# BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB PARTNERSHIP

# Minutes of the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership Management Group held on Thursday, 29th June 2023 at Neroche Parish Hall

# Present:

Cllr Bob Nelson (Chair) Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Bruce Payne Special Appointee

Carolyn Dare Blackdown Hills Transition Group

David Northcote-Wright Somerset Wildlife Trust

Gordon Field Blackdown Hills Artist & Makers

Cllr Graham Long Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Martin Turner Blackdown Hills Hedge Association

Cllr Martin Wale Somerset Council

Cllr Natasha Bradshaw Mid Devon District Council (MDDC)

Pat Markey-Bell Natural England

Peter Chamberlain Devon County Council (DCC)

Tommy Muncie National Trust

Cllr Yehudi Levine East Devon District Council (EDDC)

Blackdown Hills AONB staff team: Tim Youngs **(TY),** Lisa Turner **(LT)**, Gavin Saunders **(GS)**

**Apologies:** Charlotte Russell (Historic England); Emily Martin (National Farmers Union); Cllr John Berry (Devon County Council); John Greenshields (Blackdown Hills Trust); Jon Burgess (Forestry Commission); Cllr Mike Canham (Blackdown Hills Parish Network); Robert Derryman (National Farmers Union); Cllr Sarah Wakefield (Somerset Council); Cllr Simon Clist (Mid Devon District Council);

**Also present:** Sam Pegler (Forestry England)

**Members of the public:** None

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| **ITEM 1 Welcome and Introductions** | **By whom** |
| **1.1:** Welcome, introductions and apologies were made, including welcoming new councillor representatives for EDDC and MDDC.  **1.2:** Declarations of interest: none  **1.3:** The chairman reminded members that up-to-dateRegister of Interest forms are required for all members regardless of whether they have one for their own organisation. |  |
| **ITEM 2 Questions from the public** |  |
| No questions received. |  |
| **ITEM 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2023 and any matters arising** |  |
| The minutes were agreed as a true record. |  |
| **ITEM 4.1 Presentation: Wild Core Area project (Neroche)** |  |
| Presentation by Sam Pegler, Ecologist for Forestry England West District.  This is one of several similar projects that are being progressed in every Forestry England district, totalling 6,000 ha nationally, that take a landscape scale approach to conservation focused on natural processes. In our area, it has been identified that there is great potential to build on the work of the previous Neroche Landscape Partnership Scheme. The initial focus will be on Forestry Commission land. The project is at an early stage and a project officer is to be recruited soon to develop the proposal.  Questions and discussion ensued regarding engagement with key partners and neighbouring land managers, including the potential fit with Landscape Recovery Pilots.  The chairman concluded by urging Forestry England colleagues to keep talking to us, as partnership working is core to our work and the key players are already around the table.  **Action: Copy of the presentation to be circulated with the meeting minutes.** |  |
| **ITEM 4.2.i Presentation and Discussion: National Landscapes branding and logo** |  |
| TY provided an overview of the rationale for new branding and a common identify for the AONB family stemming from the Glover Review, further to Action 3 in the Team Report.  **Agreed: Members were positive about a common identity, and supported the Team’s efforts to secure a revised version of the logo that better captures the essence of the Blackdown Hills.** |  |
| **ITEM 4.2.ii Presentation and Discussion: AONB Management Plan Review overview and key issues** |  |
| LT summarised the timetable and key steps in the review of the AONB Management Plan; the intention is to work towards a draft plan for consultation next summer and then to finalise and be adopted by local authorities by March 2025.  It was noted that the revised plan is likely to be formed around the four themes of people, place, nature and climate.  There was some discussion around the current Vision statement, notably recommending a sense check, especially the wording in the second element around lack of change.  **Action: The chairman proposed that a workshop session on the management plan be held at the next meeting.** |  |
| **ITEM 5.1 AONB team report** |  |
| **TY** gave a presentation to highlight some key aspects of core and project work set out in the team report;  Jackie Vaughan’s last official day is 30th June. Recruitment for her replacement is underway, with closing date for applications also 30th June and interview to be held 7th July.  Support has been secured to continue the **Facilitation Fund** work for a further 3 years, with a contracted co-ordinator due to be appointed. **GS** reported that around 1/3 of farmers in the AONB are members of the group, which offers training, knowledge sharing and support around farming and the natural environment.  Development work is progressing with the **Rivers Run Through Us** project; meeting held with Lottery, scoping extent of community engagement with the river environment and learning from the Kit Brook approach.  **BN** suggested that the pro-active, community and environmentally motivated people involved in river citizen science were ideal candidates to consider for the management group.  **MW** highlighted that he knew of 2 community flood groups recently established in Chard area (within the RRTU project area) – to forward details to GS.  **Farming in Protected Landscapes** (FiPL) has been extended by one year, and has a significant budget available.  **Action:** Members are asked to encourage potential FiPL applications within their organisations, communities and networks and consider ways of publicising the funding available.  Action 5: Somerset Nature Connections – **Members endorsed** an approach to future **nature-based wellbeing** work that focusses on supporting existing groups and providers, as well as leading work on sites in the AONB.  Action 6: **Connecting the Culm** – The original Co-Adapt 3-year programme delivery ended on 31 March 2023, however work continues in the catchment utilising a range of other grant funding. **Members were requested to note** the planned recruitment of a second Farm Adviser (1 FTE) for nature-based solution interventions 100% funded by flood defence Grant in Aid. | **MW**  **All** |
| **ITEM 5.2 Financial summary to end of May 2023** |  |
| **BN** noted the complexity and scale of the AONB budget, particularly in respect of projects, and asked about financial control and oversight.  **PC** and **TY** explained that day to day management by the AONB team is supported by Devon County Council finance, legal, procurement, etc. Further, project funding bids are subject to reporting and approval processes within the authority. The Officer Support Group also maintain regular oversight of the AONB budgets. |  |
| **ITEM 6.1 Equality, diversity and inclusion update** |  |
| **GS** started with a reminder of the key recommendations from Clarity consultants’ report   * Have a clear definition and understanding of EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) relevant to BH AONB * Collect data so that the current situation is better understood * Start to increase diversity within the management group and the voices reflected in decision making * Start to build relationships with other local community organisations and agencies to collaborate on inclusion   and there was a reminder of discussion points and actions from the previous management group meetings.  Focused next steps for staff team:   * Improve outreach to relevant experienced organisations and learn from them (a meeting is proposed for the autumn) * Improve our data gathering * Building principles into new projects |  |
| **ITEM 6.2 Briefings from partners** |  |
| CD: Launch event for new biochar research project with Plymouth University, 8th July at Eco hub site, Trimplants, Combe Raleigh.  GF: Majority of pieces from the recent Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers exhibition at the Beehive are to be exhibited in the Musgrove Park Hospital gallery.  MW: (reporting on Action 1) Noted that the transition to the new council seems to have gone smoothly. Planning is currently still based on previous districts. A number of *Local Community Networks* are being established, including one for Chard and Blackdowns. These involve councillors, other statutory agencies and interested parties. MW has made the case for the AONB to be represented on this.  GL: Parish Network Hunt the Heat project - The thermal imaging camera will start to be made available via trained parish councillors from September for residents who wish to see where heat is being lost from their homes.  TM: Recent plant surveys around Wellington Monument show the site to be in good condition.  NB: Introduced herself as a new Mid Devon Councillor for the Upper Tone ward, alongside Simon Clist. She is the council’s climate change portfolio holder.  DNW: Highlighted the availability of Defra grant funding to help pay for some of the costs to remove and replace dangerous ash with ash dieback that are growing along roadsides and public footpaths. See [Grants for ash with ash dieback - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tree-health-pilot-scheme-2023/grants-for-ash-with-ash-dieback)  MT: The Hedge Association will again be at Honiton Show, in the lower field.  PC: The Devon Local Nature Partnership (LNP) Conference took place earlier in the month, which focused on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It was very well attended, and both TY and GS were involved in giving presentations and running workshops.  DCC currently assessing guidance, implications and expectations from new duties associated with the implementation of the Environment Act 2021 around Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain, which will be mandatory from November 2023 on relevant planning sites.  Additionally, all public bodies (including parish councils) have a strengthened biodiversity duty and must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives based on that consideration, and taken action accordingly. |  |
| **ITEM 7 Any Other Business** |  |
| TY noted that the process for reviewing Special Appointee positions on the management group is due to start in September.  TY further reiterated the opportunity to join a site visit to Ruttersleigh SSSI with Sam Pegler after the meeting. |  |
| **Date of next meeting** |  |
| Next meeting will be held on **Thursday 2nd November 2023** from **9.30am – 12pm,** venue to be confirmed. |  |

**Signed as a true record:**

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