

Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Minutes of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership Management Group
held on

Thursday, 26th June 2025 at Upottery Village Hall

Present:

Cllr Bob Nelson (BN) (Chair)	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Cllr Graham Long (GL)	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Cllr Natasha Bradshaw(NB)	Mid Devon District Council
Simon Richardson (SR)	Natural England
Janette Ward (JW)	Campaign to Protect Rural England
Phillip Hackett (PH)	The British Horse Society
Martin Turner (MT)	Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
David Northcote-Wright (DNW)	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Doug Eltham (DE)	Devon County Council
Jonathan Farey (JF)	Co-opted Member
Cllr Mike Canham (MC)	Blackdown Hills Parish Network
Cllr Sarah Wakefield	Somerset Council
Trudi Righton (TR)	Member of the public
Adam Powell (AP)	Co-opted Member
Tristan Colaco (TC)	Forestry England

Blackdown Hills National Landscape staff team:

Tim Youngs **(TY)**, Lisa Turner **(LT)**, Hannah Metson **(HM)**, Amy Taverner **(AT)**, Jane Robertson **(JR)**, Emily Hobson-Martin **(EHM)**, Di Weeks **(DW)** (Minutes)

Apologies: Gordon Field Blackdown Hills Artist & Makers, Daniel Lazar Co-opted Member, Cllr Yehudi Levine East Devon District Council, Robert Derryman (National Farmers Union), Fiona Rew (National Farmers Union), Tommy Muncie (National Trust), Carolyn Dare (Blackdown Hills Transition Group), , Alex Swan (Environment Agency), Cllr Martin Wale (Somerset Council), Paul Spearing (Co-opted Member), Charlie Plowden (East Devon District Council), Tristan Peat (Mid Devon District Council), Stephen Dury (Somerset Council), Sarah Jennings (Devon County Council), Ross Henley (Somerset Council), Jon Burgess (Forestry Commission), James Divall (Somerset Council).

Members of the public: One

ITEM 1 Welcome and Introductions	By whom
<p>Welcome, introductions and apologies were made, including welcoming back Trudi as a member of the public.</p> <p>The Chair asked if everyone was happy with the timings of these meetings and locations, and if there are any suggestions then please put them forward. Some suggestions were to host them at a business location, possibly Otter Brewery, an evening or afternoon meeting.</p> <p>Declarations of interest: None.</p> <p>The Chair reminded members to complete an updated Register of Interest form which had been circulated with the previous minutes (regardless of whether they have one for their own organisation), a copy will be sent with the minutes.</p>	BN

<p>The Chair confirmed with all in attendance that they are happy for the Terms of Reference to be Approved.</p> <p>NB commented that the TOR shows 5 levels of operation, but in fact should be 6. Querying public engagement and should be celebrating our Partnership. TY replied with the Forum and other events (RRTU).</p> <p><u>Action: check TOR levels of operation and amend to 6 if needed.</u></p>	TY/LT
ITEM 2.1 Questions from the public	
<p>Questions from the public – TR commented that she is curious that she is the only member of the public and queried if it is publicised.</p> <p><u>Action: Contact Parish Councils to make them aware of next PMG meeting so can be advertised.</u></p>	<p>BN</p> <p>DW</p>
ITEM 2.2 Minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025	
<p>The minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025 and any matters arising - The minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.</p>	ALL
ITEM 3 Presentations	
<p>Rivers Run Through Us project (RRTU).</p> <p>Presentation slides to be circulated with Minutes.</p> <p>NB asked if this data would be shared with the Connecting the Culm project team.</p> <p>TY confirmed yes it would be and has already.</p> <p>Forestry England – Wild Neroche – restoring and transforming landscapes project.</p> <p>Presentation slides to be circulated with Minutes.</p> <p>TR asked if this project is being communicated with the public.</p> <p>TC replied not at present as just in the planning stages and will then start comms when ready.</p> <p>SW commented that is good for the local Parishes to have some awareness of works happening.</p> <p>Some conversation continued regarding timings of previous work at Thurlbear woods and the damage to the ground caused as completed in wet weather in April. TC confirmed this was due to the dormouse licensing.</p> <p>TY questioned if it would be possible to come to Somerset Council to discuss the projects when ready.</p> <p>Conversations continued about Tesco funding this project for 2 years, TC confirmed that Tesco have a large number of suppliers in that locality.</p> <p><u>Action: Attend a meeting to talk through the projects at Wild Neroche.</u></p> <p><u>Action: for future presentations involving small print maps – print on A3 and circulate in paper form.</u></p> <p><u>Action: JF agreed to be included in the Technical Advisory group for Wild Neroche.</u></p>	<p>JR / EHM</p> <p>TC</p> <p>TC/TY</p> <p>DW</p> <p>TY</p>

Item 4 Workshops	
<p>5 year Delivery plan (sits in the 2025-2030 Management Plan). Presentation slides to be circulated with Minutes.</p> <p>LT gave a comprehensive overview of the 5 year delivery plan and ran through the key priorities and proposed strategic actions for each of the themes. NB commented that was very comprehensive and its critical that communities are supported with neighbourhood planning, the Parish's are un urgent need of support especially on the boundaries of the National Landscape. LT advised she will be speaking at the Parish Network AGM next Thursday so will be a good starting point to help explain more about the National Landscape and how we can work together. MC commented that Parish Network keen to get involved, planning is probably the biggest subject they are involved with. SW commented that there are two recent occasions where the Local Parish Councils were ignored when the applications went to Planning Appeal. TR suggested it is important to involve the youth, so they understand what the National Landscape is. LT replied that although young people are not specifically mentioned in the Management Plan, we are involved with many projects that involve young people, Cat Farnell has a teaching background and Archaeology and so we can utilise her skills. TR mentioned the Kingfisher scheme run by FWAGSW, run by volunteers who encourage children onto farms. NB queried that we should utilise the string voice of the National Landscape to address failures under the water environmental regulations in specific with SWW.</p>	<p>LT/TY</p>
<p><u>Action: Add SWW to the Water Quality: Address failures under Water Environment Regulations.</u></p>	<p>LT/ TY</p>
<p>SR Natural England – gave a short presentation following a request at the last meeting on Agri-environment schemes, he explained the Data is fluid and changing each month. The Data for live agreements as of April 2025 and shows AE uptake (Environmental Stewardship + Countryside Stewardship + SFI) = up to 70% of area of BDH National Landscape in at least one scheme.</p> <p>SR commented that support is vital for farmers in the Blackdown Hills.</p> <p>TY thanked SR for completing this research and requested that SR feedbacks that the National Figures are misleading as don't appear accurate and it was great to see these figures being reported today.</p> <p>Presentation slides to be circulated with Minutes.</p>	<p>SR</p>
ITEM 5 National Landscape Team	
<p>The Chair confirmed that the Team Report had already been circulated with the Agenda for this meeting.</p> <p>TY commented, would just like to add that Farming in protected Landscapes (FiPL) funding is open for another year so now in its 5th year of delivery, we have a healthy pipeline of projects but if anyone would like to discuss any projects to get in contact with DW or AT. Budget for delivery is £324,000.</p>	<p>TY</p>

<p>TY commented we also have Capital Uplift funding of £157,000, and £88,000 for Access for All funding. TY explained that these various funding streams can be used to jointly support projects if needed.</p> <p>Financial summary – TY confirmed that we are working on a balanced budget and explained it can be quite challenging as working with changes in funding all the time.</p> <p>The Chair commented that he imagines it's hugely unsettling, especially working with short term contracts and thanked DCC for their support with hosting us.</p>	
<p>ITEM 6 National Landscape Partnership – briefings from Partners</p>	
<p>DNW talked of an article in The Guardian regarding river quality including the River Tone, and they are reporting high levels of pesticides which are believed to have come from dog flea treatments, possibly from them swimming in the rivers.</p> <p>Conversations continued about ways of monitoring this and SR confirmed you need specialist EA equipment to allow for this.</p> <p>PH commented he attended a Somerset Council meeting yesterday regarding opening up the Herepath, there are tyre bales that have been dropped in to stabilise the paths and these would need to be removed to enable the herepath to be brought back into use. He confirmed he is keen to get the work done to allow this path to be used again.</p> <p>JF said that there had been a Eco-fayre a couple of weeks ago at Combe St Nicholas which was hugely successful. He commented that they had been working on a garden that had 20 years growth of Himalayan Balsam and is starting to eradicate it now but has taken a lot of labour.</p> <p>JF and his wife are involved in a youth theatre group where they have 45-50 8-18 year olds involved which is some good news.</p> <p>JW agreed to circulate to DW the CPRE Planning document. She said some good news was that all new build homes will be expected to have solar panels fitted.</p> <p>TR no comment.</p> <p>MT nothing to report – a quieter time of year for them currently and will be at the Honiton Show this year.</p> <p>NB confirmed the Management Plan will be going to MDDC cabinet on the 8th July. The Parish Council (Upper Culm) in particular looking at the Neighbouring plan and thanks to JW and the CPRE, for their support with a Culmstock Planning application. NB also asked for any help with Himalayan Balsam bashing as the person who used to champion this has left. SR agreed to pass his contact to NB.</p> <p>SR asked to not be quoted on the shortfall figures that were mentioned in his presentation as a very rough calculation.</p> <p>MC commented that the Parish Network are struggling with support from Devon Highways, in particular speeding guidance and to discuss funding schemes to replace signs etc. DE suggested that he could pass anything across to Highways.</p> <p>SW mentioned a local project at Blagdon Hill called Greener and Wilder where they have built a pond, wildflower area, painting classes, exhibitions and worked wonders with the area.</p>	<p>ALL</p>

<p>AP said he had found the meeting very interesting, and commented that in Gittisham over the last 5 years, there have been 300 new houses built and its right on the edge of the National Landscape and will continue to question EDDC over their brownfield sites and the need for housing in Gittisham compared with Honiton.</p> <p>HM commented that the Blackdown Hills National Landscape will have a stand at the Mid Devon Show on 26th July for the first time.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed AT to the team.</p>	
ITEM 7 Any other Business	
<p>Next meeting will be held on Thursday 6th November 2025 from 9.30am – 12pm, venue to be confirmed.</p>	ALL

Signed as a true record:

Chairman.....

Date.....