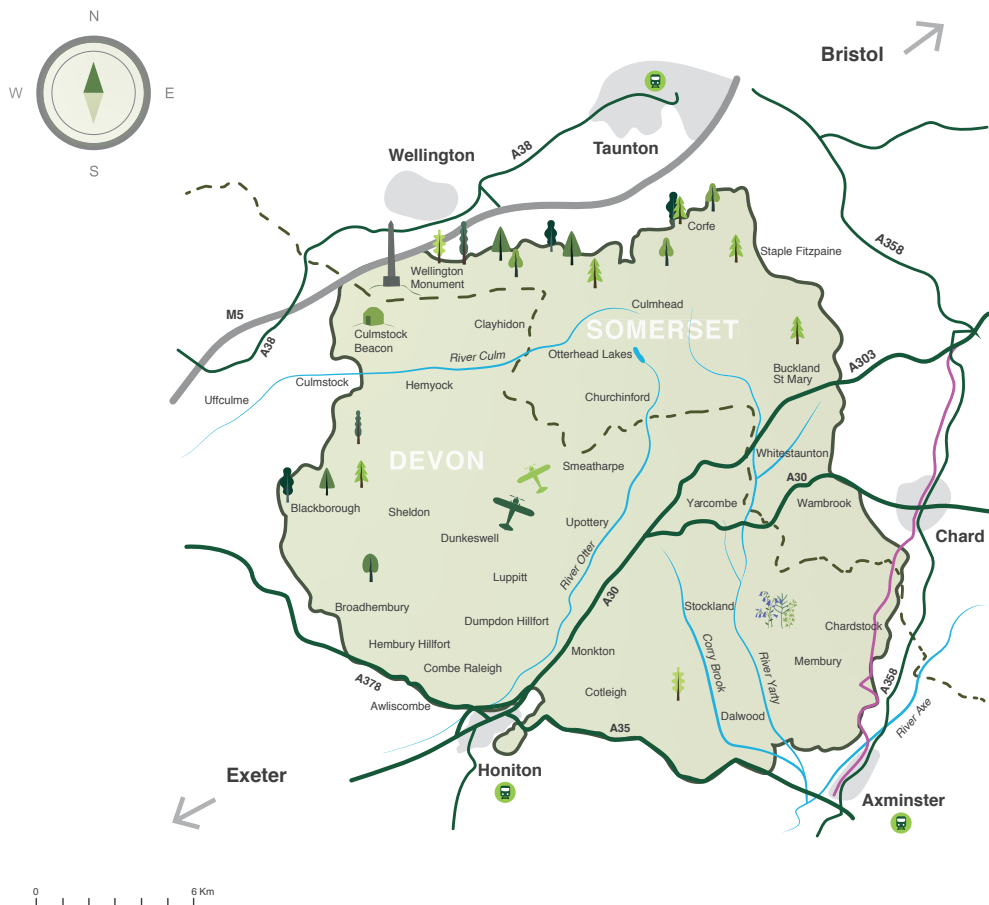




Blackdown Hills

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

AN INTRODUCTION TO MANAGING
THE BLACKDOWN HILLS AREA OF
OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY



BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB

The Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a tranquil and relatively isolated landscape on the border of Devon and Somerset. The area is rich in wildlife and heritage. For many, it epitomises the English countryside, with hedgerows and copses, small farms with intricate field patterns, deep valleys and narrow, winding lanes.

The Blackdown Hills AONB is a designated protected landscape. It is one of 46 AONBs in England and Wales, each with its own distinct, sometimes unique, characteristics. Each has been designated an AONB so that these special qualities can be safeguarded for future generations.

BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN

Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership (a coalition of local authorities, government agencies, conservation organisations and community groups), along with a small team of staff, work together to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills.

We work to an agreed five-year management plan which provides a framework to help guide the work and activities of all organisations, groups and individuals with a responsibility or interest in the Blackdown Hills AONB.

This guide gives an insight into the special qualities of Blackdown Hills AONB and briefly sets out our vision and objectives for managing the area. More detailed information is included in our full Management Plan 2019-24, available on our website.

www.blackdownhills.org.uk/managementplan



Photo: Liam Marsh

SPECIAL QUALITIES



The following special qualities, distinctive characteristics and key features combine to give the Blackdown Hills its distinctive identity in relation to natural beauty. If the Blackdown Hills AONB is to retain its character and status among England's finest landscapes, these special qualities require protection, conservation and enhancement.

LANDSCAPE QUALITY

- A managed landscape sculpted and maintained by the stewardship of generations of those who work the land
- Undeveloped skyline of the northern scarp slope is a prominent feature in views from the Vale of Taunton and beyond
- A rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi-natural habitats; a patchwork of woodland, heathland, meadow and mire linked by hedgerows
- Clear, unpolluted streams that meander down the valleys to feed the Yarty, Otter and Culm rivers
- Ancient and veteran trees in hedgerows, fields and woodland
- A settled landscape with a strong sense of time-depth containing farms and small scattered villages well related to the landscape

SCENIC QUALITY

- The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors
- Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat-topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys
- A well-wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedges and hedgerow trees
- The pattern of regular, large-scale enclosure fields on the plateau contrasts with the smaller, curving medieval fields on the valley slopes
- Majestic avenues of beech trees along northern ridges
- Long straight roads across the plateau with verges and low, neat hedges give way to narrow, enclosed, high-hedged winding single-tracked lanes in the valleys
- Wellington Monument is a key landscape feature identifying the Blackdown Hills over a very wide area in all directions



RELATIVE WILDNESS

- A sense of remoteness enhanced by the exposure of the plateau and more intimate extensive woodland of the upper slopes and hidden valleys
- Wide-open spaces provide exposure to the elements; big sky, windswept places, contrasts of sunlight and shadow

RELATIVE TRANQUILLITY

- Areas of high tranquillity spared many of the intrusions of modern life
- Places to enjoy natural sounds; the melody of the song thrush and skylark, the call of buzzards
- Dark night-time star-filled skies contrasting with the light pollution of the surrounding towns

CULTURAL HERITAGE

- The number and extent of well-preserved buildings in the local vernacular – chert, cob and thatch – are an important element of the landscape
- Hillforts are prominent features on the ends of the plateau ridges
- Mining remains from the once internationally significant whetstone industry and extensive evidence of iron-working
- Three second-world-war airfields and their associated buildings are found on the high, flat land of the plateau
- A community with a strong sense of place closely linked to the land and its management, with a particularly strong tradition of hedge laying
- A landscape that has inspired artists from the early 20th century Camden Town Group to the Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers of today



NATURAL HERITAGE FEATURES



- One of the finest, most extensive Greensand plateau in Britain; a distinctive landform that contrasts with the surrounding lowlands to the east, north and west
- The presence of straight, uninterrupted ridges are evident as a visual backdrop over a wide area
- Distinctive spring-line mires located around the upper slopes of the valleys
- The varied landscape supports a rich assemblage of wildlife including many species of bats, butterflies and meadow flowers and healthy populations of ferns, lichens, mosses and fungi
- Ancient, species-rich hedges with many hedgerow trees and flower-rich banks; colourful displays of primrose and bluebells in spring
- A network of ancient semi-natural woodland linked by hedgerows support a thriving dormouse population
- Streams and rivers are home to otters, lamprey and the vulnerable white-clawed crayfish



Photo: James Maben

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Ensure effective conservation and management of the historic environment

Ensure that the distinctive character and qualities of the landscape are understood, conserved, enhanced and restored

Ensure that all development affecting the AONB is of the highest quality, sensitive to landscape setting, conserving and enhancing wildlife, historic character and other special qualities

Foster vibrant, healthy and resilient communities who enjoy a high quality of life and feel connected to the AONB

Support sustainable farming and forestry practices that conserve and enhance AONB special qualities and deliver a range of ecosystem services

Ensure that opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty

Conserve geodiversity and ensure effective conservation, enhancement, expansion and connectivity of habitats

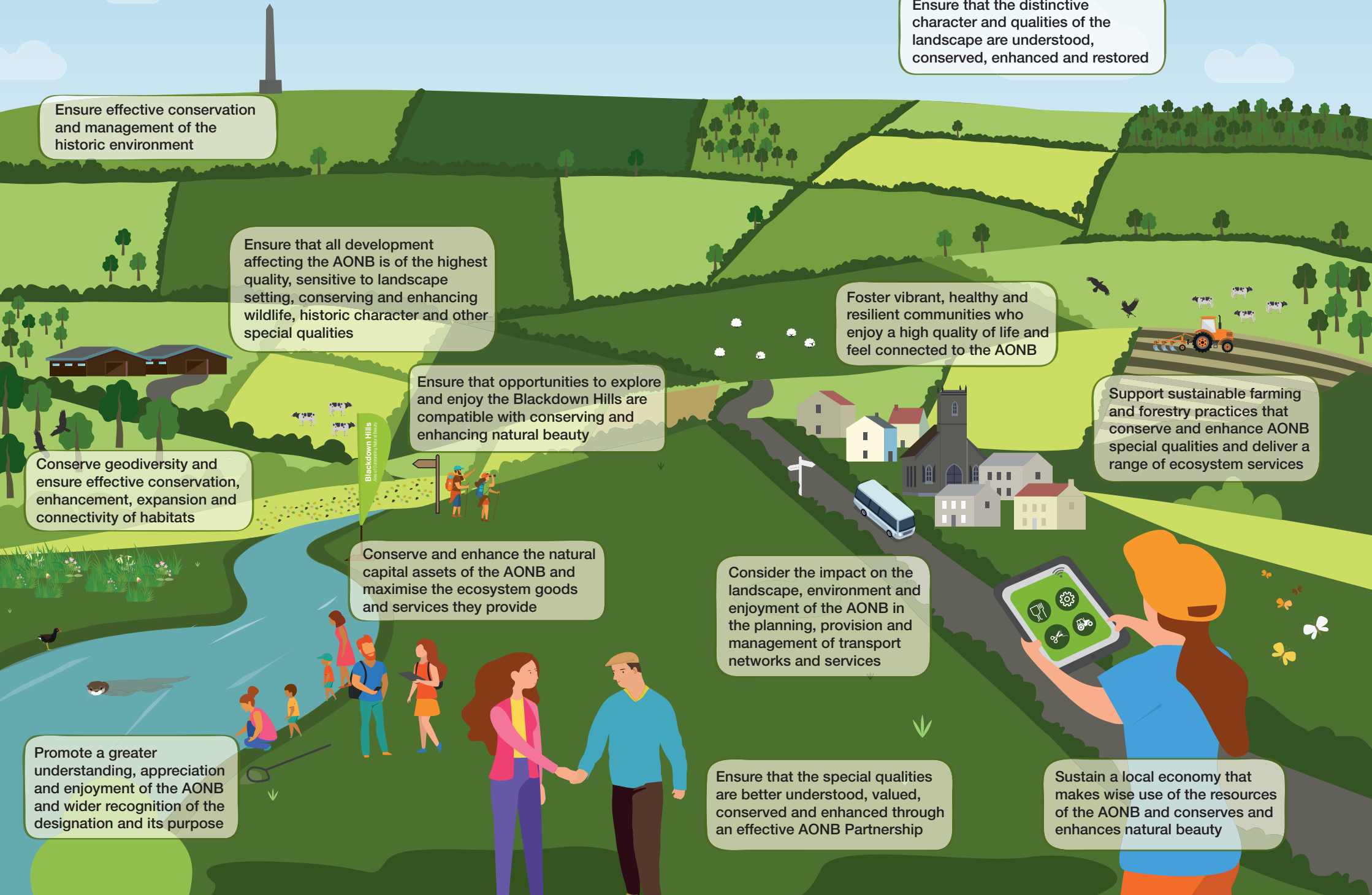
Conserve and enhance the natural capital assets of the AONB and maximise the ecosystem goods and services they provide

Consider the impact on the landscape, environment and enjoyment of the AONB in the planning, provision and management of transport networks and services

Promote a greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the AONB and wider recognition of the designation and its purpose

Ensure that the special qualities are better understood, valued, conserved and enhanced through an effective AONB Partnership

Sustain a local economy that makes wise use of the resources of the AONB and conserves and enhances natural beauty



VISION FOR THE BLACKDOWN HILLS AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Our Vision is that in 2029:

- The Blackdown Hills remains an ancient landscape of small villages and farms, deep valleys and high hedges shaped by its unique geology.
- Its sense of tranquil timelessness and lack of change provides reassurance in a polluted, overcrowded world and gives a sense of well-being to residents and visitors alike.
- Its wildlife is thriving and heritage conserved due to sympathetic management that is keeping alive traditional skills. They are enjoyed and understood by local people and visitors alike.
- Vibrant, diverse communities, with a strong sense of identity, live and work sustainably, supporting the local economy and conserving and enhancing the area's rich resources for future generations.



HOW TO CONTACT US

Blackdown Hills AONB

01823 680 681

Email: blackdownhills@devon.gov.uk

WWW.BLACKDOWNHILLS.ORG.UK



Blackdown Hills
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