# BLACKDOWN HILLS National Landscape

# Minutes of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership Management Group held on Thursday, 30th November 2023 at Yarcombe Jubilee Hall

# Present:

Cllr Bob Nelson (Chair) Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Carolyn Dare Blackdown Hills Transition Group

Cllr Graham Long Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Cllr Natasha Bradshaw Mid Devon District Council

Cllr Sarah Wakefield Somerset Council

Cllr Mike Canham Blackdown Hills Parish Network

Janette Ward Campaign to Protect Rural England (Somerset)

Robert Derryman National Farmers Union

Peter Chamberlain Devon County Council

Tommy Muncie National Trust

John Greenshields Blackdown Hills Trust

Gordon Field Blackdown Hills Artist & Makers

Jonathan Doyle Somerset Council

Stephen Dury Somerset Council

Paul Spearing potential Co-opted Member

Daniel Lazar potential Co-opted Member

Blackdown Hills AONB staff team: Tim Youngs **(TY),** Lisa Turner **(LT)**, Gavin Saunders **(GS)** Clare Groom **(CG)** Hannah Metson **(HM)**

**Apologies:** Bruce Payne (Special Appointee): Cllr Yehudi Levine (East Devon District Council)

David Northcote-Wright (Somerset Wildlife Trust); Martin Turner (Blackdown Hills Hedge Association): Pat Markey-Bell (Natural England) Alex Swan (Environment Agency): Emily Martin (National Farmers Union); Sarah Jennings (Devon County Council)

**Members of the public:** One

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| **ITEM 1 Welcome and Introductions** | **By whom** |
| **1.1:** Welcome, introductions and apologies were made, including welcoming a member of the public  **1.2:** Declarations of interest: none  **1.3:** It was agreed to bring forward the co-option nomination/ discussion (from agenda item 6.2 to 1.3) and Paul Spearing and Daniel Lazar were both welcomed to the meeting and asked to provide a brief synopsis of their experience / skills, relating to the role of supporting the ‘Climate’ task and finish group. It was agreed that they both be co-opted as members for the duration of the project (expected to be 6-12 months).  **1.4:** TheSpecial Appointee Process was outlined by TY. Bruce Payne has indicated that he is happy to continue in his role. In addition, it is intended to use the EDI workshop (see item 5.1) as a springboard to recruit one or two new special appointees, to be the advocates for this important topic area.  **1.5** 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.  **1.6:** The four yearly process for the Partnership Management Group membership was outlined in the meeting papers. Members agreed that the process was fit for purpose. Nomination papers would therefore be sent out before Christmas to the Partnership organisations, for the eight available nominations.  **1.7:** TY discussed the revised Terms of Reference resulting from the replacement of the Somerset councils of Somerset County Council, South Somerset District Council and Somerset West & Taunton Council, to instead form a single Somerset Council, but there was no change on balance of representation across Devon and Somerset. An amended copy will be circulated in due course. | **TY/HM**  **HM/ TY** |
| **ITEM 2 Questions from the public** |  |
| 2.1 The question was asked regarding who could be contacted at the Blackdown Hills National Landscape for volunteering opportunities. **LT** agreed to provide contact details following the meeting for the BHNL Volunteer Coordinator. | **LT** |
| **ITEM 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 29th June 2023 and any matters arising** |  |
| The minutes were agreed as a true record. |  |
| **ITEM 4.1 Presentation: Update on the progress with the Somerset and Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategies** |  |
| Presentation by Stephen Dury (Somerset Council) and Peter Chamberlain (Devon County Council)  The presentations focused on the work being done by Devon and Somerset to deliver on the major commitment made in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan and enacted by the Environment Act 2021, to create a single, national network of wildlife rich places across England. Responsible Authorities will lead the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) process in each area and will involve workstreams such as mapping areas of particular importance for biodiversity (including national and local sites and irreplaceable habitats), mapping where action has been taken, identifying opportunities for recovery and mapping areas of importance and agreeing LNRS priorities. This data will then be used to create Local Habitat maps, Statements of biodiversity priorities which will form the Local Nature Recovery Strategies which will be published in September 2024.  Questions and discussion ensued regarding engagement with key partners and experts and an invitation was extended for those who would like to be involved in workshops / discussions around particular species, habitats, nature-based solutions or delivery sectors.  The chairman thanked the presenters and encouraged participants to take up the opportunity to get involved by contacting [Beth.Bird@devon.gov.uk](mailto:Beth.Bird@devon.gov.uk) (Devon) or [steve.dury@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:steve.dury@somerset.gov.uk) (Somerset).  **Action: Copy of the presentations to be circulated with the meeting minutes.** | **HM** |
| **ITEM 4.2. Presentation and Discussion: Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan Review – progress and discussion on key points.** |  |
| **LT** summarised that work is underway on gathering evidence and establishing the scope of the review and that we were awaiting the commissioned review by Craggatak Consulting to compile a State of the AONB report. LTalsodiscussed the timetable over the next year and raised questions, in particular asking members to identify what they felt was missing.  The ongoing survey was highlighted and it was encouraging to have received over 120 responses to date and the group was asked to promote the online survey which will close on December 15th 2023.  Questions and discussion ensued with particular mention of how the plan would address species invasion and sewerage issues.  **Actions:**  **Copy of the presentations to be circulated with the meeting minutes.**  **Members are asked to engage in the workshop session** [planned for late February 2024] **that will discuss the 2050 vision; framework; forces for change and plans & strategies to consider Members to advise of any other relevant plans and strategies that we have missed and any other forces for changes (see presentation slides)** | HM  **All** |
| **ITEM 4.3 Presentation on the rebranding of the AONB** |  |
| **CG** gave a presentation followed by a short video on the rebranding of the AONB to Blackdown Hills National Landscape. Following the official launch on Wednesday 22th November 2023. It was emphasised that the reasons behind the rebranding were to create:   * A **unified** national identity. * More accessible and inclusive, extending a warm welcome to **everyone**. * Supports our work to **attract** **funding**. * Ongoing campaign to raise **awareness and understanding**. * Gradual approach to roll-out.   Questions and discussions followed in particular how best to raise awareness of the new National Landscape branding and how more signage could be used around the area and within communities with the new logo as well as how the Satnav systems could be updated to show the changes. **CG** explained some of the challenges and that **LT** would work with her to look at planning / highways issues  **Actions: member are asked to raise awareness within own organisations, ‘like’ and share social media posts promoting the new brand and to use new logo where appropriate. Logos and brand guidelines available from:**[**www.blackdownhills.org.uk/logo**](http://www.blackdownhills.org.uk/logo) | **All** |
| **ITEM 5.1 AONB team** |  |
| **TY** gave a presentation to highlight some key aspects of core and project work set out in the team report; slides to be circulated with minutes  Support has been secured to continue the **Facilitation Fund** work for a further 3 years, with a FWAGSW as the contracted co-ordinator.  Work is ongoing with the **Climate Acton Plan** which has been co-created with the Blackdown Hills Parish Network, with parallel work being undertaken with Devon protected landscapes colleagues that will enable a set of shared principals to be defined to underpin individual action plans.  The **Festival of Heritage** project was a very successful event that ran throughout the summer with over 160 people attending events which included local volunteers. There were many positive comments from participants and a significant uptake in people signing up for the Blackdown Hills Community Heritage Forum.  **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 is still in progress.  **Triple Axe Project (Farming, Nature & People)** is in the ‘scaling-up’ phase through the East Devon Catchment Partnership (EDCP) and is being funded through the Water Investment Fund (WEIF), matched by Blackdown Hills and Dorset National Landscapes via FiPL. National lottery funding application for a development-stage application for the proposed ‘Rivers Run Through Us’ will be submitted in January 2024.  **Farming in Protected Landscapes** (FiPL) has been extended by one year and has a significant budget available for the next financial year of £407K.  **Action:** **Members are asked to encourage potential FiPL applications within their organisations, communities and networks and consider ways of publicising the funding available.**  **Luppitt Landscape Partnership - GS** was congratulated for his hard work in supporting the Luppitt Commoners Association to successfully bid for the DEFRA 2nd round of ELM funding. Only 34 projects in total were approved from over 150 applicants. The project will require a CIC to be set up to lead the project with a two year development phase using the £750k grant with the aim of achieving commitment to a 20 year agreement being in place for the partnership.  **GS**  gave an update in relation to **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)** and the recent event with partners to discuss the common challenges, overlaps, issues etc. facing the Blackdown Hills community. There were a number of shared key issues such as lack of transport and work will be jointly looked at to address these whilst reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. | **HM**  **All** |
| **ITEM 5.2 Financial summary to end of September 2023** |  |
| **BN** noted that as the financial summary had already been circulated that a presentation was not required and gave the group an opportunity to ask questions – no questions raised. |  |
| **ITEM 6.1 Briefings from partners** |  |
| **PC** gave a briefing relating to the LNRS project as well as the Heritage work looking at historical monument management and whilst funding was coming to an end he was hopeful that Historic England would provide future funding. The LURA Bill would require Historic Environment records to be maintained by LA’s and new guidance is awaited on HER and to what the cost implications would be.  **JW**: Majority of pieces from the recent Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers exhibition at the Beehive were exhibited in the Musgrove Park Hospital gallery for three months with a very positive response from patients, staff and visitors.  **MC**: Highlighted the joint energy mapping project and rewilding projects underway and that demand for these types of projects had increased since Covid. There was a need highlighted for better availability and access to tree planting for landowners.  **NB**: Updated the group that MDDC had agreed through cabinet that all reports considered at future cabinet meetings would require a climate statement to be included to help the council achieve the net zero target set for 2030. A Biodiversity Net Gain paper was being presented at the February 2024 cabinet meeting. Culmstock had raised a request to be included in the BHNL boundary, but BN pointed out that the parish council would need to raise the request to Natural England.  **JG**: Highlighted the Saving Devon’s Treescapes and the availability of orchard trees for projects / landowners that are in the BHNL area with the condition that it is creating new woodland that the community has access to. There are a limited amount available and interested parties should contact JG in Jan/Feb.  **JD**: explained the bleak financial position that Somerset Council was facing with a deficit of £27m this financial year and £87m for 24/25. Work is underway to address the shortfall and making savings where possible. Rising costs with providing Social Care services had heavily impacted the shortfall.  **GL**: Discussed the thermal image camera that was being used to show properties that required insulation and work was already demonstrating where the heat loss was located.  **PS**: Updated the group following a meeting with MP’s earlier in the year to discuss issues with the current planning laws which currently do not address climate change. Richard Forde MP has asked the PN to critique the NPPF Framework, a copy of this work will be circulated with the minutes.  **DL**: Thermal imaging camera- training will commence week beginning 4/12/23 on ‘hunt heat’ for recording heat loss within Churchstanton and Upottery and anyone interested in joining the training should get in touch. CD: Presentation of Research and Findings - GISS Project will be held on 28th January 2024, 1400-17:00 hrs. at Churchinford Village Hall where they will be sharing final results and findings from the GISS biochar research project with Plymouth University.   **RD**: Raised the issue that reports had been made of around 30 foxes being caught in Bristol and released in the Blackdown Hills and that Natural England were aware, but not helping to address the problem and asked members to exert pressure on NE where possible to help address the problem. |  |
| **ITEM 7 Any Other Business** |  |
| TY mentioned that alongside the £407k of FiPL funding available in 24/25, there is also £55k Access to All funding for increasing accessibility in the Blackdown Hills. |  |
| **Date of next meeting** |  |
| Next meeting will be held on **Thursday 7th March 2024** from **9.30am – 12pm,** venue to be confirmed. |  |

**Signed as a true record:**

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