**BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP**

**Minutes of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership Management Group held on   
Thursday, 4th November 2021, 9.30am – 11.15am, online via Teams**

**Present:**

Bruce Payne Special Appointee (Chair)

Cllr Graham Long Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Elaine Hayes Special Appointee

Kristina Luxton National Trust

Jon Burgess Forestry Commission

Emma Magee Environment Agency

Alex Swan Environment Agency

Peter Chamberlain Devon County Council

Blackdown Hills AONB staff team: Tim Youngs **(TY),** Lisa Turner **(LT)**,Gavin Saunders **(GS)**, MarkEdwards **(ME)**,Lucy Jefferson **(LJ)**

**Apologies:** Cllr Bob Nelson (Blackdown Hills Parish Network), Cllr John Berry (Devon County Council), Cllr John Thorne (Somerset County Council); Cllr Paul Hayward (East Devon District Council); Cllr Simon Clist (Mid Devon District Council), John Greenshields (Blackdown Hills Trust); Heather Stallard (Co-opted); Jenny Ash (Blackdown Hills Transition Group), David Northcote-Wright (Somerset Wildlife Trust), Gordon Field (Blackdown Hills Artists & Makers), Martin Turner (Blackdown Hills Hedge Association), Lydia Dahlin (NFU) substituting for Mark Pope.

**Members of the public:** None

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| **ITEM 1 Welcome and Introductions** | **By whom** |
| **1.1:** The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were given.  **1.2:** Declarations of interest: None.  **1.3:** Chairman’s announcements;  Gavin Saunders has stood down as a Special Appointee because he is now employed by Devon County Council in the AONB team.  BP also referred to Neroche Woodlanders Annual Report showcasing their most impressive work and undertook to circulate it.  Further announced that Heather Stallard is standing down after many years involved in the AONB and recorded a vote of thanks for her service and support throughout. | **BP** |
| **ITEM 2 WORKSHOP: Inclusion and diversity- outline of the piece of work being undertaken - what can we do better as an AONB Partnership** |  |
| Sarah Tarragon and Jenny Archard, of Clarity CIC, joined the meeting and led this workshop session. They are working with Young Somerset on a research project for the AONB up to March 2022. The first stage is just getting underway, and the aims are to understand the AONB’s current reach, look at who is out there, and to explore understanding of diversity and inclusion within the team and partnership to provide a baseline. The second phase after Christmas will involve consultation with individuals and support organisations.  A brief discussion was held to start to get a feel for perceptions and the context for this work. Ways to get involved in this work:  - Sarah and Jenny would be pleased to receive any comments from members of the management group  - Please respond to the survey will be sent to management group and staff  - Opportunity for one to one discussion | **ALL** |
| **ITEM 3 Questions from the public** |  |
| No questions received and none present. |  |
| **ITEM 4 Minutes and matters arising from 1st July 2021**  Minutes circulated prior to the meeting |  |
| Matters arising and actions:  **ITEM 2 (Farming in Protected Landscapes):** The latest version of the local targeting statement will be circulated.  Noted that a Local Assessment Panel is now established and chaired by EH, and they will keep detailed oversight of pipeline projects with an overview of the delivery of the programme provided at Management Group meetings.  **ITEM 4 (minutes and matters arising from the previous meeting):**  i. TY and BP will now follow up directly with those members who have still not returned their Register of Interest form.  ii. GL noted that the Parish Network website needs updating and through discussion, including at the forthcoming AGM, we could establish what AONB related information could usefully be included.  **ITEM 5 (climate emergency and carbon toolkit):** Discussion points and draft report referred to elsewhere in the last minutes have informed a brief for a piece of work around actions on the climate emergency and linking with the district/county strategies.  **ITEM 6.1 (team report):** SDFapplications have been received and together with the Challenge Fund applications this grant funding is now fully spent.  The minutes were agreed and will be signed by the chairman as a true record when appropriate to do so. | **TY/FiPL team**  **BP/TY**  **GL/MC/BN** |
| **ITEM 5 Farming in Protected Landscapes (and underpinning Nature Recovery Area plan)** |  |
| i. Farming in Protected Landscapes presented by ME and LJ.  A reminder of Defra programme objectives:  **Climate** - delivery of net zero through nature based solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change  **Nature** - delivery of the Nature Recovery Network and commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030  **People** - provide a natural health service to improve the nation’s public health and wellbeing through increased access to nature  **Place** - protected landscapes as: centres of excellence and green innovation; flourishing places to live and work; strong identity and cultural heritage; attractive visitor destinations  LJ provides administrative support for the programme, while as project officers ME and GS advise on potential projects, visiting potential applications and assessing projects in relation to the programme objectives and local priorities. Projects seeking more than £5000 are considered by a local assessment panel which meets every 6-8 weeks.  Have so far had 56 enquiries and potential projects include specialist advice to restore a site’s wildlife potential, researching soil carbon, and works to restore and create ponds, orchards, hedges and mire.  ii. Nature Recovery Areas presented by GS.  GS presented progress with identifying and mapping nature recovery areas in the AONB, noting that previous workshops with Management Group members had resulted in a revised approach. The mapping covers the entire AONB and is based on ecological and landscape character, centred around the river catchments. It offers way of focusing effort to achieve better outcomes for the AONB based around environmental issues and priorities, and for example is being used to inform FiPL.  It was noted that this has not been prepared in isolation, and there are linkages with work in both Somerset and Devon, and beyond, on nature recovery strategies.  TY sought endorsement from Management Group to support the Nature Recovery Areas document, which was given. |  |
| **ITEM 6 AONB Team**  Papers circulated prior to the meeting |  |
| **ITEM 6.1 Team report** |  |
| **6.1.1:**  TY gave a presentation on some highlights and priorities from the team report relating to core work and live projects:  Core  Government response to the Landscapes (Glover) Review  No return to the office quite yet  SDF Challenge Fund  30 Ways to experience the Blackdown Hills AONB  Volunteering-Monument Management Scheme and citizen science surveys  - Noted that full Government response to the Glover Review is expected in December.  - Very positive response to the Challenge Fund, with 6 successful applications focusing on climate and nature.  Projects  Connecting the Culm (Interreg 2Seas) and now also the Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme (FCRIP)  Somerset Nature Connections -Nature & wellbeing  Landscape Enhancement Initiative (National Grid): Enhancing the Hills & Hillforts of the Hills  Facilitation Fund  Nature Recovery Plan/ Areas including Triple Axe/ national Colchester Declaration pilot  Level-Up (Green Recovery Challenge Fund)  Inclusion & diversity and climate change  Also provided an overview of our work with white-clawed crayfish in the Culm, from the Natural Futures project, through the Culm Community Crayfish project and beyond to the development of the Connecting the Culm project and then the recent release of some white-clawed crayfish into an ‘ark’ site near to the river.  **6.1.2:**  Actions in Team Report:  **ACTION 1:** Members to **note** that the AONB will be sending in a response to the A358 consultation and recognise that individuals/ groups/ organisations will also separately submit their own responses. If you wish any pertinent points to be included in the AONB response, please e-mail Lisa Turner at the AONB [response was submitted to meet the consultation deadline on 22nd November].  **ACTION 2:** Members are asked to **sign off/ endorse** the Nature Recovery Area document.  This was covered and agreed under Item 5.  **ACTION 3:** Members to **indicate** if they wish to be directly involved in the climate change action plan work.  JB indicated that he would be happy to contribute to this where it relates to trees, i.e. sequestration.  **ACTION 4:** Members specifically in South Somerset and East Devon are asked to **note** the Triple Axe project, as this relates to current phosphate related discussions/ Axe Nutrient Management Plan.  TY to follow up directly with Cllrs Wale and Haywood, who were absent.  **ACTION 5:** Members are asked to **endorse** the recruitment of a new 0.8 FTE project member of staff to work on the Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme (FCRIP) project in the Culm catchment up to late 2026.  This was agreed.  **ACTION 6:** Members to **indicate** if they wish to be directly involved in the Inclusion & Diversity work**.** | **ALL**  **TY/JB**  **TY**  **ALL** |
| **ITEM 6.2 Financial summary to end of September 2021** |  |
| TY explained that a more substantial spreadsheet summary had been presented this time because Officer Support Group felt it was important for the Management Group to see the financial breadth and complexity of the project work and non-core funding.  PC noted that the finances are looked at in detail by the officer support group.  No questions raised. |  |
| **ITEM 7 AONB Partnership** |  |
| **7.1 Briefings from partners**  **PC, Devon County Council (DCC):**  1. Highlighted a couple of the many tree and woodland planting initiatives available –   * Queen’s Green Canopy, to mark the Queen’s platinum (70th) Jubilee. Does not provide money but encourages community participation – DCC involved with Lord Lieutenancy in co-ordinating and supporting the initiative locally. * Devon Emergency Tree Fund – funding from Woodland Trust, in the region of £300,000, to local authorities for tree planting and promotion through others. One of things DCC is doing is tree planting on DCC land, including County Farms, one of these being within AONB in Kentisbeare area. Also working with Mid Devon District Council on tree planting sites, including outside the AONB around Uffculme. The county council is also using some of this money to try and engage with town and parish councils where they might be really keen to review their land holdings and explore opportunities for tree planting. DCC happy to team up with a few town and parish councils around the county to see if they can support them.   2. Hembury Hillfort – PC highlighted that the Hembury Hillfort site has been put up for sale by the current landowner. It is a very important hillfort for the AONB and in Devon and the landowner has been very supportive of the Scheduled Monument status and management works involving various bodies. It is important that a future owner will allow that positive management to continue. Some interest is being shown by key bodies such as English Heritage, Historic England and Devon Archaeology Society, but would be great to see local consortium to work together to secure the site’s future. TY noted that he is in close contact with the DCC County Archaeologist too.  **DNW, Somerset Wildlife Trust:**  1. Green Recovery Challenge Fund Levels Up - 1,000 metres of new chestnut boundary fencing has now been installed, this is replacing the very dilapidated previous fencing which was at least 25 years old and completely collapsed in some sections. Work has started on both the Yarty Moor and Brimley Hill Mire fences with the lines cleared and the materials on site, work is currently paused due to the recent very heavy rains which have made the sites even wetter than usual, they will resume when we get a drier spell of weather. The specifications for the scrub clearance work on the three sites has been sent out to contractors and I’m starting to meet them on the ground to obtain quotes before the work is done later in the winter.  2. Ash dieback – A felling licence is in place and the contract let for the felling of the diseased trees along the road edges at Quants this winter. Roadside trees will also be felled at Dommett Wood and Bickham Wood. |  |
| **ITEM 8 Any Other Business** |  |
| BP noted that he hoped that face to face meeting might be able to resume early next year, and that this would provide a fitting opportunity to pay tribute to Heather Stallard and Paul Diviani.  TY reported that work on the Blackdown Way footpath link between Axminster and northern AONB is continuing, led by East Devon based volunteer. Intention that it will link East Devon Way with the East Deane Way and West Deane Way around Taunton and on to the Quantock Hills, providing a long distance route between the English Channel and Bristol Channel. Parish Councils have been written to and the route has been walked.  TY highlighted that there is a current government consultation on beaver reintroduction and management in England; the consultation closes on 17th November. |  |
| **Date of next meeting** |  |
| Date of next meetings in 2022:  **Thursday 10 March** (please note that this is change to the date referred to on the agenda and at the meeting)  **Thursday 30 June**  **Thursday 3 November** | **ALL** |

**Signed as a true record:**

**Chairman………………………………… Date………………….**