

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at Ubley Village Hall, 10am 29th January 2026

Present:

Partnership Committee

David Turner	Chair
Jim Hardcastle	National Landscape Manager
David Julian	CPRE
Simon Clarke	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Jo Lewis	Natural England
Rachel Thompson MBE	The Trails Trust
Lauren Holt	National Trust
Tina Bath	Mendip Society
Cllr Paul Crossley	Bath & North East Somerset
Di Sheppard	Bath & North East Somerset
Barbra Lakin	Somerset Council Officer
James Small	NFU Farming Representative
David Eddins	Mendip Activity Centre
David White	Aldwick Estate
Nigel Garnsworthy	National Trust
Cllr Roger Dollins	Somerset Parish Councils Representative
Cllr Joe Tristram	North Somerset Council

Other attendees

Joanna Cheung	Support and Communications Officer
Tim Haselden	Project Development Officer

Apologies

Cllr Theo Butt Phillip, Vice Chair	Somerset Council
Cllr Edric Hobbs	Somerset Council
Cllr Ros Wyke	Somerset Council
Steve Dury	Somerset Council Officer
Duncan Anderson Margetts	Country Land and Business Association
Fern Elias-Stagg	Avon Wildlife Trust
Cllr Annemieke Waite	North Somerset Council
Esther Coffin-Smith	North Somerset Council

Summary Notes

	Item	Notes	Action
1	Introduction and Apologies	Apologies as stated above.	
2	Declaration of interest	No declarations.	
3	Notes of Previous Meeting	To be agreed at next meeting.	
4	Mendip Landscape Connections Development . Paper A	DT – Three main areas for discussion: - Vision / Ambition for a Landscape Connections Bid (LCB) - What could be included - What role each of our organisations could play - - Nothing is set in stone for the bid at the moment - Talks through a print out from the Landscapes Connection website outlining the brief and application process Landscape Connections The National Lottery Heritage Fund TH – identified six key questions to keep us focused on the bid PLEASE SEE ATTACHED POWERPOINT FROM THE MEETING DT – Asks how many NLs have applied so far? JH – One is in development; five others are applying that we are aware of. - HLF are looking for physical changes on the ground - Landscape and nature recovery - Aim to use the funding to deliver 30 by 30 and PLTOF - We need to think how to connect people to the landscape in a sustainable way while recovering nature - Engage residents at the same time as welcoming visitors	

		- Innovative - Working with communities - Lists several documents/policies that are already in place, with two still to come: recreation strategy and climate change plan - We also have several partnerships who are supportive of a bid - We can build on previous bids that have been submitted - Pulled together outcomes from plans and strategies - We are not starting from scratch Discussion 1 Vision USP and potential content of a Landscape Connections Bid (LCB) A wide-ranging debate highlighted the following key elements of both our USP and potential content of a future bid: 1) the unique landscape of the Mendip Hills and the need to make the bid unique 2) The need to support nature recovery including the progression of the NNR and meeting the defined targets against major inadequacies of existing funding levels 3) The importance of access and the role of the multi-user network building on the proven work of Test and Trials to deliver access for all and work with the farming community through a proven process 4) The opportunity to influence and plan access so it supports nature recovery and appreciation of the natural environment 5) The opportunity to develop improved access and connectivity between the Mendip Hills and the growing populations that surround it including those from low income families 6) The Mendip Way and other longer distance routes provide a golden thread which need to be developed alongside the multiuser network 7) The opportunity to develop sustainable tourism and facilities including car parking and visitor/user	
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		facilities to be developed further through the Recreation Strategy 8) The need to incorporate Climate Change interventions 9) The need for further understanding and appreciation and access to the built heritage of the Mendip Hills 10) The need to develop sustainable transport solutions to improve accessibility to and around the Mendip hills 11) The opportunity to celebrate the subterranean landscape 12) Opportunity to extend beyond the boundary of the National Landscape to link with the Strawberry Line and nature recovery and accessibility within the Chew Valley GAPS in Understanding/Inputs Need for a Qualitative User/Visitor Survey to understand how users engage with the Mendip Hills. Further work stemming from the preparation of a Recreational Strategy. Further work and interventions stemming from a Climate Change Adaptation Plan. Need to better understand the scoring criteria and priorities of the Heritage Fund. Need for demographic overview including information regarding deprivation in the population adjoining the NL and how best to engage with hard to reach groups. Need to develop 'cost-certainty' for the delivery elements. Areas requiring further clarity : A mixture of views were expressed regarding the degree to which long distance routes should be focused on as opposed to more local routing. It can be deduced from the discussion that: Long Distance Routes capture interest from a wider visitor audience and provide a basis for promoting and developing sustainable tourism . They have the potential to bring forwards other partners into a bid and address nature recovery at a strategic level.	
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		This focus should work alongside supporting the existing local network that supports residents. The MHNL multi-user network is an approach that is at the heart of the Partnership's commitment to accessibility and the ability to integrate with delivering nature recovery, heritage and sustainable tourism outcomes. TH highlighted discussions that had previously taken place at an officer level regarding the benefits of developing the Mendip Way and Limestone Link and Big Chalk projects as part of a bid. Has spoken to HLF about including sites in Devon & Cotswolds but they felt it would make the application too big - Presents a map showing Mendip Way and the Limestone Link which leads to Cotswolds - We could use the Limestone Link as a bridge to link up towards the Cotswold, make us more nationally relevant - Big Chalk is an ongoing national project for calcareous grassland - Gives us connectivity to other populations ie Bath, Wells -	
5	Mendip Landscape Connections Application Strategy. Paper B	TH – summarised two options for the bid structure and timing - Development phase, or - Direct delivery - We have a Project Enquiry Form ready to go for development phase - We can bring in additional resources - Talks through pros and cons of both RD – yes we should go for it, great opportunity - Wellbeing of local community NG – yes potentially, we need to make it into a cohesive bid - Atm it feels a bit nebulous SC – yes we would support but we need to see details - That would help us identify resource we can contribute	

		DT – missing elements for that decision - Partnership has to be at the centre of the bid - I would like to see a group of key partners putting time in to building the bid with technical partners DT – perfect and outline the Project Enquiry Form - Work with heritage fund at a strategic level - We don't feel we have a focussed and good partnership with the heritage fund yet - More thoughts on technical gaps - Anything else to add DJ – developing understanding with HLF is vital DS – up to £250k - development route is no brainer - I was involved with the GWF and 250k is not a lot of money for the breadth of what is being discussed - Development phase is vital DW – key word is sustainability - Commercial perspective - limited local authority funding - we need to think about who is prepared to pay to enjoy the Mendip Hills. It needs to be financially sustainable. ACTIONS (From both Papers) Meeting with HLF required to update on latest thinking and appetite to support a bid from MHNLP including clarification of whether to proceed with a development phase or not. Obtain host authority understanding and support from Somerset UA. Project Enquiry Form to be reworked to reflect the Partnership discussion and brought back to the Partnership prior to submission. Means of working up bid including appointment of external resources to be considered further: Access Group could take on accessibility agenda	
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		NNR Group could cover nature recovery/ environment. Identify the built heritage offer with South West Heritage Trust and Mendip Society. DT/JH/RT to consider further the degree to which the multi user network can be used alongside the development of longer distance routing and promotion within the bid. Develop further potential role of WECA/ NT/ Mendip Society/ SWT. Further work on the resource/sustainability and staffing asks to be undertaken.	
6	AOB	DT – thanks you all Please think further about papers Contact me on email with other questions	
7	Date of next meeting	19th March In person meeting	

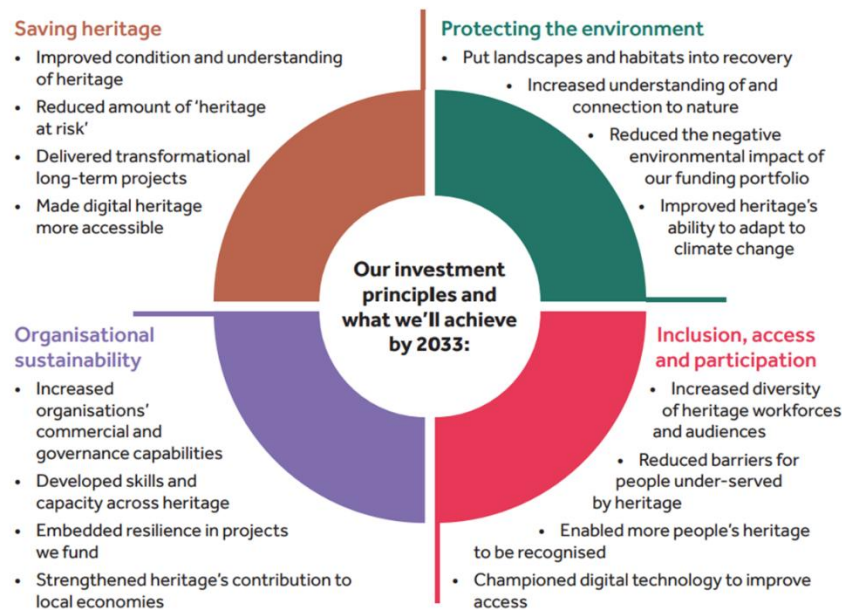
Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	10am 29 th January 2026	
Title:	Agenda	
Presented by:	NA	
Ubley Village Hall, Ubley, Bristol BS40 6PN		

1. Introductions and Apologies
2. Declaration of Interest
3. Notes of Previous Meeting. To be approved
4. Mendip Landscape Connections Development. Paper A
5. Mendip Landscape Connections Application Strategy. Paper B
6. AOB
7. Date of next meetings: 19th March 10am In-person

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	29th January 2026	Paper A
Title:	Mendip Landscapes Connections	
Presented by:	Tim Haselden	
Background – the paper provides an outline of the work undertaken to date by the National Landscape Team on a potential bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF) Landscape Connections initiative and seeks Partnership support to formally progress a bid in accordance with the NHLF’s four investment principles. The responses to the 4 lottery investment principles were generated by consultation with the Partnership and others in 2025, including the a Lottery Fund Development Officer, and the actions from the key plans for the Mendip Hills. Recommendations The Partnership agrees in principle to submit a formal application to the NHLF Landscape Connections initiative in accordance with the NHLF’s four investment principles entitled Mendip Landscape Connections. Prompted by work undertaken by the National Landscape Team in response to an initial expression of interest outlined in this report, Partner views on the direction and content of a bid are sought alongside areas of specific support and joint working that should form part of the initiative.		

Fund overview:

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) has a Strategic Initiative called ‘Landscape Connections’ which will invest £150m in approximately 20 long-term (10 year) projects to enhance Protected Landscapes across the UK (National Parks, National Landscapes and National Trails) for nature and people. Projects should focus on Protected Landscapes and cover each of NLHF’s four investment principles (but not necessarily in equal measure nor need to be fully located in Protected Landscapes):



We can apply for a grant of up to £10m to support systemic nature recovery, inclusive access, and collaborative frameworks. Applications require robust plans, measurable outcomes, and strong collaboration, engagement and reporting. The first 2 years of the 10 is also for development. This should result in equitable access to nature-rich landscapes, accelerated systemic nature recovery, the fostering of innovative frameworks for community and landowner collaboration and bold, measurable outcomes with lasting legacy.

All Landscape Connections projects should aim to;

- enable everyone in the UK to have access to landscapes rich in nature, clean water and fresh air, places that are inspiring in their beauty and cultural heritage
- help these landscapes to become better for nature and more able to welcome people from all backgrounds, including those who rarely visit them now
- deliver longer-term projects that are bold in ambition and create measurable outcomes for Protected Landscapes
- support those who live in and care for these places to strengthen them as working landscapes based on a clear diagnosis of why the landscape is currently failing to deliver for nature and people and how that will be addressed
- accelerate systemic and lasting nature recovery across whole landscapes, creating and sharing exemplars for how landscape conservation and nature recovery can be delivered with, by and for people who live and work there
- create innovative frameworks for ways in which communities, landowners, organisations and those that manage the land can work equitably together to agree how to influence and drive change to ensure a lasting legacy

More details can be found here: www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/strategic-initiatives/landscape-connections

What is the need for this project?

The Mendip Hills is a nationally important landscape facing mounting pressures from climate change, ash dieback, habitat fragmentation, increasing visitor pressure and new development. Its unique geology, habitats and heritage that support vital ecosystem services require urgent additional resources, proactive management and innovative solutions to support their long-term recovery. Threatened species are in decline and only 14% of land is managed for nature – a long way off 30by30.

There is over 400km of drystone walls on the Mendip Hills, a key landscape feature, habitat and corridor for wildlife, but only 13% are 'sound' and 60% are 'not stockproof with large holes, or derelict'.

The Mendip Hills State of Heritage 2024 report shows that the area contains evidence of human activity which is of both regional and national significance, and in some cases European importance. The Mendip Hills also has the 3rd highest density of scheduled monuments per km² amongst the 15 protected landscapes in the south-west. But only 8% of 4,800 heritage sites have statutory protection, and many are at risk from erosion, neglect, intensive agriculture and lack of public awareness.

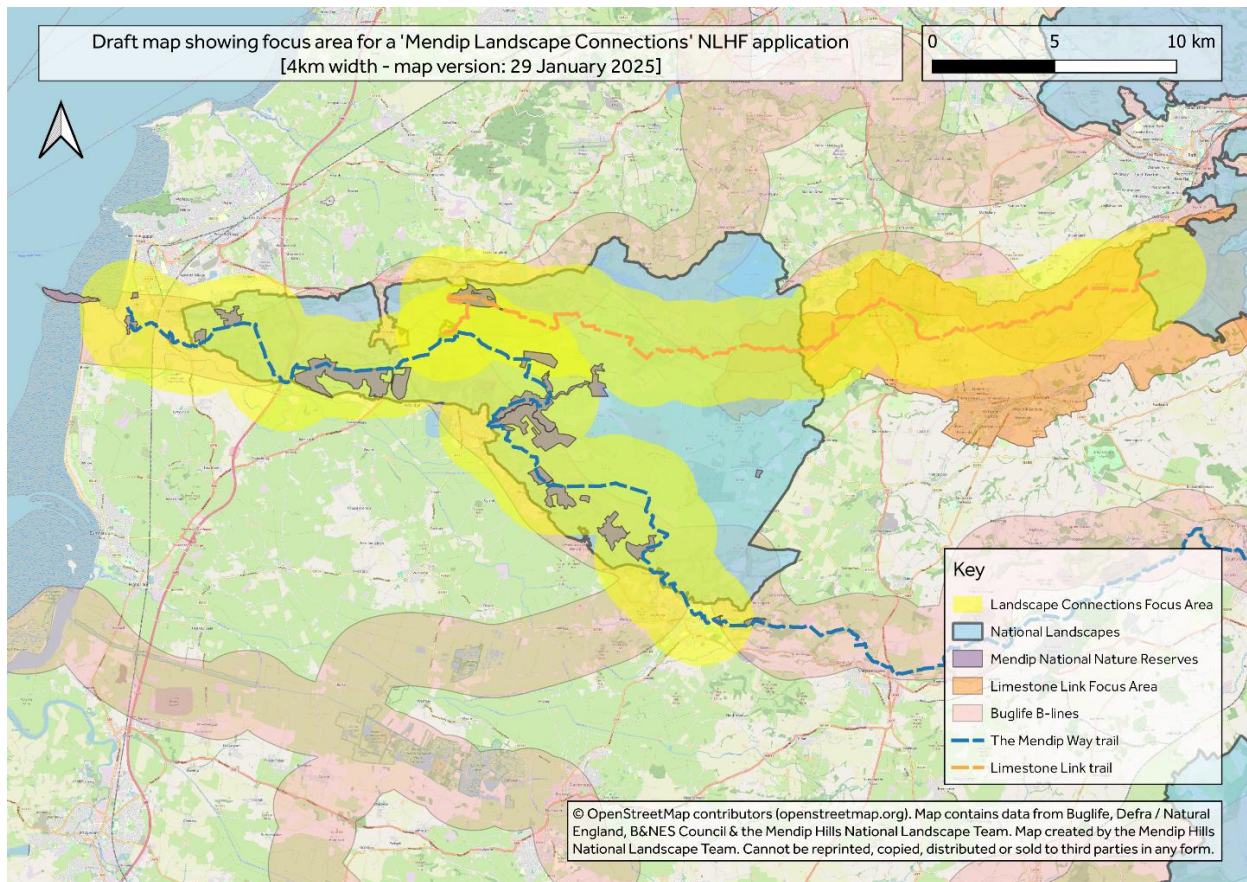
From the installed visitor counters and annual visitor count we know that on average there has been a 10% increase in the use of public rights of way since 2019. Alongside the maintenance of the existing rights of way network which needs more attention, the NL needs to increase access provision to spread the current impact and cope with future increases in use caused by the increase in housing in the area.

The declaration of the new NNR shows that Natural England and partners have identified the need to work together to recover nature at a landscape-scale; yet this comes with no resources.

It is a priority area identified by the West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) and both the Somerset and West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The National Landscape Management Plan, State of the AONB Report, Nature Recovery Plan, State of Heritage Report and the Mendip National Nature Reserve (NNR) Management Framework all show how important Mendip is and then provide recommendations.

Where we've got to:

Over the last 12 months we have had discussions with neighbouring National Parks and National Landscapes and with NLHF. We have also had conversations with partners both on the Mendip National Nature Reserve, Chew Valley Reconnected and Somer Valley Rediscovered partnerships. The consensus was that we should develop a bid for the Mendip Hills using the two recreational trails of the Mendip Way and Limestone Link as the focus – meaning a project area that spanned between Weston-s-Mare south-east to Wells, and north-east to the edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape.



What is the heritage value of this project?

**While the focus of the Landscape Connections initiative is nature recovery the heritage value of this project must be obvious to the National Heritage Lottery Fund.*

The Mendip Hills National Landscape holds a rich and layered heritage spanning over 500,000 years. Its dramatic limestone ridges, gorges, and cave systems contain some of the earliest evidence of human activity in Britain. The area features Neolithic monuments, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hillforts and Roman mining. Medieval churches, farmsteads, and field systems shape the rural character, while post-medieval limekilns and leadworks reflect its industrial legacy. Modern heritage includes WWII and Cold War sites.

The Mendip Hills are steeped in [rich cultural heritage](#) that spans thousands of years. From the Mesolithic and Neolithic archaeological sites to the Bronze Age barrows, these hills narrate a tale of ancient human activity and settlement. The large Iron Age hillforts and smaller enclosures reveal patterns of territories and lordships, while the historic villages and towns are home to significant buildings that reflect the area's rich past. The Mendip Hills also bear witness to over 2,000 years of mining history, with quarries and pitted landscapes that map out the landscape's lead and mineral extraction. This historical tapestry is further enriched by traditional skills, fairs, customs, and cultural events that continue to celebrate the Mendip Hills' unique identity.

The landscape is dotted with 4,800 heritage sites (listed on the Historic Environment Record) including 173 Scheduled Monuments. Historic features such as drystone walls, dew ponds, and ancient trackways also serve as ecological corridors. The Mendip Hills' cultural identity is deeply

rooted in its archaeology, rural traditions, and community events. This heritage, intertwined with the area's natural beauty and biodiversity, contributes to a strong sense of place and national significance. The Mendip Hills rich natural heritage is shaped by its limestone geology with 21 priority habitats including calcareous grasslands and ancient wooded combes, home to rare and threatened species such as adder, hazel dormouse, horseshoe bats and Cheddar pink.

How the project will respond to the four Lottery investment principles.

Protecting the environment

We will work with consultants and landowners to undertake hedgerow and update drystone wall condition surveys and connectivity mapping along recreational trails to understand and cost how we recover nature across a super-landscape-scale from the Bristol Channel to the Cotswolds via the restoration and enhancement of hedgerows and drystone walls and a network of ponds and hibernacula.

The project will scope the feasibility of green bridges and the vast untapped potential of Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites and their landowners, engaging with them to put plans in place to improve habitat condition and potential for wildlife, with affiliation to the Mendip NNR where appropriate.

A grazing feasibility study and pilot will show a way forward for an innovative, joined-up shared 'Mendip Herd'. Building on cave excavations at Ebbor Gorge by Professor Danielle Schreve, we plan to work with academics to conduct paleo-environmental climate research to support species re-introduction and invasive species control.

Outcomes

- 10km of new hedgerows and drystone walls across the landscape – joining up and restoring existing linear features, from the levels up to the hills and in keeping with landscape character. Green bridges and tunnels.
- A pond in every other field and restoring dew ponds where they were once present – or every 400 / 800m.
- A limestone hibernaculum in every other field – with key hibernacula created as sculptures across the landscape where suitable.
- Farmers transitioning to regenerative farming, installing natural flood management, and buffered watercourses across the entire scheme area. Extension of the Mendip NNR through the establishment of 'affiliated' farmland and joined-up grazing herd.
- Safeguarding veteran trees and establishing a network of new veteran trees of the future, along with a network of local tree nurseries and joint seed bank.
- Shared conservation grazing herd.
- Climate and disease resilience focussed on Ash Dieback legacy.
- Dark skies from end-to-end.
- Opening Cheddar Gorge by making it traffic free once a month.

Saving heritage

Working with expert heritage partners, we plan to deliver a parish-level pilot project at the start to survey the ground via LiDAR and tithe maps to identify historic 'gruffy' mining ground,

drystone walls and other heritage features. This will inform a scaled-up project across the landscape, which not only identifies the features, but provides protection and restoration plans.

We will identify designated heritage assets on local HER records and on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk' list to design restoration projects.

We will also run a pilot project to improve understanding and interest in local cultural / intangible heritage, including scoping out the availability of digital heritage and local memories.

Outcomes

- Cultural heritage project focussed on capturing the memories and traditions of local people.
- Restoring farm buildings, scheduled monuments, drystone walls and Cold War/WW2 structures with climate change and nature in mind (e.g. new bat roost structures for horseshoes) – from 'the Ice Age to the Cold War'.
- Traditional skills hub.
- Improving understanding through a community archaeological programme.
- LiDAR survey and look at old tithe maps (see Historic England's National Mapping Project) to see how the landscape has changed and how it could be changed back (i.e. filled in gruffy ground or old hedgerows that have been removed).

Inclusion, access and participation

To make real change on the ground, we are requesting funding to develop a portfolio of projects and fundable propositions along two of our long-distance recreational trails, which will form the backbone to re-connecting people and wildlife to and through the Mendip Hills. These two trails of the West Mendip Way and the Limestone Link can act as the golden thread. They link the urban centres of Weston-super-Mare and Wells, the new Mendip 'super' National Nature Reserve (NNR), and Mendip with the Cotswolds, connecting the whole of southern England's 'Big Chalk' calcareous landscape to the west coast.

The project will also enable us to build on current legacy work and start delivering an art, nature and wellbeing pilot project, testing an innovative and exciting joint staff model and activities with an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (ACE NPO). We will also develop links and a project to create new shared innovative modular interpretation with museums.

Outcomes

- Art in the landscape projects focussed on the Champion Species and Special Qualities, i.e. on dark night skies and caves, linking urban and rural communities together. The area will act as a testbed for new artworks and performances working with ACE NPOs.
- Surveying and innovative research initiatives focussed on Champion Species and archaeology, with local colleges and universities, and with the community through online and in-the-field citizen science (surveying both species, light and air pollution).
- Creation of information hubs or 'nodes' across Mendip (and wider) at visitor centres and museums, i.e. in Weston, Cheddar, Burrington and Wells – potentially also linking with Bristol Museum to upgrade their 'South West Wildlife' exhibition, creating a new modular and interactive exhibition space celebrating nature and cultural heritage of Mendip located in central Bristol, with the ability for modules to be taken on tour across the Mendip information hubs.

- Providing nature and wellbeing activities for people struggling with their mental health – i.e. structured courses and sessions using the Five Pathways to Nature Connectedness, in partnership with the health and social care sector.
- Stile-free routes along the entirety of both long-distance recreational trails.
- Bus service and/or tour bus and subsidised travel (the 'Mendip Mule').
- Augmented reality / new interactive interpretation at heritage sites and nature reserves.
- An exciting and nationally revered annual geology festival (Mendip Rocks!).

Organisational sustainability

The funding will provide the small and stretched National Landscape Team with the resources required to lead the project and coordinate and facilitate a strong partnership of organisations. The funding will also support partners, many of whom are eNGOs, to develop projects and cover their costs. The Mendip NNR Partnership has a strong and united vision but currently no funding to deliver it.

The project will also support the Mendip and Cam & Wellow farm clusters and their farmers with time and expertise to develop shovel-ready projects. It will also provide partners with the resources to identify synergies and match funding opportunities with other key initiatives including the Western Forest, ICB, LNRs, Water Companies via WINEP and Cheddar 2 reservoir, green finance and corporate companies, whilst also helping to develop the Mendip Hills Fund community grants scheme by increased promotion and advocacy to potential financial supporters.

The Mendip Hills National Landscape Team, hosted by Somerset Council, will lead the project with support from consultants and a strong partnership of organisations from the Mendip NNR Partnership and the Limestone Link / Somer Valley Rediscovered Partnership, led by Bath & North East Somerset Council and WENP.

Outcomes

- Improving branding and signage on the ground of the Mendip Hills National Landscape and Mendip 'super' NNR, and for both recreational trails.
- Shared staff members and shared knowledge, data, research and learning between partner organisations and National Landscape teams (e.g. survey and monitoring, heritage, archaeology, EDI, green finance) – a team of 'ologists'.
- Two new ranger teams, North and South. Each team will include a Nature Recovery Ranger, a Volunteer Coordinator Ranger and apprentice, supported by volunteers.
- Supporting local community and interest groups, such as tree nurseries, an archaeology forum and geology group.
- Eco-tourism hub and initiative to market local produce from local regen and organic farms ('Mendip Made').
- A team of farm engagement advisors – linked to Landscape Recovery and ambassadors to work with farmers to encourage wildlife farming (FiPL and farm cluster extension).

Who will be involved in the project?

Potential partners on Mendip:

- Somerset Council
- North Somerset Council
- Bath & North East Somerset Council
- South West Heritage Trust
- Somerset Wildlife Trust
- Avon Wildlife Trust
- National Trust
- Longleat Estate
- Natural England
- Butterfly Conservation
- Somerset Art Works
- Somerset Film
- Super Culture
- Trigger Stuff
- Westbury Society and Tree Nursery
- The Mendip Society
- Wells & Mendip Museum
- Bristol Museum
- Weston Museum
- Cheddar VIC
- Yeo Valley
- Disabled Ramblers
- MAAF
- NFU / FWAG
- Quarry companies
- Historic England
- Soil Association
- Local community groups

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	29 th January 2026 at 10am	Paper B
Title:	Discussion on the strategic direction for a large-scale ‘Landscape Connections’ bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund	
Presented by:	Tim Haselden	
Proposal: Which route should be used for the Landscape Connections application? The Direct Delivery Route? Faster, less certainty. The Development Route? Slower, more certainty.		

Fund overview:

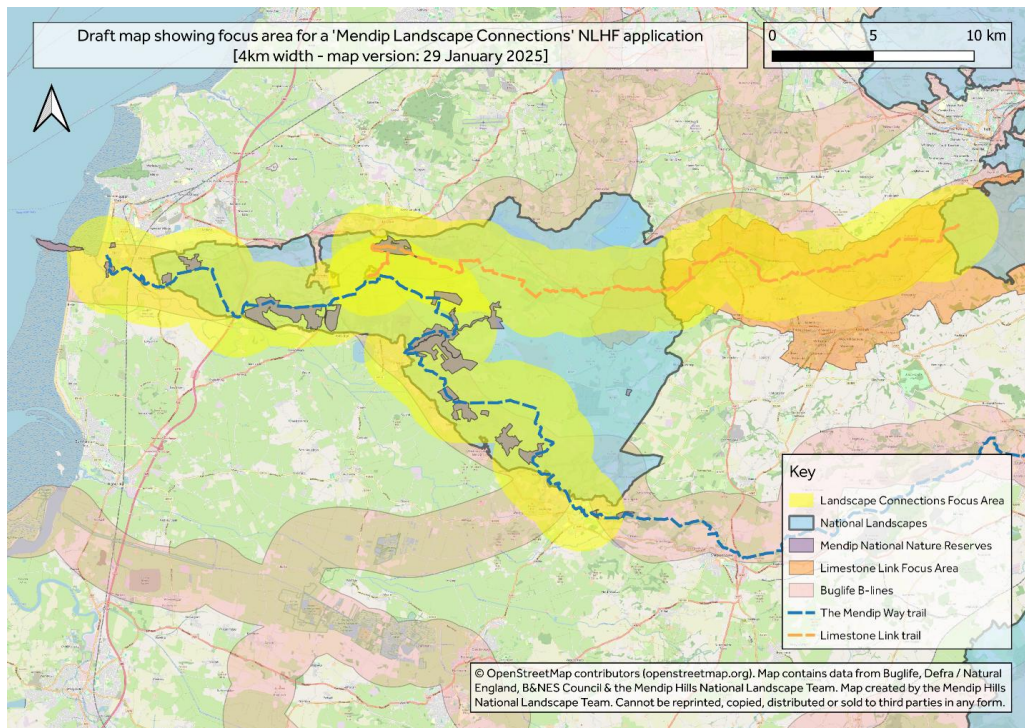
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The two possible pathways:

- 1) Direct Delivery Route – via an EOI and full bid to the £250K - £10m Heritage Grant.
- 2) Development First Route – via an Enquiry Form and a bid to the <£250K Heritage Grant.

Pathway	Pros	Cons
Direct Delivery Route	• Faster action for nature and people – full application must be within 12 months, project starting by autumn 2027 (until 2037). • Less chance of Landscape Connections funding being allocated to other PLs first. • Plans and partnerships are in place.	• Short window for working up full application and greater risk of EOI and full bid being rejected. • Would need to use existing, limited Team resources (staff, expertise and contingency funding). • Questionable as to whether enough consultation has taken place.
Development First Route	• Potential to secure up to £250K of funding first to develop projects and bring in additional resources and fund required match. • Pilots undertaken and projects fully developed that could be funded elsewhere by other streams. • Greater likelihood of success.	• Less urgent delivery – application for development funds would mean full project starting later, by autumn 2028 (until 2038) at the earliest. • More chance of Landscape Connections funding drying up, other nearby PLs being successful, or NLHF forced to change priorities.

Year	Month	2026	2027												2028												2029											
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb											
Direct Delivery Route		Work on LC EDI																																				
								Submit LCED I	If successful	Work up full LC bid											Submit full LC bid					Start 10 year LC scheme												
Development First Route		ED																																				
Funding																																						
Funding																																						

The two possible pathways for the Landscape Connections application with their timelines:

To decide:

It is requested that the Partnership decide on:

- a) whether they support a bid to the NLHF's Landscape Connections Strategic Initiative;
- b) the best way forward for the Mendip Hills National Landscape Team to take in their efforts to secure a Landscape Connections grant;
- c) how their organisations could support the Team during the application and initial development process and subsequently during the development / delivery phases.