

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at Bleadon Coronation Hall, 7pm 19th June 2025

Present:

Partnership Committee

David Taylor	Chair
Cllr Theo Butt Phillip	Vice Chair, Somerset County Councillor
Jim Hardcastle	National Landscape Manager
David Julian	CPRE
Simon Clarke	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Cllr Roger Dollins	Somerset Parish Councils Representative
David Collingbourne	Natural England
Rachel Thompson MBE	The Trails Trust
Lauren Holt	National Trust

Other attendees

Joanna Cheung	Support and Communications Officer
Tim Haselden	Project Development Officer

Apologies

Cllr Edric Hobbs (Vice Chair)	Somerset Council
Barbra Lakin	Somerset Council Officer
Cllr Nick Cottle	Somerset Council Councillor
Cllr Annemieke Waite	North Somerset Council
Di Sheppard	Bath & North East Somerset Council Officer
Steve Dury	Somerset Council Officer
Duncan Anderson Margetts	Country Land and Business Association
Cllr Paul Crossley	Bath & North-East Somerset Councillor
Tina Bath	Mendip Society

Summary of Actions

No	Item	Notes	Action
1	Introduction and Apologies	Apologies as stated above	
2	Declaration of interest	No declarations.	
3	Notes of Previous Meeting	No other matters arising. Accepted as a true and accurate record. DJ – requests and amendment re decision to have two vice chairs	JC
4	Partner Updates	JH - read out an update for Somerset Council, (now added to the Paper) NSC – update has been circulated SC – several Countryside Stewardships in progress Mendip NNR - Uphill - Cheddar Woods - Grant for the tree nursery in Westbury sub Mendip LH - NNR developing new branding and management framework - Dolebury Warren, upgrading water pump system etc - Capital grant for King's Wood ancient woodland - Focus on new strategy of "restore nature now" - Mendip VR tour, includes CGI of WW2 as well as nature - There will be a launch shortly - Lauren will share the link - Black Rock very close to signing of Stewardship, thank you to NE - TOTG partnership event, 1000 people attended - Unsure when there will be any progress on this now SC – focus on infrastructure - Farm advisory work - Farm Cluster Group is continuing to expand - Dormouse project almost complete, phase 3 will come soon	

		- Wilder Churches - Review of strategic priorities - “integrated delivery plans” DT – one of the benefits of this meeting, helps us align - Impressed with the amount of outreach from SWT DJ - worried about the number of applications ending up with inspector - Glencot Road - Potentially 280 houses if this is accepted - The management plan could mention the periphery of the NL DT – re outside of boundary but has impact - Views out and in are one of the special qualities - We are not confined by the geographical boundary - We have objected to applications outside of boundary recently RT – Strategic access group with Lauren - Including landowners, farmers and others - Not having specific user groups - Jim suggested a “Disability Champion” - Suggested Terms of Reference with Jim - Waiting for funding JH – Access funding is awaiting approval from a finance committee in Defra, not anticipating any problems RT – Initial thoughts are to start with Black Down and work out - Need to talk to all three local highway authorities	
5	MHNL Management Plan	JH Verbal update - Final draft is out for consultation - You have all been sent it	

		- Closing date 22/7/2025 DT To TBP how will it be adopted? TBP - delegated powers DT – Who is the portfolio holder? TBP – we can certainly work on getting more focus on it JH – All three Local Authorities need to adopt it	
6	Governance Review and Terms of Reference	DT presents Paper A DT - Summarises the findings of SWOT analysis - Has done a review of the guiding principles from the Glover Review - Not recommending reduction in size of the Partnership committee - Change OSG into Executive Board - Strengthening relationship with funders and improving capacity - Addition of task groups - Including an annual forum - Discusses list of weakness on SWOT analysis - o Capacity, more resource - o Cannot sustain new initiatives - o Broaden funding base, blended funding strategy RT – comprehensive, what was your process? JH – from issues raised in previous meetings, the Glover Review and personal experience RD – wide ranging and opens up other questions DT – Partnership is fit for purpose - ie in relation to coordinating highway officers - More funding/resources - S106 funding - get the developer to pay for the impact of their development RD – who would implement?	

	DT – jointly with TBP - Specifically on the highway officers point we could hold a joint meeting for all three LAs, or separately, but we need to find a way to have those discussions JH – important to have a strategic highway assessment, because changes affect other LAs - E.g. Cheddar Gorge has impact on so many other roads DT – we need to try on an operational level and strategic level TBP – You will need to be very clear about the purpose of meeting, and need to also include planning authorities if we are looking at s106 JH – get them to the meeting, need to use our collective power - Ask them to show us how they are demonstrating duty of regard and furthering the purposes DT – community network - Public transport - highway issues are a major impact on quality of life - We will aim to hold these meetings as matter of urgency RD – do they often meet as three? DT – NSC and BANES meet as WECA but not all three DT – concerns about temporary contracts in the NL Team - Strong, highly skilled core team - Enthusiasm of team - Need more resource JH – talks through process of changes to ToR - We do need to add two vice chairs JH – Annual Forum topic should be decided at Partnership level JH – We need to formalise recognition from NFU and CLA on the partnership	DT JH
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	RT – do they need to represent a body or an interest - James Small seems obvious choice RT – better to have two farmers DT – we need enthusiasm not representation DJ – agree, but groups can help to our advantage eg on planning objections, lobbying highways etc DT – yes, we need to look at both LH – contacts can be useful too - Be clear on the expectations of the role DT – still approach NFU & CLA, then broaden the search RT – don't start with them, just put the role out there RD – chances of obtaining a meeting are higher with backing from NFU RT – NFU doesn't represent farmers in the way they used to JH – the proposal is: two representatives on the Partnership for farming and landownership which could come from NFU or CLA - We approach those bodies but also put out a wider call TBP - then what? Who chooses? JH – the example of Business and Tourism rep, Partnership would approve by a vote TBP – not always easy for 14 people to come to decision RD – could it be the Executive Board? DT – we need to give further consideration to selection process RD - definition of the role DT – short brief of expectations for each role - Look at formal representative bodies - Pre-selection process before coming back to the Partnership	JH
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		JH – Proposed change that the Access rep is a formal part of the partnership and not a co-opted role RD – seconded JH – Propose a change that co-opted members do have a vote. They are there because of their specialist knowledge. RD – seconded JH – Proposed change to the local authority councillors. Currently ToR say they must have a ward that is wholly or partially within the boundary. We need to add “or have experience or knowledge relevant to the purpose of the National Landscape”. RT – seconded JH – remove the rule that we can only have one officer attendee from each LA All - agreed JH – proposed OSG renamed to Executive Board - This will enable core budget conversations RD – who heads it up? JH – I would chair DT – The change of name would elevate the group to the next level in LA and encourage them to take it seriously TBP – inconsistency re vice chair - Propose that Vice Chair can attend alongside chair All – agreed JH – Chair or VC must be from a Local Authority but not necessarily a councillor TBP - unlikely but all for flexibility JH – how can we continue the work we young people, mental health, active lifestyles etc DT – community outreach recommendation is strong in Glover Review	
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		There was a discussion regarding the outreach partners do to involve young and older people and how this could be help to inform the Partnership's decisions. It was agreed to undertake a survey to find out more. JH – 2 Vice Chairs - September elections DC – for Exec Board who do you want from NE? JH – to represent Defra, we suggest Jo Lewis, but she may feel it should be Rachel Williams JH – summarises actions - Update membership accord, all partners to sign - Approach ALCA to initiate election for Parish Reps for BANES and NSC, if no response then NL Team to contact parish council's directly. RD – are we going to develop that role JH – yes DT – need your help RD – will help where I can DJ – correction to the name of CPRE	JH
7	MHNL Team Update	MHNL presentation TH lead presentations with a focus on upcoming Nature Calling installation. Highlights the remit of NC is about reaching young people DT – really good example of reaching out to the community	
10	AOB	Next meeting in person not online because it is elections	
11	Date of next meeting	Thursday 4th September, 7pm. Thursday 20th November, 10am JC to send invites out	JC

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	7pm 19 th June 2025	
Title:	Agenda	
Presented by:	NA	
Bleadon Coronation Hall. 5 Coronation Road, Bleadon, Weston-super-Mare BS24 0PG		

1. Introductions and Apologies
 2. Declaration of Interest
 3. Notes of Previous Meeting. To be approved
 5. Partner updates.
 7. MHNL Management Plan Update. Verbal update
 8. Governance Review and Terms of Reference. Paper A
 9. MHNL Team Activity Plan 2025-2026 update. Paper B and verbal presentation
 10. AOB
 11. Date of 2025 meetings:
- 4th September 7pm Online. *Focus on the preparation of the MHNL 5 Year Delivery Plan*
20th November 10am In-person



Mendip Hills National Landscape

A message from David Turner, the new Chair of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership.

It is both an honour and a challenge to be the new Chair of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership and could I thank Andy Wear, the outgoing Chair, for his support and advice. I look forward to meeting all the different partners involved and working with them to manage this nationally significant Landscape.

The Mendip Hills is an incredible place, a very special landscape rich in biodiversity and architectural heritage. It relies on a resilient and diverse farming community to deliver effective land management and stewardship. It supports a growing range of sustainable tourism and visitor services alongside nationally recognised and local business.

Post Covid many more of us understand that it is a place that is at the heart of our well-being, be it for active sports, informal recreation, physical and mental relaxation and recovery.

It is a place where the Partnership, by working together, supported by our skilled and dedicated National Landscape Team and an amazing group of volunteers has and is making a real difference.

However, if the National Landscape is to continue to be a very special landscape, it has to respond to change; be it the ecological challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, changes in farm funding, the need for improved accessibility to and through Mendip, the need to extract positive benefits from development and robustly resist those schemes that threaten us and be responsive to changes in local and national Government policy and funding.

Whilst I cannot cover the full breadth of ambition outlined in the Management Plan, I would like to highlight the things that particularly resonate with me:

Nature

The creation of the Mendip National Nature Reserve will secure ecological resilience and coherence along the whole of the southern escarpment, guiding all that farm and own land within and adjacent to it and prompting a step change in understanding and volunteer activity.

Climate

Through the excellent work on Farming In Protected Landscapes and the potential of new farm funding structures stemming from 2023 Environment Act around natural capital, conservation, and access we will place the farming community at the centre of how we work.

People

We need to be more inclusive and accessible, particularly in how we engage with young people and those on low incomes. We also need to review our capacity to further develop volunteering activity and how we support the growth and outreach of voluntary organisations and bodies that operate within the Mendip Hills and how we can become an integral part of health and active lifestyle funding and delivery.

Place

It is now more important than ever that we work closely with the three Local Authority Planning Services in resisting inappropriate development and secure the mechanisms to secure funding from new development.

Developing our work with local business particularly those providing sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation is a key interest for me as is strengthening our focus on delivering a strategic network of multi-user accessible routes across Mendip.

To address these issues the Partnership needs to be fit for purpose. In 2023 the Partnership

approved a review of governance and structure in response to government guidance on how we should be reformed to inspire and secure ambition and better reflect society. Whilst this doesn't require us to go through wholesale change it does need us to ensure that we are aligned to achieving the Management Plan, have accountability, be forward facing and focused on implementation and have influence with local regional and national organisations.

Further information on how we are looking to strengthen the Partnership and how it operates will be available shortly.

Biography

David left a thirty-year career in Local Government in 2016 to set up his own specialised environment and development consultancy. He has worked at County, District and Unitary Authority levels based initially on Town and Country Planning then extending into countryside management, urban regeneration, transport and place shaping. He has held senior management roles for Buckinghamshire County Council and North Somerset Council and has been instrumental in developing joint working arrangements between Authorities and the Business Community in the West of England and Somerset.

He moved to Wells in 2003 with his wife Debra who sadly passed away in 2023 and has two sons James and Rob and recently became a grandfather to Otis. He is a Trustee of a Community Cinema and Director of a Local Community Interest Company dealing with health and well-being.

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	19 th June 2025	
Title:	Partner Updates	
Presented by:	Jim Hardcastle	
To be noted.		

1. Somerset Council

2. BANES

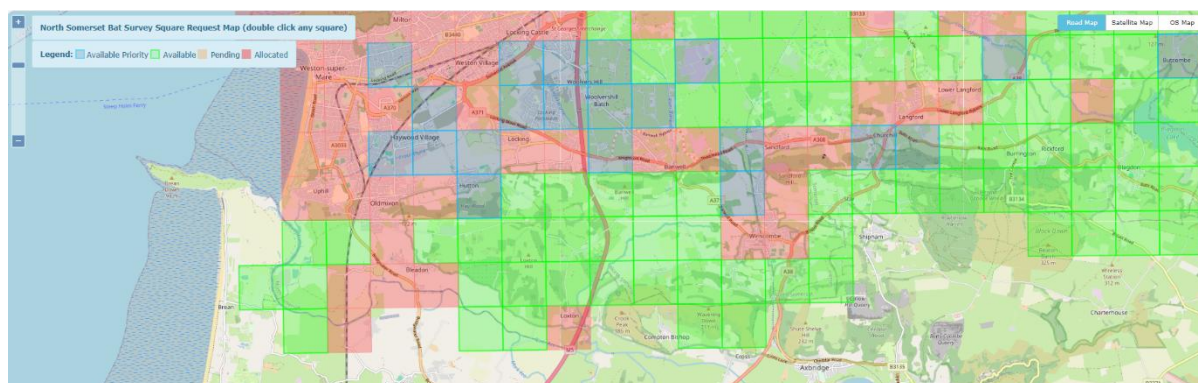
3. NSC

We are soon to be consulting on an updated North Somerset and Mendip Bat SAC SPD (the NL team should have been invited to an engagement event on the 2nd July). The main updates are:

- Reviewed and updated following a piece of research conducted for NSC by UWE.
- Main conclusion of the research: our populations of horseshoe bats are having to fly further to forage.
- Size of the consultation zones is proposed to increase to reflect this - greater emphasis, across a larger area of North Somerset, on both the survey effort and level of mitigation required to demonstrate that development will not impact on these species.
- New roosts which have been discovered since the previous SPD was published have been added to the consultation zone maps.
- Requirements in relation to upfront lighting modelling have also been increased.
- Habitat Evaluation Protocol tool (used to determine the amount of mitigation land required) has been updated.
- North Somerset Nature Park (NSNP) initiative is introduced (locations are chosen based on habitat and connectivity modelling, also produced by UWE).

Most of the Mendip Hills NL was already covered by the consultation zones but now it all is and the majority is in zone B for one or both horseshoe species.

The Great North Somerset Bat Project is live and landowners/residents can sign up here to reserve a 1km square to site a detector in: [Booking](#) Blue and green squares are currently available to reserve. More information on the project can be found here: [North Somerset Bat Survey | BatConservResLab](#)



If people aren't aware, our Chief Executive Jo Walker has now moved on and her replacement, Mandy Bishop, joins the Council in August.

4. Natural England

5. National Trust

6. SWT

SWT Reserves:

Our main area of practical work over the last few months has been carrying out infrastructure repair work, but we've also been working on new woodland management plans and carrying out annual deer browsing / natural regen growth monitoring:

- We've replaced around 2km – 2.5km of livestock fencing in-house around the reserves, as well as replacing several field gates. We've also fenced livestock out of dew ponds that are being used by great crested newt and have had specialist contractors replace around 100m of fencing with metal stakes in areas that are too rocky to drive in wooden fence posts.
- We've had lots of volunteer work days, carrying out repairs to dry stone walls and fence lines.
- Conservation grazing agreements have been renewed for 2025 across all our grassland reserves and timings / stocking densities agreed on for conservation grazing regimes.
- We've also been carrying out our annual infrastructure safety inspections and arranging remedial works, as necessary
- We've carried out deer browsing impact assessments in our woodland reserves to monitor how the understory growth and natural regeneration of vegetation and saplings is responding to the loss of the ash canopy in our woodlands, and to the browsing pressure from roe & muntjac deer.
- We've also been writing new woodland management plans for the Mendip woodland reserves for the next 5–10-year management cycle.

Tor Works Environmental Enhancement Fund and Mendip Hills Farm Cluster

The summary below gives a breakdown of the work we have conducted through the TWEEF over the last financial year (1/2/25 to 31/3/25):

- Delivered or facilitated 25 training and information events, with 245 participations
- Continued to support the expanded Mendip Hills Farm Cluster, enabling 44 farm cluster members to collaborate
- Provided land management advice on eight sites following site visit and/or survey
- Supported the Private and Community Nature Reserves to relaunch, with over 100 active members, relaunch and training events and support resources.
- Delivered five community empowerment events, totalling 117 participations with ~382 hours of community volunteer time to gain skills, collaborate and/or take action for nature
- Run three practical habitat management and restoration tasks, collectively contributing ~193 volunteer hours
- Supported five communities to undertake nature initiatives
- Secured over £57,900 of external funding to support nature recovery work in Mendip
- Collectively, through 32 activities/events, enabled 303 participations and ~574 volunteer hours

Dormouse Phase 2 Project (FIPL funded)

Habitat enhancement works targeted around important remnant dormouse populations were coordinated by Mendip staff, working with landowners, and included:

- 190m of ride widening and habitat management at Mascall's Wood to create linear corridors of scrubby habitat, connecting up coppicing coupes
- 248m new hedgerow planting, and 270m deer fencing of existing young trees at A Patch Wilder (between Rowberrow and the Perch SSSI) to connect up woodland habitats supporting dormice
- 0.4ha selective coppicing of hazel coupes next to Mascalls Wood (Cheddar Complex SSSI)
- 275m (~0.5ha) ride widening at Forecliffs (part of Perch SSSI) to create linear corridors of scrubby habitat to connect up existing and future coppicing coupes
- Ride widening along 1700m ride at Cheddar Wood to create linear corridors of scrub
- Planting connecting scrub woodland next to important dormouse populations at Rowberrow Wood, to link to new neighbouring woodland.

Other activities undertaken as part of the funded project included:

- Design and installation of an interpretation board at Mascalls Wood to explain the work being undertaken, including importance of creating wide rides
- Footprint tunnel surveys to improve knowledge of where populations may be present at 4 Mendip sites, which will inform future hedgerow restoration work, woodland management and monitoring work.
- Nest tube surveys on land surrounding Mascalls wood to understand if dormouse populations remain at this once important dormouse site where surrounding scrub cover has declined in recent years. Presence was indeed confirmed.
- Advisory work – one day PTES Dormouse officer time to run workshop/ advise landowners on habitat management to benefit dormice
- 3 days of PTES Dormouse officer time to offer habitat specific management advice to inform a woodland management plan
- Training for SWT Reserves Assistant to aid application for a NE dormouse survey licence)

Further opportunities:

Private and Community Nature Reserves Network:

For those interested in this Somerset Wilde Network, more training for members is being planned for this year and new people can join anytime if they have land that they manage primarily for nature. More info here:

<https://www.somersetwildlife.org/get-involved/specialist-groups/pcnr-network>

Wilder Churches:

SWT working with the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The initiative supports communities to get to know the wildlife in their local churchyard, other church land or burial ground and work together to find ways to increase the value of these special places for wildlife. New communities can get involved any time! <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/wilder-churches>

7. AWT

We have been continuing with several projects on our Mendip reserves focussed on habitat improvement and connectivity. Unfortunately, a significant number of the hedgerow trees we planted at our Hellenge Hill nature reserve didn't survive the dry spell despite our best efforts, however the trees at Hutton are in much better condition. Our phased Interpretation board overhaul is in process with our Mendip boards containing a section devoted to the Mendip NNR

and we have two which have recently been installed at Hutton Hill. We've also rolled out dormouse footprint tunnels at several more sites including one on Mendip and have trained teams of new volunteer groups to monitor and maintain them.

8. Parish Council Representatives

9. Mendip Society

10. CPRE

Campaign success: We've secured a [campaign win](#) with the government now planning for solar panels to be fitted on all new-build homes in England by 2027, as part of the Future Homes Standard. This comes after CPRE members wrote to their MPs asking them to support the Sunshine Bill in early 2025 and after years of campaigning by CPRE groups here and across the country. Here in Somerset, we are constantly facing large applications for solar farms, which are industrialising our landscapes and taking precious farmland out of food production. It's a complete "no brainer" to have more solar on rooftops, so we are pleased that the voices of so many CPRE members and campaigners have finally been heard by the Government. Next, we are campaigning for policies to bring in solar panels as standard on industrial roofs and warehouses – and even over large car parks.

Ongoing campaigns

Planning & Infrastructure Bill: Nationally, CPRE is a member of Wildlife & Countryside Link and, together, we are sounding the alarm and calling for various amendments to this bill. The P&I Bill aims to speed up planning but is actually putting nature and local democracy at risk. More info [here](#)

New guide to help with planning

Our "How to respond to planning applications" guide has been revamped and can be downloaded from our website [here](#)

Local planning cases we are involved with:

We are involved in planning cases across the whole

county, but cases near to the Mendip Hills are highlighted below:

- Replacement wind turbine, Wanstrow - Awaiting decision.
- Relocation of sawmill, Dinder (nr Wells) – awaiting decision
- 78 houses, Glencot Road, Wookey Hole – has gone to appeal and we have submitted a further objection
- 74 houses at Packsaddle Fields, Frome – refused earlier this year but an appeal has been launched. We will speak at the Public Inquiry in August.
- Selwood Garden Village – proposal for 1700 houses, new roads, 2 care homes, roads, employment land & school on the edge of Frome. This massive proposal is not in the Local Plan. It has been called in by the Secretary of State and there will be a public inquiry in August. Our [crowdfunder appeal](#) to help pay for legal costs and an expert landscape report has been very successful, with over £5000 raised from almost 150 donations so far.
- We spoke at a recent appeal hearing re plans for 75 houses in Coleford. This Mendip village has very poor transport links and only one shop but is classed as a primary village

so is under great pressure for housing. It has already delivered 225% of its housing allocation in the Local Plan.

Other

- Our 2025 photo competition with the theme of “Somerset: life in the countryside” is open for entries until 30th September. Details [here](#)
- CPRE will be 100 years old in 2026. We are developing an exciting programme of activities to celebrate our centenary.
- Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and BlueSky – search @cpresomerset
- Lots more info on www.cpresomerset.org.uk

11. The Trails Trust

With partners TTT is involved in establishing a MHNL strategic access delivery group with the aim of using the ELMs test and trials 159 / 159A tools, mechanisms, learning and stakeholders to create, improve and enhance public access with biodiversity to, through and around the MHNL.

TTT is expecting a visit in early autumn from Baroness Hayman, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Baroness Hayman would like to see the strategic landscape scale planning carried out for the ELMs tests and access routes delivered subsequently.

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	7pm 19 th June 2025	Paper A
Title:	Governance Review and Terms of Reference	
Presented by:	David Turner, Jim Hardcastle	
Proposed recommendations:		
1. Partnership Committee commits to organise, via the NL Team, an annual forum to engage with a wider community. 2. Two representatives of land owning and farming interests on the Partnership. National Farmers Union and Country and Landowners Business Association. 3. Add an access issues representative to the Partnership. Proposal that this is Rachel Thompson MBE. 4. Proposal is that co-opted members do have a vote. 5. To enable local authorities to select the most appropriate member for the Partnership add the words in BOLD 'All local authorities represented on the Partnership Committee should have regard to the desirability of appointing one member of the authority who represents a ward or electoral division situated wholly or partly within the Mendip Hills National Landscape and/or has experience or knowledge relevant to the purposes of the National Landscape. 6. Remove the rule that only one local authority officer may attend the Partnership, and if more wish to attend they must seek the approval of the Chair. 7. Officer Support group renamed as the Executive Board. 8. Executive Board is chaired by the National Landscape Manager. 9. Agree in principle to the creation of new positions to specifically represent and engage with Young People, Healthy and Active Lifestyles and increasing visitor diversity.		

Mendip Hills National Landscape - Governance Review 2025

1. Purpose of Report

The report reviews the current governance of the Partnership in respect of its structure, mode of operation and constitution (Terms of Reference) taking account of the recommendation of the National Landscapes Review (Glover Report) that National Landscapes should have **"reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition"**

It identifies where changes should be made to the current governance arrangements in light of the tasks and challenges the Partnership needs to address in the period 2025 -30. This is informed by a high-level organisational review in the form of a Strengths/Weaknesses /Opportunities and Threats (S.W.O.T) analysis set out in Appendix A.

It seeks Partnership Approval to:

- 1) Maintain the current operation of the **Partnership Committee** as the formal Partnership body but amend and extend representation to increase its effectiveness including a stronger mission to connect with diversity, youth and well-being and promote sustainable tourism.
- 2) Establish an **Executive Board** (replacing the former Officer Support Group) to oversee the financial and operational key decisions of the National Landscape Service.
- 3) To task the Executive Board to develop a new financial model to give greater resources and security for the Partnership, capable of supporting its ambition to 2030 and beyond.
- 4) Establish **Task Groups** to formalise and strengthen project and partnership working in accordance with delivery of the Management Plan.
- 5) To undertake a review of **Community Outreach**, making this the focus of the next **Community Forum** to strengthen relationships with Parish, Town Councils and key local community organisations and users.
- 6) To agree to the revised **Terms of Reference (ToR)** to support these changes as set out in Appendix B.

2. Introduction

In response to the Glover Review (2019) and subsequent government response, in 2023 The Partnership agreed to change its name to the Mendip Hills National Landscape and at the same time agreed to review its Terms of Reference to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose.

Key Principles from the Glover Review (2019) (with those particularly pertinent to our structure and way of working highlighted) include:

- A renewed mission to recover and enhance nature and form the backbone of nature recovery networks (Proposal 1)
- Strengthened Management Plans with clear priorities and actions for nature recovery (Proposal 3)
- A central place in Environmental Land Management schemes (Proposal 5)
- A strengthened place in the planning system (although statutory consultee status still eludes us)
- **A stronger mission to connect all people with specific action to engage with young people and increase the ethnic diversity of visitors.** (Proposal 7/8/9)
- **Making landscapes that cater for and improve the nation's health and well-being** (Proposal 10)
- Expanding volunteering, improving information and ranger services (Proposal 11/12/13)
- **Becoming leaders in promoting sustainable tourism** (Proposal 14)
- **Improving working in and with vibrant communities** (Proposal 17)
- Adopting new approaches to sustainable travel and ways of accessing the National Landscape (Proposal 19)
- A new duty on Local Authorities to further not just have regard for the National Landscape (Proposal 25)
- **Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society.** (Proposal 26)

- **The need to develop a new financial model that secures more money, greater security and more ambition.** (Proposal 27)

3. Current Partnership Position

The Glover Review was based on “Being honest on what doesn’t work at the moment and put in place a system which can do better”. To follow a similar approach a high-level “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats” analysis (S.W.O.T) of the Partnership has been undertaken to assess the degree to which change is required and to inform the areas of The Partnership that require strengthening.

The SWOT diagram is attached at Paper A Cont. and Partner members are asked to consider and comment on whether you agree with the assessment and whether there are any obvious omissions.

4. The Partnership Committee

The current strengths of the Partnership revolve around the commitment and joint working brought to the table by the Partners via the existing Partnership Committee. The scale of Mendip lends itself to a Partnership which allows it to be both manageable and co-ordinated avoiding the criticism levelled at some Partnerships by the Glover Review that they were too large and unwieldy.

The Partnership model has served the Mendip Hills National Landscape well bringing together the National Landscape (NL) Team with key partners and organisations whilst at the same time directly linking with the key funding/ accountable bodies. Current representation from nature conservation bodies, the farming community and access, fit well with the renewed mission for national landscapes.

Specific changes in the Terms of Reference

- 3.4 [Partnership Committee] organises via the NL Team an annual forum to engage with a wider community
- 3.5d Two representatives of land owning and farming interests on the Partnership. National Farmers Union and Country and Landowners Business Association
- 3.5h Add an access issues representative to the Partnership. Proposal that this is Rachel Thompson MBE
- 3.9 Remove the line ‘Co-opted members do not have a vote.’ Proposal is that co-opted members do have a vote.
- 3.13a All local authorities represented on the Partnership Committee should have regard to the desirability of appointing one member of the authority who represents a ward or electoral division situated wholly or partly within the Mendip Hills National Landscape and/or has experience or knowledge relevant to the purposes of the National Landscape.
- 3.13b and c removed.
- 5 Officer Support group renamed as the Executive Board
- 5.3 Executive Board is chaired by the National Landscape Manager

However, whilst the Partnership has supported policies and actions that improve connectivity and the involvement of young people, well-being and the diversity of visitors, these areas of renewed importance are not currently reflected as strongly in the Partnership in terms of membership as they could be.

The Partnership is therefore requested to agree in principle to the creation of new positions to specifically represent and engage with Young People, Healthy and Active Lifestyles and increasing visitor diversity.

Whether this is by a suitable umbrella organisation or specific organisations or individuals remains to be determined. Further advice is being sought from professionals operating within these areas of interest and the views of appropriate organisations or individuals from the Partnership is welcomed. The Partnership will decide on the appointments in due course.

5. An Executive Board

The National Landscape Manager has in the past been supported by an 'Officer Support Group' representing the key funding bodies [This is a separate issue] However, it is apparent that the scale of ambition reflected in the Partnership Plan, the increasing complexity and scale of projects and programmes and the need to explore alternative funding solutions is placing a considerable additional burden on the postholder and wider NL Team.

This comes at a time when resources in both national and local government are stretched and the goal of more money and greater security for the NL Team appears less, not more obtainable.

It is proposed that the membership of the Executive Board initially is made up of:

- National Landscape Manager
- Somerset Council Officer
- North Somerset Council Officer
- Bath & North-East Somerset Council Officer
- Natural England
- Chair and Vice-chair of the Partnership

An objective behind the creation of an Executive Board is to reinvigorate the relationship between the accountable bodies and The Partnership, creating the capacity to explore what "to further" The Partnership means. It is also aimed at supporting the Manager with timely decisions and support relating to the financial management and key operational decisions he currently makes.

A key focus of the Executive Board should be to create a new financial model in accordance with Proposal 27 of the Glover Report including the potential for a greater role of private sector/business funding and sponsorship and potential funding from new delivery bodies such as the West of England Combined Authority (WECA),

The Partnership is requested to support both the formalisation of the Officer Support Group as the Executive Board and its initial area of focus as outlined in this report with recommendations on these issues being brought back to the Partnership for approval.

6. Landscape Management Team

Somerset Council has announced a pay and grading review of all staff commencing this year. It is clear from the SWOT analysis that capacity needs to be built in the NL Team to develop and respond to the challenges facing the National Landscape at a strategic level whilst ensuring project management and delivery is robust.

Critical areas that require increased capacity include supporting a growing and more diverse volunteer base and developing a Communication Strategy that maximises the use of social media to make the partnership more accessible, to better inform and be informed; and to reach a wider audience particularly those identified as key to increasing the inclusivity of the Partnership.

The review needs to provide greater security to individual members of the Team in terms of their terms and conditions accepting that several of them are employed on fixed term contracts tied to specific project funding and grading reviews are tied to Somerset Council's pay and grading review processes.

Our objective is to retain a strong, highly skilled and motivated core officer team that is properly remunerated and flexible enough to respond to external funding and project opportunities.

Further details of the review will be brought back to the Partnership for approval.

7. Task Groups

The Partnership already contributes or leads on a significant number of projects aimed at delivering the Management Plan. There are however projects either due to their scale or complexity which require dedicated and focused attention, and it is proposed that these operate as Task Groups.

It is proposed that Task Groups are overseen by the NL Team and are able to draw upon the support of the Executive Board in relation to resources and problem solving. Their outcomes and performance will be reported to The Partnership Committee.

Membership of a Task Group will be at the discretion of the NL Manager and Task Group Leader and where relevant will be drawn from the existing Partnership Membership but will also be open to individuals and organisations who are deemed to add additional value and experience to the task.

Some Task Groups will be short term others may have longer timescales.

At present the following Task Groups are proposed:

- Strategic Access Delivery Group - Task Lead Rachel Thompson
- Farming in Protected Landscapes Local Assessment Panel – Task Leader Andy Wear
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8. Conclusion

The Partnership is requested to adopt the recommendations of the report to strengthen the governance of the organisation to ensure it can both inspire and secure ambition for the

Mendip Hills National Landscape for the period 2025 – 2030 and to report back where appropriate.

Paper A Cont. SWOT Analysis of MHNL Partnership

Strengths • Established Partnership Committee • Renewed mission to recover and enhance nature reflected in Nature Recovery Plan and 'super' National Nature Reserve proposals • Established joint working with landowners and farming community through FiPL • Established active and motivated volunteers • Core group of experienced officers in NL Team • New planning officer (albeit part- time) • Active sustainable tourism sector with nationally significant and local business • Active joint working to develop multi-user accessibility via green infrastructure	Weakness • Lack of representation on Partnership Committee of individuals and organisations to connect all people and better reflect society including, young people, ethnicity and diversity and health and well being • Lack of capacity to further develop volunteering • Over reliance on the Landscape Manager to deliver outcomes at the expense of strategic capacity to address new challenges and ambition • Degree to which the officer core is reliant on time limited funding and core funders who are themselves financially restricted creates insecurity and curbs ambition • Ability to further develop working in and with vibrant communities due to funding and staffing resources • Lack of capacity to develop alternative funding strategies including the role of business and new development
Opportunities • To add under-represented interests to the Partnership Committee and other working /task groups and develop further joint working with Health and related services to better promote well -being • To strengthen Executive support for the NL Manager: ○ To explore with the 3 LA's how the work of the Partnership can assist them in meeting the new duty to further the purposes of the National Landscape including how to assist in meeting their environmental, social and economic objectives. ○ To explore further how the NL planning function works with the 3 LA's to secure funding from development within and adjacent to MHNL including section 106 obligations and CIL. ○ To influence and integrate the 3 LA's sustainable transport services and promote new public transport service within and serving the National Landscape	Threats • The work of the Partnership fails to adequately engage with existing and potential users across Society adding to inequality and lack of access to the NL. • The inability to prevent inappropriate development within or adjacent to the NL detracts from its value • Uncertainty in funding to farming community to maintain and expand effective environmental land management • Lack of more certain funding results in loss/fragmentation of officers from the NL Team which in turn fundamentally impacts on the Partnerships ability to conserve and enhance the National Landscape • Lack of funding support and commitment from the 3 LA's and government fundamentally restricts the Partnerships ability to sustain itself or move forwards to inspire and secure ambition • Lack of capacity restricts working in and with communities reducing the relevance and connectivity with the National Landscape,

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To support the NL Team through the Somerset Council pay and grading review to increase the capacity of the Landscape Manager to address strategic change and capacity and reduce reliance on him for operational delivery• To address capacity in the Landscape Team to extend volunteering, communication/information and Ranger Services• To strengthen delivery through the establishment of focused Task groups on core projects drawing from within and outside of existing partners• To explore alternative funding strategies including from the private sector• To further develop how the partnership communicates and connects with local communities, users /visitors through a review of community outreach including revised working with Parish and Town Council's and Mendip Society and operation of the Mendip Hills Fund. | |
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Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	19 th June 2025	Paper B
Title:	National Landscape Team Activity Plan for 2025-26	
Presented by:	Jim Hardcastle	
For discussion		



Mendip Hills
National
Landscape

Mendip Hills National Landscape Team

Activity Plan 2025-26

Project Delivery

NATURE						
Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj.	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Mendip Landscape Connections	Secure a development grant for the Mendip Landscape Connections programme.	TH, JH			Broad consultation completed with partners. Development meeting held with National Lottery Officer – advice given to submit a Project Enquiry Form first then a development bid to secure resources for submitting the full bid. This approach should result in a funded 2 year development stage to fully cost the main bid.	A
Mendip National Nature Reserve	Produce and initiate partnership management framework for the Mendip NNR.	JH, TH			Draft management plan has been completed and to be reviewed at June Delivery Group meeting before being adopted by the Steering Group. Mendip NNR brand development work taking place, led by NT.	A

Mendip Hills Fund	Submit a National Lottery Heritage Fund application to increase the fund.	JH/ TH			To be developed.	R
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CLIMATE

Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Climate Change Adaptation Plan	Build on the Climate Vulnerability Assessment in the MHNL Plan to create a Climate Change Adaptation Plan.	JH			Work to be progressed after management plan adopted.	A
Tree planting	Support the planting of 4000 trees in line with the Nature Recovery Plan.	TH/ NO			Needs development work prior to planting season. Scheduled meeting with Westbury Tree Group in June and small fund now received to support maintenance of trees planted in previous years through LATF. Planning to link with new Western Forest initiative.	A
Natural Flood Management	Produce a guide for land managers on Natural Flood Management on the Mendip Hills.	JH			Work to be progressed after management plan adopted.	A

PEOPLE

Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Nature Recovery Plan Community Engagement	Promote the awareness of the champion species via a series of projects.	JH / TH			Mendip Nature Connections and Nature Calling projects are ways in which the engagement plan is being delivered. Promote the Champion Species Educational game to local schools and care homes.	

					Develop a programme of nature-themed guided walks.	
Mendip Nature Connections	Continue the project that supports people with mental health issues via a coordinated programme on farms and other sites. Secure long-term funding.	TH / MC			FiPL and WoE Healthier with Nature funded project successfully completed at end of April'25 with 60 sessions delivered, supporting c.300 participants (22 through long-term 6-18 week course)- currently producing an independent evaluation report. 3 months (with a view to 12 months) funding was secured to continue work through Somerset Community Learning, but due to staff departure we were unable to start the work in the delivery timeframe required and have therefore paused further activity until longer-term funding is secured and Somerset Council re-assess and re-grade the role appropriately.	R
My Mendip Memories	Secure remaining funding and deliver the 'My Mendip Memories' photography and film project.	TH/ AC			Full bid submitted to NLHF with Windrose Rural Media Trust – due to hear result in mid-June. If successful, a 1 year project will start to record the memories and images of 5 key Mendip figures and their traditional skills.	A
Wells & Mendip Museum	Develop temporary exhibitions on nature recovery and the Special Qualities.	TH			Exhibition based on 'Menhir' images by Elizabeth Woodger, commissioned for the Cheddar Gorge projections event, is currently being produced and will be exhibited in the Museum between mid August and end of October, coinciding with the Mendip Rocks! festival.	G
Top of the Gorge	Support the delivery of the adventure festival through pre-event meetings, on site staffing and volunteer rangers.	AC/ KD			The event took place on 7-8 June 2025. Approx 1100 attended the event. MHNL Team staff and volunteers attended the event. Poor weather reduced numbers on Saturday. MHNL continue to co-fund the organising consultant with the National Trust.	G
Access for All	Spend the allocated amount on a series of projects that make access easier for people across the Mendip Hills NL.	KD/ TH			Current draft spending plan for £113k; MHNL Strategic Access Delivery Group £40k Strawberry Line £35k Cheddar Gorge Loop (Black Rock path on Longleat side) £25k MHNL Team £13k	A
Visitor data collection and analysis	Deliver and analyse visitor counter data and The Big	KD			2025 Big Visitor Count took place on May 3. Staff and volunteers recorded visitors at the usual 16 locations. Data is still being analysed but provisional results show a slight increase in numbers.	A

	Visitor Count and develop a pilot visitor survey.				Visitor counter data from the static recorders will be sent to landowners in July containing 2024 results.	
PLACE						
Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Training	Deliver training programme for local councillors on the NL special qualities, nature recovery and planning system.	IB/TH			To be scheduled for autumn.	A
Management Plan	Review the management plan for adoption by local authorities in June 2025.	JH/IB			Formal consultation of the draft plan will be between 1/6 and 22/7. Final version will then be approved by the Partnership and then sent to the local authorities for adoption.	A
Nature Calling	Deliver the final year of the 'Nature Calling' programme for the National Art in the Landscape Mendip & Weston Hub	TH			All engagement and sound recordings have now been completed. Final plans (logistics and marking & comms) are progressing for the public presentation 14-20 July in Weston town centre, and the 3 augmented reality audio trails in South Ward, Uphill and on Mendip to be in place between July and October. The press and partnership are welcome to attend the launch on Monday 14 th July at The Sovereign Centre.	A

Core Delivery

Conserve & Enhance

Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj.	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Blackmoor Reserve and Deer Leap	Update management plans and instigate works that conserve and enhance these sites, based around existing countryside stewardship schemes for Blackmoor and Deer Leap.	TH / NO			Blackmoor – wider areas have been roped off during spring for adders. A variety of habitat management has taken place including bracken crushing, removal of invasive species, tree planting, wall restoration and path clearance. Deer Leap – community engagement work delivered via skylark art work. Clearance of public rights of way and protection of scheduled monument prior to improvements of visitor areas has been completed. LPA have now confirmed that a planning application is not required to carry out improvements to the car park and picnic area – these improvements, based on the consultation responses and available budget, will take place over the summer.	G
The Mendip Way	Improve the infrastructure of the route and signage. Develop the Walkers are Welcome groups.	TH / KD			To be developed using Access for All funds.	A
Farming in Protected Landscapes	Promote the benefits of the programme, support the allocation of project funds and administer the Local Assessment Panel.	JH			£93,000 already awarded to local projects. Lucy Stockton, current Fram Engagement Officer leaves in late June. Recruitment has started to replace her.	G
Raise Awareness						
Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Mendip Rocks!	Work with SESC & Mendip Society to organise a	TH/ JC			Programme to be announced soon for this year's events in October – working on the final schedule and leaflet design, led by SESC.	A

	programme of events aimed at family groups and people with geological interests during Sept and Oct.					
Online e-commerce	Develop the range of products available.	JH/ JC			Darker Side of Mendip book available plus wildlife badges.	G
MHNL Website	Maintain visitor traffic to 50,000 Users & 65,000 sessions on NL website.	JC			11,237 Users since up to 10/6/25 14,059 Sessions since up to 10/6/25	A
Social media	Achieve 6500 followers on Facebook	JC			6800 followers up to 10/6/25	A
	Achieve 18,000 views on YouTube	JC			2600 views up to 10/6/25	A
	Achieve 3500 followers on Instagram	JC			3175 followers up to 10/6/25	A
Enewsletters	Distribute a minimum of 24 newsletters (12 to the public list, 12 to the Partnership list)	JC			4 sent	A
	Achieve 1900 on the newsletter database.	JC			1906 achieved	G

Talks & other opportunities	Deliver 10 talks (walks), including online events & attend relevant events.	JH, TH			Mendip Society Harptree environment/wildlife group Draycott church group Wookey Hole Environment group Wells Rotary Danish Academics Rodny Stoke Annual Meeting Chew Stoke WI	A
Annual Forum	Organise and deliver an annual forum for the public to raise awareness of the special qualities of the NL.	JH, JC			To be delivered in the autumn	A
Landscape Planning Advice						
Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Awareness	Two newsletters to planning managers (DM & policy) & planning officers. July & January	IB			To be planned	A
Regional	Liaise with other NL planners and partner organisations.	IB			RTPI regional site visit to be held on Mendip, September 3 2025	A
Involve the Community						
Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)

Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership	Restructure the Partnership to make it a body that has greater influence on the future of the National Landscape.	JH			Paper presented to June Partnership meeting	A
NL Storage	Find alternative facility for tool storage.	JH			No progress	R
Partnership	Administer 4 x meetings per year minimum.	JH	ALL		On track	A
Officer Support Group	Administer 2 x meetings per year minimum	JH	ALL		See paper presented to Partnership at June meeting	A
Regional representation	Actively participate in regional and Somerset wide environmental partnerships that will benefit the Mendip Hills and protected landscapes	ALL	ALL		Somerset National Landscape staff day on 9/5 Attendance and support of: Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy Somerset Local Community Network x 2 Chew Valley Reconnected Partnership Churchill Area Woodland Group Cheddar Vision Group	G
National representation	Attend NLA meetings, contribute to responses, forums and communications	ALL	ALL		Ongoing. Lead Officer meetings. Big Chalk Board	G