly stargazing when he was raised at Ballifants Farm on the AONB's south-western boundary in the 1920s and 30s.

Access and enjoyment opportunities

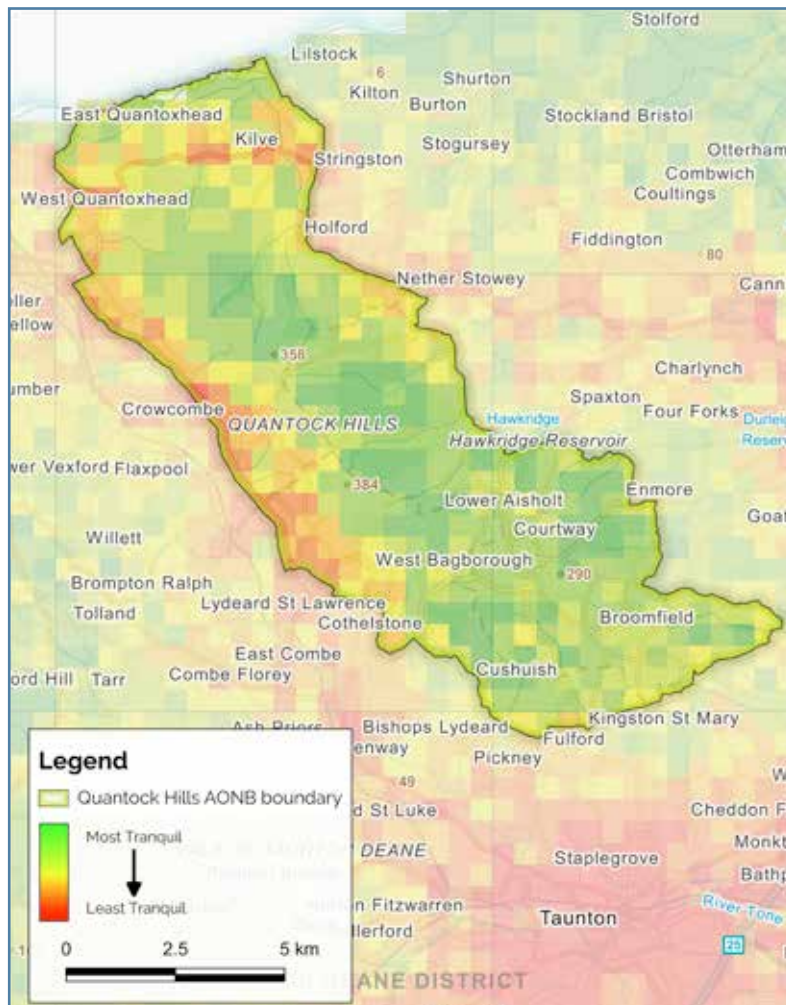
The Quantock Hills AONB offers superb opportunities for quiet outdoor recreation, the area has 3,000 hectares of public Access Land comprising all the most beautiful hilltop and higher wooded areas. There are approximately 250 kilometres (150 miles) of rights of way in the AONB, 130 km within the open access hilltop area of which 80% are bridleways or restricted byways making this an exceptional area for horse riders and mountain bikers as well as walkers.

Proximity to two of the largest population centres in Somerset, Bridgwater and Taunton, makes the Quantocks very popular with day-trippers and according to the most recent visitor survey the hills receive over 385,000 recreational visits a year. The fact that over half of Quantock visitors come to the hills 10 or more times each year indicates the loyalty and appreciation the area inspires.

Tranquillity and sense of space

The Quantock combes, hilltops and coast are places where tranquillity and quiet public enjoyment are accessible to all. Based on the CPRE map of Tranquillity (2006) the Quantock Hills are relatively and universally tranquil (see map below). This is lost a little at its edges where it is close to larger roads and more settlement. Natural England information for the developing Quantock Hills National Character Area (144) states: notable trends from the 1960s to 2007 are the ongoing lack of disturbance and only slight and localised intrusion (visual and auditory).

The hilltop area in particular has a sense of space, wildness and seclusion that is perhaps unexpected in a comparatively small range of hills close to large market towns (It is approximately 12 miles from Taunton/ Bridgwater town centres to open Quantock heathland). It is a place people value for inspiration, spiritual refreshment, exhilarating views, dark skies at night and unpolluted air.

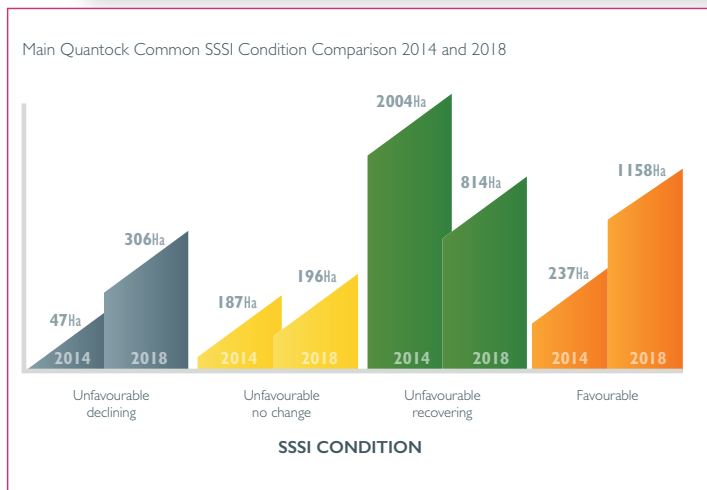
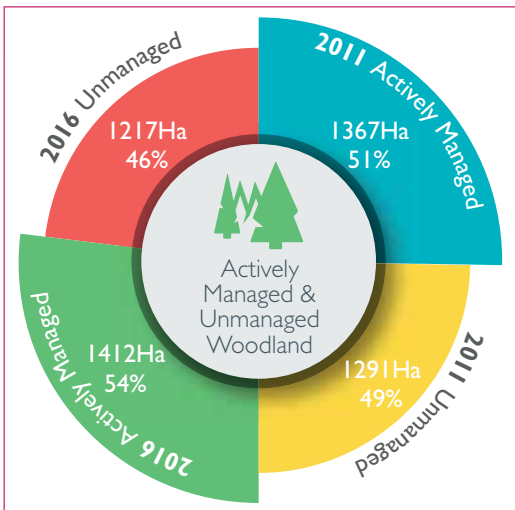
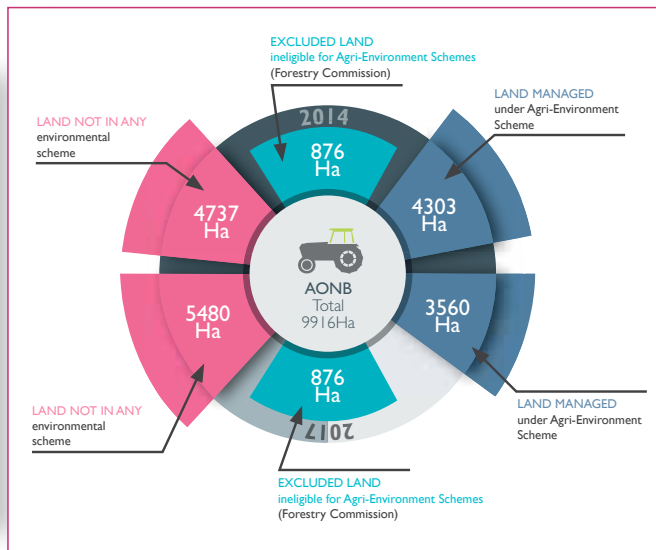
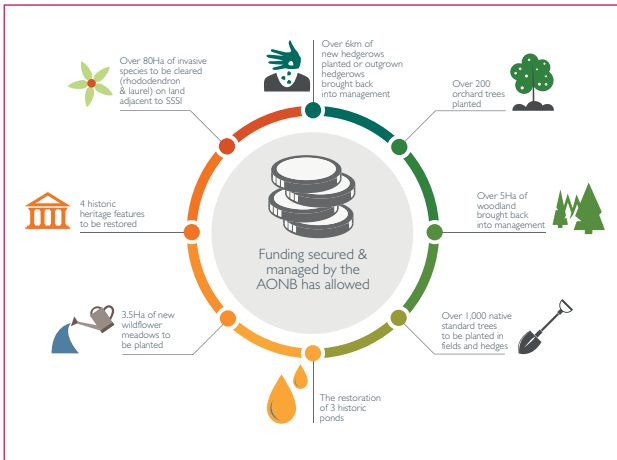


Appendix 3

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
CPRE	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
CRoW	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
DCO	Development Control Order
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Devonian	Geologic period 416 to 359 million years ago
DPD	Development Plan Document
Ecosystem Services	The range of beneficial resources and processes supplied by the natural environment
ECP	England Coast Path
ELC	European Landscape Convention
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LCA	Landscape Character Assessment
LPS	Landscape Partnership Scheme
Miscanthus	A tall thick-stemmed grass from eastern Asia grown specifically to be harvested and burnt in power stations
NAAONB	National Association of AONBs
Natural Capital	The stock of renewable and non-renewable natural resources e.g. plants, animals, air, water, soils, minerals that provide benefits to people.
NCA	National Character Areas
NE	Natural England
NELMS	New Environmental Land Management Scheme
NFM	Natural Flood Management
NGO	National Government Organisation
NPs	National Parks
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
NT	National Trust
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCI06	Section 106
SDC	Sedgemoor District Council
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEO's	Statement of Environmental Opportunity
SIP	Site Improvement Plan
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
Swaling	Planned and controlled heather burning undertaken in winter
TDBC	Taunton Deane Borough Council
WSC	West Somerset Council
25 YEP	25 Year Environment Plan

Infographics



Quantock Hills Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund

Farm Buildings	Grassland	Heathland	Woodland
Maintenance of traditional buildings	Grassland for wildlife	Heathland management	Assessing your woodlands potential
Managing water in the yard	Surface water management in field		Ancient woodland in the landscape
Managing manures	Improving soil structure, biology and resilience		Woodland creation
	Monitoring soil health		Agroforestry, sheep and woodlands
	Improving grazing management planning		Woodland biodiversity
	Using hedgerows to control flood water		

