

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at Cheddar Catholic Community Hall, 10am 20th March 2025

Present:

Partnership Committee

Andy Wear (Chair)	NFU
Jim Hardcastle	National Landscape Manager
David Julian	CPRE
Simon Clarke	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Cllr Roger Dollins	Somerset Parish Councils Representative
Jo Lewis	Natural England
Esther Coffin-Smith	North Somerset Council Officer
Rachel Thompson MBE	The Trails Trust
Fern Elias-Stagg	Avon Wildlife Trust
Cllr Theo Butt Phillip	Somerset County Councillor
Cllr Paul Crossley	Bath & North-East Somerset Councillor
Lauren Holt	National Trust
Tina Bath	Mendip Society

Other attendees

Joanna Cheung	Support and Communications Officer
Tim Haselden	Project Development Officer
Kelly Davies	Sustainable Recreation Officer
Jemima Western	Farm Engagement Officer
Mick Fletcher	MHNL Volunteer
Justin Milward	Candidate
David Turner	Candidate
Chris Howard	Candidate
Tanys Kolizeras	Observer

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

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. JC to arrange AW to sign	JC
4	Cllr Mike Adams	JH spoke in memory of Cllr Mike Adams who served for several years on the Partnership.	
5	Partner Updates	TB – - Mendip Society have installed new doors at St Hugh's Church - Provided uniform for MHNL Young Rangers - Revamped their walks and talk programme SC – presented the update in the Paper LH – National Trust has entered a new ten-year strategy, more ambitious than before. - Winter conservation has been underway but hampered by storms - No-fence collar project - Thanks to NSC for new equipment (flail mower) - Top of the Gorge festival in planning stages - 360 virtual tours ready for TOTG - James McWilliam has left NT for WWT TBP - Early stages of local plan - New staffing structure in place, will bring more stability JH – will there be a resolution to the funding issue for MHNL? TBP – Will take that away and come back to you FES – Busy winter - Nature recovery project "Wilder Mendip" at Hellenge Hill	

		- Preparing a response to North Somerset Local Plan as some of the sites are field adjacent to nature reserves JH – Ian Bowen can offer planning support FES – New interpretation panels at Hutton Hill and Hellenge Hill - Involved in Arty Adders with NT - Thanks to FiPL for funding grazing projects at Hutton Hill - Volunteer task in Woolborough PC – Housing targets have been a big challenge - Mainly it will be met by building in the Bristol/Bath corridor - Banned use of glyphosate except in limited circumstances - Ash dieback is taking almost of our ash trees JL – nothing to add to Paper DJ – In addition to submission in the Paper - Stargazing festival underway - Awaiting new local plan - 25 acres sold off Bath Road (Wells) which we are watching with interest RT – busy lobbying - Meeting with Baroness Hayman (House of Lords) - Thanks to FiPL for new gates - Hazel Manor is now open for the first time in 25 years, also thanks to FiPL ESC – Local plan consultation ends tomorrow - Citizen science project re bat protection launching in May - Pursuing delivery for BNG and bat mitigation units, partnered with Belmont Estate - New SPD in the next few weeks - Exciting announcement in the next few days, creating 12 new jobs. JH – we would all love to help find locations for bat detectors	
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		JH – please to see so many mentions of FiPL, it has been a great success and Defra have agreed to extend for one more year (2025-26)	
6	Election of Chair and Vice Chair	AW – Lived on Mendip all my life and it has been a great pleasure to serve as Chair on the Partnership - Learned so much over the last years - Covid opened people's eyes to what Mendip has to offer - Change to National Landscape has allowed more recognition - Hopes to still be involved and he will be staying on as Chair of the FiPL LAP Panel JH – Andy will continue to chair the meeting for continuity - Thank you Andy for being a fantastic Chair JH – asks candidates to leave the room JH – Do either of our councillors want to go for the role as Chair TBP & PC - No JH proposes all candidates RD seconds all candidates JH – reminds Partners what we are trying to achieve and what needs to be delivered - JH does not get a vote JH – AW will have no vote, but a casting vote in the event of a tie - One vote per member organisation David Turner elected as Chair JH - Vice Chair according to ToR this role must go to a Councillor PC – proposes TBP RT – proposes change to ToR to remove the restriction re one of the positions being from a funding partner. PC – need advance notice of a change like that RD – I think TBP is a good candidate	

		RT – vote on leaving it vacant JL – can we have two Vice Chairs? RD – It would need to be an agenda item RT – I would like to see input from a farmer, 80% of Mendip is farmed RD – we need to councils on board because their work and their money is vital RT – agree councils are important TB – Partners are still on the Partnership they don't have to be VC DJ – is it possible to appoint interim VC? - Agrees with all points JH – to confirm, we have TBP as interim VC with a review of ToR including election of two Vice Chairs PC – very uneasy at the arbitrary change of rules proposed. It needs to be proposed and discussed. AW – are you happy to take the role on this basis TBP - Yes JH acknowledges the ToR are old AW – TBP elected with due process and intention to review ToR RD – Could we have the next meeting in person if we are reviewing ToR and also possible electing? ESC – apologises but she has to leave for another meeting RD – proposes TBP TB – seconded TBP – I won't stand in the way of any changes - I have chaired the committee that wrote the constitution for the new council, so I have good understanding of this type of documentation	
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		- All formally welcome DT and TBP.	
7	MHNL Management Plan	JH – we passed the screening for HRA and SEA - The consultant flagged that there might be conflict between promotion of visitors and protection of habitats but we reassured them there would be no significant effect - As a National Landscape, we manage recreation rather than absorb it, we differ from National Parks in this point - we are approaching formal consultation stage	
8	MHNL Activity Plan	JH – we can go into this in more detail next time unless anyone has any specific questions	
9	MHNL Team Update	MHNL presentation JH – Volunteering has increased significantly and needs a development plan - IB has had a few recent successes with planning enforcement - We will arrange a meeting to go over the proposal for the Burrington Inn site. We are hoping for a design review panel. Biggest concerns are potential impacts on ecology and visitor pressure. TH – presents update for works at Deer Leap, Mendip Nature Connections, Nature Calling and Generation Green - An update on the process for Landscape Connections bid KD – Big Visitor Count is coming up soon - Summarises visitor data JH – Update on the Mendip Hills Fund - Potential of new link with National Lottery JW – Summarises achievements of FiPL programme this year - We have been focussing on connectivity sites - Also helps us identify where we need to approach new landowners - SFI schemes have been put on hold	

		JH – the map of funded FiPL projects highlights the gaps are some of the big estates, who have countryside stewardship so they might be doing other work	
10	AOB	Meeting to be in person, location tbc	
11	Date of next meeting	Thursday 19 th June. JC to send invites out	JC

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	10am 20 th March 2025	
Title:	Agenda	
Presented by:	NA	
Cheddar Catholic Community Hall, Tweentown. BS27 3HU		

1. Introductions and Apologies
2. Declaration of Interest
3. Notes of Previous Meeting. To be approved
4. Cllr Mike Adams (1941-2025)
5. Partner updates.
6. Election of Chair and Vice-chair. Paper A
7. MHNL Management Plan Update. Verbal update
8. MHNL Team Activity Plan for 2025-2026, includes budget headlines. Paper B
9. Project update and review, MHNL Team. Verbal presentation
10. AOB
11. Date of 2025 meetings:

19th June 7pm Online. *Focus on the preparation of the MHNL 5 Year Delivery Plan*

4th September 7pm Online

20th November 10am In-person

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	20 th March 2025	
Title:	Partner Updates	
Presented by:	Jim Hardcastle	
To be noted.		

1. Somerset Council

2. BANES

1. Local Plan

Work on Local Plan Reset is progressing. Following publication of proposed revisions to the NPPF and the standard method housing figure B&NES Cabinet agreed that the Local Plan needs to be reset because the implications are so significant. Our housing figure requirement has more than doubled.

The new Local Plan will be for the period 2024-2043 with options consultation planned for Aug/Sept 2025, draft plan consultation Apr/May 2026, and adoption summer 2027

2. Green Infrastructure Framework 2025-2035

Since stakeholder workshops were held in Sept 2023 and July 2024, the GI Framework for B&NES, replacing the 2013 B&NES GI Strategy, will comprise 5 components including a summary providing context for the approach followed by: GI Investment and Delivery Plan, Mapping tools, revised GI Policy in the new Local Plan, and GI Standards.

We expect to publish the Summary document and Delivery Plan early summer 2025. This will be followed by the first phase mapping tool, GI Standards, and draft GI policy as part of the Local Plan Options Report consultation in Summer 2025.

3. Ongoing GI projects

No feedback received.

3. NSC

4. Natural England

- The management framework for the new Mendip National Nature Reserve is now almost complete. The Framework is required by NE to support the delivery of all NNRs and will set the standards for management of the entire Mendip NNR going forward. The crucial biodiversity section has just been completed, along with the Climate Vulnerability assessment. Once the framework is signed off the partnership will work together to identify next steps. Work is also underway on creating a visual identity for the NNR. This will enable sites to have more of an identity on the ground.
- At Ebbor Gorge and Rodney stoke we've been doing work to begin restoring some lost grassland areas alongside standard winter management works.

- Our Mendip Countryside Stewardship and Protected Sites officer Hannah Shell has now left NE but we have other members team are lined up to cover her work; including working with the National Trust and Longleat on their CS options for Cheddar Gorge.
- Our Grassland and grazing specialists will be visiting Mendip soon to help advise on SSSI management of some key grassland sites, e.g. Crook Peak and our field unit will be undertaking condition monitoring of the SSSI grassland at Rodney Stoke.
- We are funding a project looking at the relative importance of populations of nationally rare vascular plants on Mendip.

5. National Trust

6. SWT

7. AWT

8. Parish Council Representatives

9. Mendip Society

10. CPRE

Events & Competitions:

We are about to launch our new 2025 photo competition with the theme of "Somerset: life in the countryside". Details will be on our website www.cpresomerset.org.uk

We ran a successful Stargazing event in Middlezoy in February with Somerset Levels Stargazers. Great attendance and a clear night. One of the speakers was Josh Dury, Mendip-based astrophotographer.

Litter Project:

Our litter project is still growing – we have now given out over 350 kits to volunteers around the county.

Fingerposts:

We continue to offer small grants to Parish & Town Councils to help restore their traditional fingerpost road signs. Latest ones on our website [here](#)

Planning

We are involved in planning cases across the whole county, but cases near to the Mendip Hills are highlighted below:

Replacement wind turbine, Wanstrow. This will be 30m taller than the Statue of Liberty and is to be located inappropriately within a small-scale landscape of medieval field patterns and listed buildings. Awaiting decision.

Fortescue Fields, Norton St Philip. The developers of the original housing scheme are trying to extend the scheme across the village landscape. We attended a 3-day appeal hearing and spoke as an Interested Party. We have worked closely with the Parish Council. Happily, both appeals were dismissed by the Inspector.

Battery Energy Storage Scheme (BESS) at Styles Close, Frome: we spoke out against this plan which was very close to houses and did not meet Fire Safety standards. Refused.

74 houses at Packsaddle Fields, Frome – refused.

Relocation of sawmill, Dinder (nr Wells) – awaiting decision

11. The Trails Trust

The Trails Trust (TTT) currently represents multi-user access whether on foot, by horse, by bicycle or disabled conveyance to the Mendip Hills NL partnership.

ELM 159 Test

Landscape Recovery Test ELM 159A

Now that the second ELMs Mendip test (159A) 'Incentivising green infrastructure public access and biodiversity creation in land management', run in the Landscape Recovery programme, has finished, TTT is lobbying government to be proactive about the results. Following a successful visit to the Test by the Duchess of Edinburg in 2024, TTT has been offered a visit this year by a government minister from DEFRA. The final ELMs report is available on the TTT website <https://www.thetrailstrust.org.uk/>

DEFRA is keen to promote engagement to nature for everyone, therefore accessible, safe and connected green infrastructure networks of rights of way and other paths are key but creation and improvement is dependent on landowner willingness and funding.

Access projects

In Mendip the strategic multiuser network is being created, improved and enhanced thanks to some very co-operative landowners and managers and FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscape) funding. Three access projects that TTT have facilitated or helped with have been completed or are nearing completion. These include some exciting projects and grateful thanks to the landowners / managers and FiPL funding:



- Waldegrave Farms, replacement of dilapidated gates and stiles and installation of new signage on access points to North Hill (Chewton Mendip parish picture above left).
- Small Brothers Warren Farm replacement of dilapidated gates and stiles and installation of new signage on access points to Road Field and the minery (Charterhouse, Priddy Parish picture above right).
- All the new gates are mobility and disability friendly allowing access for all. See pictures above.

- Yeo Valley Farms an exciting project to upgrade the surface and other works to link Hazel Manor with Compton Combe via a multiuser trail thus creating route T5 in the MHNL Management Plan strategic network plan. This adds another 3 km of route approximately to the existing 5km multi user trail between Priddy and Nordrach and also provides a new safe circuit connecting Hazel Manor to Compton Combe, Villice Lane Byway, Ubley Drove and a return via Green Lane or Leaze Lane. Both these lanes having been improved / and re-opened thanks to Yeo Valley and FiPL.

FiPL funding is available for another year, so TTT hopes to be able to facilitate another access project during 2025.

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	10am 20 th March 2025	Paper A
Title:	Application for Chair and/or Vice-chair of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership	
Presented by:	Jim Hardcastle	
For election		

Candidate	Chair	Vice-chair
Dave Eddins	Y	N
Chris Howard	Y	Y
Justin Milward	N	Y
John Simpson	Y	Y
James Small	Y	Y
David Turner	Y	Y

Please note that one of the roles must be filled a councillor from a local authority that contributes funding to the Partnership.

The vote for the Chair's role will take place first.

Each Partnership member has one vote. For local authorities the vote sits with the councillor, if the councillor cannot attend the meeting the vote may be passed to the officer of that authority.

DAVE EDDINS

My connection to the Mendip Hills is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet)*;

My Connection to the Mendip Hills

Having lived and worked in the Mendip Hills since 1988, the unique and beautiful landscape has been a defining part of my personal and professional life. Personally, I've spent countless hours caving, climbing, cycling, walking, and exploring the hills, fostering a deep connection to the area and a passion for its preservation.

Professionally, as MD of Mendip Activity Centre, I am a custodian of 250 acres within the Mendip Hills National Landscape (MHNL). This stewardship includes actively working to protect and enhance the landscape in collaboration with the Partnership's objectives. For example, we host a nature recovery ranger 1.5 days a week, contributing directly to biodiversity restoration and habitat enhancement.

Through our charity, Mendip Access Adventure Foundation (MAAF), we promote inclusive outdoor experiences, ensuring the Mendip Hills are accessible to all while safeguarding their natural beauty. This work reflects the critical balance between accessibility and conservation.

Additionally, I sit on DEFRA's Local Assessment Panel for the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme, enabling me to engage with and support local farmers and landowners. This role deepens my understanding of the interdependent relationships between conservation, agriculture, and community needs within the Mendips.

As a Scout leader with 1st Winscombe Scouts, I have introduced many young people to the wonders of the Mendip Hills, encouraging future custodians of this special area.

The Mendips have shaped my life and career, inspiring me to contribute to their protection and enhancement. They represent not just a landscape but a legacy of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and opportunity. My aim is to ensure their future as a thriving, sustainable environment for generations to come.

My previous relevant experience as a chair-person or running committees is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet)*;

My Previous Relevant Experience as a Chairperson or Running Committees

I bring nearly 20 years of governance and leadership experience, currently chairing five limited companies and serving as Vice Chair of Activities Industry Mutual (AIM), where I work with a diverse membership from the outdoor activity sector. I have been a Director of AIM since 2019 and am preparing for the transition to Chair in the coming years, contributing to its strategic direction and operational resilience.

As MD of Mendip Activity Centre, I lead a senior leadership team with diverse perspectives, requiring inclusive leadership, clear communication, and conflict

resolution skills to align goals and drive progress. These experiences have prepared me to chair meetings effectively, ensuring all voices are heard while maintaining focus on strategic outcomes.

Beyond internal governance, I have represented my organisations in public forums, media engagements, and government settings. Notably, I hosted Tamara Finkelstein, Permanent Secretary for DEFRA, to showcase how private businesses and national landscapes can collaborate to achieve shared goals. This has given me experience balancing competing interests and fostering productive relationships between stakeholders.

Over the years, I've cultivated strong relationships across the Mendip Hills with landowners, local councils, and other stakeholders. My work on DEFRA's Local Assessment Panel for the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme has further deepened my understanding of how to mediate complex issues while advancing shared objectives.

Whether leading a board, mediating stakeholder discussions, or promoting initiatives at industry events, I bring an action-oriented and collaborative approach to leadership. I am confident that these skills will enable me to unify the diverse stakeholders of the Partnership and advance its mission to protect and enhance the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

My vision for the Mendip Hills National Landscape is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet)*;

My Vision for the Mendip Hills National Landscape

The Mendip Hills are at a pivotal moment, facing both opportunities and challenges. My vision is to help curate and foster a resilient, thriving landscape where conservation, recreation, and sustainable development work in harmony.

The Partnership must prioritise biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation. By fostering stronger ecological networks, protecting species, and promoting sustainable farming practices, we can build a landscape that is both rich in nature and resilient to environmental pressures. Initiatives like the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) scheme demonstrate the power of collaboration with landowners to achieve lasting benefits for people and wildlife.

Equally important is promoting responsible and inclusive recreation. The Mendip Hills should be a place where people from all backgrounds can connect with nature. Expanding programs to increase accessibility while educating visitors on responsible use will protect its fragile ecosystems and ensure long-term sustainability.

As Chair, I would focus on strengthening partnerships and advocacy to secure the future of the Mendip Hills. Strengthening relationships with local authorities, conservation organisations, and businesses will allow us to align efforts and maximize impact. Hosting high-profile visitors, such as DEFRA's Permanent Secretary, has

highlighted the importance of showcasing the area's potential to national decision-makers. Advocacy at regional and national levels will be essential to securing funding and support for the Partnership's goals.

The Mendip Hills National Landscape is a place of beauty, inspiration, and opportunity. By uniting conservation with community engagement and sustainable development, we can ensure it remains protected and enhanced for generations to come. Strong and collaborative leadership is essential in achieving this vision.

CHRIS HOWARD

My connection to the Mendip Hills is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet);*

I moved to Winscombe and the edge of the Mendip Hills in 2016 having lived in the Bristol area since 2004. It was my desire to be out of the city and amongst some real countryside that drove this move, and having spent a lot of time exploring around Bristol over the years, it was the Mendip Hills and surrounding areas that really spoke to my wife and me.

We both love the countryside and the natural world, and wanted to live somewhere that connected us to the land much more deeply than the city. In all honesty we found the Mendip Hills slightly tricky to know to begin with, but there was some sense of connection and energy from the place, and I also have family connections to the area as well; my maternal grandparents honeymooned here and my paternal grandparents ran the village shop in Easton (sadly no longer there) for some ten years before they retired.

I have since come to understand that finding these connections and coincidences is part of Mendip's unique magic; gradually the Hills and surroundings started to get under your skin.

This was increasingly true for us as we got to know the area more intimately through living in Winscombe. We spent more and more time walking the landscape, observing the wildlife and simply being amongst the hills and valleys (and the plateau). And recent projects have also allowed me to delve much more deeply into the history, geology and mythology of the area.

It turns out that if you scratch the surface of the Mendip Hills, then many, many layers will be revealed... and so although I have no claim to be an expert or to have generations of heritage to fall back on, the area intrigues me, and always leaves me wanting to find out more.

My previous relevant experience as a chair-person or running committees is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet);*

Although I don't have a huge amount of direct experience running committees or as a chair-person in this sense, much of what I do as a producer and executive of wildlife TV programmes is of direct relevance to the role.

I chair meetings on a daily basis - ranging from regular staff check-ins with small teams of just a few people, to briefing, managing and attempting to inspire crews of up to 120 on live broadcasts. These can be hugely technical meetings (for example running safety briefings with helicopter crews, drone pilots, boat operators and the Mexican Navy) to creative sessions with directors, script writers and fundraisers.

I also have to chair sessions with disparate groups across huge organisations in order to find compromises between competing agendas. For example, for Wild Isles we had to get the

BBC commissioning team to agree to the specific content three different charities (RSPB, National Trust and WWF) could make for their associated campaigns alongside the TV show. And on Springwatch I convened regular check-ins with up to 20 different charity and NGO partners, bringing them all together to share plans, thoughts and ideas ahead of their realisation.

Another large part of my role is to deliver projects to very specific and detailed briefs, and making sure that it is done to pre-agreed schedules and budgets. It is something I do both in my day-to-day work; where I often oversee annual budgets in the millions every year, guaranteeing delivery to tight deadlines; and I am also brought in as an independent Executive Producer to help deliver projects too - coming in at key stages of the process to provide advice and steer productions towards a better final product.

My vision for the Mendip Hills National Landscape is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet);*

My experience is that the Mendip Hills National Landscape is not the easiest place to get to know - and I would like to see that change. Once you get under the surface this Landscape has many stories to tell; from unique characters to hidden depths; astonishing natural beauty to the long history of how it has been shaped by man.

I believe that by telling these stories in an open and inclusive manner, and by inviting both locals and visitors to share in those stories, the Mendip Hills National Landscape can continue to thrive as a welcoming and open place for everyone.

The work of the Partnership is key to this - it can make decisions that can revive, revitalise and reinvigorate the area. I believe there are a few key areas to focus on:

- Continue the work on nature recovery.. We should restore as much land to the wild as we can (in harmony with other users), and spearhead the return of native species
- Continue to work closely with local farmers and landowners as custodians of the land - ensuring the health and sustainability of everything we do
- Continue working with local businesses and clubs to make sure that those that live, work and play in the Hills are supported
- Re-focus our efforts around climate change - always looking to reduce our own emissions, and helping others to do the same.
- Ensure that everything we do is accessible to a wide and diverse audience -we need to make sure the Hills are open to everyone.
- We also need to slim down and speed up. Recent global events have shown that the old, slow ways of working are under threat. We should always seek to find consensus as quickly as we can and act upon decisions swiftly and decisively.

JOHN SIMPSON

My connection to the Mendip Hills (MH) is varied and longstanding since I first visited MH as a geography student in 1972. In my **professional career**, I worked (in the late 1970s) for Wessex Water as a water resource planner with responsibility for mapping the MH's water related assets. In the late 1990s, as North Somerset's director of education, I became familiar with all local schools and environmental and outdoor education provision. At the same time, as the first independent chair of the West of England Learning and Skills Council, I had oversight of all post 16 education and training across the MH area.

I have undertaken a wide range of **voluntary roles** on the MH. For 20 years I have co-ordinated a well-being walking group which now has 35 members. We have walked most of the MH's PROWs and visited all MH pubs! I served as Churchill area tree warden for several years and contributed to the Tree Council's national tree survey. I have undertaken butterfly transects. Two years ago I became a MH National Landscape (NL) volunteer ranger, a role I have sought to make a distinctive contribution to. For example, I co-ordinate the Churchill Area Woodlands Group. It brings together woodland owners, the MHNL team, and organisations such as the National Trust, Woodland Trust and Avon Wildlife Trust. We aim to build a stronger shared knowledge of the challenges facing effective woodland management.

Twenty years ago I moved to the **MHNL where I live** on the slopes of Dolebury Warren. I have direct experience of the pressures on the local landscape from human activity to natural phenomena such as ash die-back. I am a member of the Mendip Society and help care for a flock of sheep on MH.

I understand that Mendip is a special place.

My previous relevant experience as a chairperson is considerable, especially as an independent chairperson of large multi-agency partnerships.

In 1999 I was appointed by the Secretary of State to be the inaugural independent chairperson of the West of England Learning and Skills Council with overall responsibility for all post 16 education and training provision, including the allocation of revenue and capital resources to all providers. The role involved interpreting national policy in the local context, agreeing a strategy and management plan and developing sound relationships with the many interest groups.

In 2015 (to 2023) I was appointed the independent chairperson of the Lottery funded Bristol Golden Key Partnership Board which focused on improving services for the area's most disadvantaged adults. In this setting, the partners were senior leaders from local authorities, NHS, Police, Government, and a range of voluntary sector providers. My role was subject to external evaluation by University of the West of England who concluded that the way I built trust and partnership capacity and capability had been critical to success.

For the last 10 years I have been the independent chairperson of the North Somerset Schools Forum, a statutory body charged with distributing the incoming Government provided resources for education across the provider community in a way that best meets the needs of all children and young people. The Forum is made up of elected councillors and senior education leaders. Its effectiveness is monitored by Government.

I have also served as the chairperson of various bodies in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

I understand the role of chairperson including how to: build partnership capacity and capability; work with a management team; build relationship capital and act as an ambassador; manage effective meetings; and secure commitment from board members. I also understand the commitment the role requires.

My vision for the MHNL is to achieve national recognition for best practice in terms of partnership working whilst being locally regarded as a strong and influential body which makes a positive difference to the well-being of the local landscape, ecosystem and communities. The vision for the Partnership is set out in its Management Plan. The role of the chairperson is to mobilise the Partnership to implement the Plan and realise the vision. National recognition will assist in winning bids and attracting resources. Local regard will assist in securing commitment, understanding and active participation.

My vision is that every Partner understands the national policy framework and believes the agreed Management Plan is grounded in this whilst reflecting the local context, distinctive character and priorities of the MH. Each Partner must be able to contribute to the Plan's formation, implementation and review and be sure that the objectives and resources of their organisations are aligned with those of the Plan. Every Partner should be proud of their contribution.

Partnership working is challenging. The role of chairperson is to build the capacity and competence of the Partnership through relationship building and support and challenge to individual Partners and the NL management team. The implementation of the Management Plan should drive the Partnership's work and the review of progress should be the central feature of Partnership meetings. This will enable successes to be celebrated, obstacles to be identified and associated solutions discussed. The Partnership must ensure that good communication is in place with the wider stakeholder community to maximise understanding of, and support for, their work.

There is a national consensus on the importance of partnership working and an emerging evidence base on the features of best practice. Our work on MH must be informed by, and contribute to, this nationally important work.

JAMES SMALL

My connection to the Mendip Hills is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet);*

I'm the third generation of my family to work the land here at Warren Farm having moved here in 1945, although as a family, we trace ourselves back in the area to the 1600's. We're a livestock farm, raising native beef and sheep animals, grazing, not only our own land, but also land for Somerset Wildlife Trust, National Trust and Longleat Estates among others. Our animals are ideally suited to grazing the Nature reserves around the Greater Cheddar Gorge area throughout the year, helping these landlords to meet the conditions of their Environmental or Stewardship agreements. We ourselves have been participants in Environmental schemes for over three decades, working to help meet the overall objectives of the National Landscape. We also run a small tourism diversification on the farm. Glamping (Glamorous/camping) has become quite popular as a low impact diversification on many farms across the country, we ourselves have been operating now for 14 years. We welcome guests between the months of April to early October, encouraging them to enjoy all the local area has to offer. Cheddar Gorge is by far the main attraction, with parents bringing their children to visit the world-famous Gorge (as their parents did them!) This also provides us with the opportunity show our guests what we do on the farm, exploring the how's and the why's. We also explain how the Mendips were formed and some of the recent history, well, parts of the last 4500 years. I have lived and worked here on the Mendips for nearly 50 years as part of a 450-year-old story, to say I have a connection doesn't seem adequate, rather I am connected to the landscape, through time, heritage and life.

My previous relevant experience as a chair-person or running committees is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet);*

Farmer representative on the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership from 2000 until 2018. Member of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Farmers Working Group.
Member of Mendip Hills AONB futures Working Group.
Served 4 years on AONB sustainable development fund including position of vice chair.

Parish Councillor (Priddy) from May 2002 until May 2011; attaining role of Vice-Chair for 3 years and Chair for 1 year.

Parish Council representative on Village Hall committee, Chair from 2004 until 2011.

Served 3 years (2004, 2005 and 2006) as Chair of Priddy Sheep Fair. This involved the organisation of a one-day event that really lasts for 3 days, working closely with outside bodies including the police to achieve successful outcomes for a safe day for the 5000+ visitors.

2012 Completed the Worship Company of Farmers Rural Leadership Course in conjunction with Dutchy College.

2016 – British Farming Awards, Beef Innovator of the Year.

2019 – Present - Appointed as a member of the Southwest Regional Advisory Board for the
NFU Mutual.

2019-2022 Chairman of Avon and Somerset Constabulary Rural Policing Forum.

2020 – Runner up, Farmers Weekly Mixed Farmer Category.

2022 – present – Farmer representative on the Mendip Hills protected Landscape FiPL assessment panel.

2022 – Became an Associate of the Council of Royal Agricultural Shows (ARAgS)

National Farmers Union.

2006-2010 North Somerset Branch Chairman.

2009-2011 – Somerset County Vice Chairman.

2012-2014 - Somerset County Chairman.

2012-to date, Regional Livestock representative for Somerset.

2014-2018 – Appointee to National Livestock Board.

2015-2018-Representative on bTB policy forum.

2015-2019 – Somerset County Delegate.

2016-2019 – Southwest England Regional Board Chairman.

2017-2019-Served on NFU Governance Board.

2018-2021 - Task and Finish Group for design of NELMs.

2018- stood for election for Vice President of NFU

2024 – 2026 – Appointee to NFU National Livestock Board

2024 – Present – Chair North Somerset Branch NFU

My vision for the Mendip Hills National Landscape is *(max 300 words, continue on a separate sheet);*

The Mendip Hills isn't just the visual landscape, it's formed by many factors, especially the people who live, work and visit within it. It cannot be held in a moment in time, but rather it must evolve to meet the demands of the present, whilst retaining the essence of what makes it such a special place.

To this end, I'd like to explore how the Mendip Hill National Landscape (MHNL) can work with organisations and businesses within the area to add value and develop, not only financially, but culturally and spiritually. There are many different demands being placed on the landscape by many different sources, and inevitably it'll be impossible to please everyone, but by keeping the objectives of the MHNL, namely Climate, People, Place and Nature at the core of what we do, I hope that we can make a difference.

I would like to see the partnership working to best effect (even if this means reforming in some sense) not only in developing a management plan, but seeking that partners work to deliver the objectives of the plan.

I like a meeting to be well run, with adequate advance preparation and time allotted throughout the agenda to allow good discussion but not going in circles, its important that progress is made.

Having received extensive media training in radio, TV, print and social media, I'm happy to help represent the MHPL where needed and appropriate.

I thank you for your consideration.

DAVID TURNER

My connection with the Mendip Hills is both personal and professional.

I have lived in Wells since 2003 in a property which delineates the boundary between the City and the National Landscape.

As a multi-user, (rambler, dog-walker and mountain biker) the Mendips has been a source of inspiration and well-being. It is where we raised a family and whilst I think I know many parts of it there are lots I want to learn more about.

Between 2003 and 2016, as Director of Development and Environment at North Somerset, I oversaw the authority's legal duty to have regard for the National Landscape and sought to further the Partnerships activities through funding and officer support.

With responsibility for place shaping, (including planning and development, nature conservation, countryside management, highways and transport, heritage, tourism and leisure) I have the benefit of both technical and political knowledge of the issues facing The Mendip Hills.

I oversaw the effective management of development through plan preparation and the operation of countryside and natural environment services to positively support the Partnership. Actions impacting positively on The Mendips included revised and improved working relationships with Parish and Town Councils, the roll out of rural digital connectivity, establishing a Visitor Forum and delivering The Strawberry Line from Axbridge to Yatton.

As the lead technical officer for the creation of The West of England Partnership and subsequent development of The West of England Combined Authority along with lead role for joint working with Somerset I understand and retain connectivity with many of the stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally who influence the National Landscape.

Since 2016 I have led an environmental and development consultancy. It has ensured that my professional knowledge and connectivity with key agencies, regional commerce, rural business and visitor economy in the Mendips and wider area remains up to date.

My previous relevant experience as a chairperson or running committees is based on

a career in Local Government spanning 30+ years (initially in town and country planning, expanding into major regeneration and infrastructure projects, and advancing into strategic leadership). It is grounded in effective partnership working.

At Wycombe District Council I established the High Wycombe Town Centre Forum and Castlefield Housing Estate Regeneration Programme and chaired the officer support group for the Chilterns AONB.

Whilst Head of Spatial Planning at Buckinghamshire County Council I chaired the successful Black Park Country Park HLF Partnership. Working closely with users, national funding bodies and agencies, this was instrumental in making the Parks Service self-financing in three years.

I helped to redefine business connectivity by establishing the Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership, acting as it's Company Secretary.

At North Somerset I was brought in to create a new Directorate and led on:

- Weston Regeneration Programme alongside Homes England, Highways Agency, Network Rail, Business West, North Somerset Enterprise Agency and the Environment Agency.
- North Somerset Parish and Town Council Forum and Visitor Economy Forum
- Senior Management Development including chairing a programme to motivate, inform and develop leadership skills.

On behalf of the West of England I led on housing delivery and chaired the Joint Spatial Planning Group comprising of officers from the four constituent authorities, commercial and statutory bodies.

In my personal life I chaired a Junior Football Club with 350 players for 3 years - introducing new safeguarding and training regimes. I currently chair a Community Interest Company which utilises fashion and design to tackle loneliness and promote well-being in Somerset.

My style is consensual and inclusive. It is based on the belief that the strongest partnerships are those capable of identifying and effectively drawing upon the skills and resources of **all** its constituent representatives.

My vision for the Mendip Hills National Landscape is for it to continue to be a very special landscape which is rich in biodiversity, accessible and inclusive to both rural and urban communities, with sustainable funding and focused ambition.

Nature

The Mendip National Nature Reserve delivers on its promise of ecological resilience and coherence; an exemplar of cross organisational working which guides all that farm

and own land within and adjacent; and delivers a step change in understanding and volunteer activity.

Climate

The potential of new farm funding structures stemming from 2023 Environment Act around natural capital, conservation, and access forms a lasting partnership with the farming community.

People

It is recognised as a centre of excellence for volunteering, supporting the growth and outreach of voluntary organisations and bodies.

It is a regional resource for training, learning and skills development that extends beyond local schools and is integrated with the flourishing higher and further educational sectors.

It is recognised by the Health Sector as an essential natural health and well-being service forming an integral part of health and active lifestyle delivery

Place

The duty to “further the purpose” of the national landscape is taken as an opportunity by the Local Authorities to deliver their wider responsibilities for well-being assisting to secure funding from Central Government.

Planning services are consistent in resisting inappropriate development and have mechanisms in place to secure funding from development.

Its economic and social benefits are understood by the business community in the City Region and Somerset (including WECA) who actively support action within it.

It consolidates its role as a cultural resource with a unique sense of identity and belonging which cannot be replicated.

It is nationally recognised for the strength of its partnership working and engagement and commands high levels of public understanding and support.

For the role of Vice-Chair only

JUSTIN MILWARD

My connection to the Mendip Hills has existed all my life. I was born and mostly brought up in North Somerset, and I now live in Butcombe, just 300 metres from the National Landscape boundary.

I enjoy the Mendips throughout all seasons for everything it has to offer but my particular interests are in discovering new footpath routes and landscape/cultural history. I am currently pursuing a personal project researching Butcombe and the surrounding area during the English Civil War, and have been surprised to discover that there were a number of armed clashes on Mendip.

Before retiring in 2022, I was employed by the Woodland Trust for 25 years as a land agent and local government policy officer covering the South West and West Midlands. In particular, the focus of the policy role was engaging with local authorities to promote the wide benefits of native trees and woodland. As part of this role, I also engaged with consultation on an earlier iteration of the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan during Sarah Jackson's time as Manager of the AONB unit.

This professional experience, together with my ongoing personal interest, has informed my awareness of the difficult challenges facing the Mendips - and the wider countryside - in terms of biodiversity and landscape threat, agricultural land management issues, visitor engagement and climate change mitigation.

I have also attended one Partnership Volunteer session with Andy Chamberlain - assembling bat boxes at Ubley Warren Farm.

My previous relevant experience as a chair-person or running committees is -

- (a) Chairing the South West Regional Woodland & Forestry Network. This organisation was a public/private partnership, supported by the Forestry Commission, tasked with drawing up a Regional Woodland & Forestry Strategy, followed by an Action Plan. Following on from this, I was invited to be a member of the South West Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee (FWAC), hosted by the Forestry Commission.
- (b) I have been a Councillor for Butcombe Parish Council for over 20 years, and am currently Vice-Chair. The Parish Council's remit covers local road and drainage issues, planning matters and, increasingly, seeking solutions to the ongoing maintenance of village-level services in the face of worsening local authority budget constraints.

My vision for the Mendip Hills National Landscape is along the lines of the current Management Plan and its 2025 review, as informed particularly by the Nature Recovery Plan of August 2023, in the light of a rapidly changing post-Brexit rural environment. It is difficult

to disagree with the Management Plan's wider aspirations of enhancing natural beauty as a key element of our collective green future !

A big issue will be negotiating a sustainable balance between the ongoing protection and enhancement of landscape/biodiversity, and the increasing challenges for agricultural land management at a time of reduced grant aid together with wider financial constraints. For instance, the beneficial aim of targeted rewilding, and its perceived implications for both food production and landscape appearance, requires sensitive communication.

There are of course potential new income-generating opportunities emerging to support beneficial management of the Mendip Hills, such as Biodiversity Net Gain and Carbon Offsetting, and these often complex schemes need to be fully understood by land managers and local communities. The Mendip Hills National Landscape organisation is ideally placed to continue to help in take-up of these schemes to deliver Management Plan targets.

Another challenge will be promoting the benefits and enjoyment from access to the Mendip Hills to all sectors of society, whilst achieving this sustainably in a way that does not compromise the unique nature of the landscape itself. For instance path erosion, from a combination of higher visitor usage and more intense rainfall events, continues to threaten accessibility and visual appearance.

With a big population catchment area and unique scenery, it would be marvellous to see the Mendip Hills National Landscape become an exemplar of how to successfully negotiate the often tortuous path of sustainable conservation of our irreplaceable countryside in an era of increasingly complex and competing demands.

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	20 th March 2025	Paper B
Title:	National Landscape Team Activity Plan for 2025-26	
Presented by:	Jim Hardcastle	
For discussion		

Mendip Hills National Landscape Team

INCOME

Defra Core Funding	184,662
Somerset Council	34,700
Mendip DC	8,017
Sedgemoor DC	8,001
N Somerset	3,500
B&NES	5,000
Defra Capital Uplift	?
Access for All (Defra)	?
FiPL	358,300 (265,278 for grant programme)



Mendip Hills
National
Landscape

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				
Mendip National Nature Reserve	Produce and initiate the partnership management framework for the Mendip NNR.	JH, TH				
Mendip Hills Fund	Submit a National Lottery Heritage Fund application to increase the fund.	JH/ TH				
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				

Tree planting	Support the planting of 4000 trees in line with the Nature Recovery Plan.	TH/NO				
Natural Flood Management	Produce a guide for land managers on Natural Flood Management on the Mendip Hills.	JH				

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			3-month funding from Somerset Community Learning Programme has been secured for May- July 2025.	
My Mendip Memories	Secure remaining funding and deliver the 'My Mendip Memories' photography and film project.	TH/AC				
Wells & Mendip Museum	Develop temporary exhibitions on nature	TH				

Commented [TH1]: Changed this from Moments on Mendip to the memories project (as MoM will have been completed) - is this best here or under People?

	recovery and the Special Qualities.					
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 takes place on 7-8 June 2025.	
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				
Visitor data collection and analysis	Deliver and analyse visitor counter data and The Big Visitor Count and develop a pilot visitor survey.	KD				

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/T H				
Management Plan	Review the management plan for adoption by local authorities in March 2025.	JH/I B				

Nature Calling	Deliver the final year of the 'Nature Calling' programme for the National Art in the Landscape Mendip & Weston Hub	TH				
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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				

The Mendip Way	Improve the infrastructure of the route and signage. Develop the Walkers are Welcome groups.	TH / KD				
Farming in Protected Landscapes	Promote the benefits of the programme, support the allocation of project funds and administer the Local Assessment Panel.	JH				
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 programme of events aimed at family groups and people with geological interests during Sept and Oct.	TH/ JC				
Online e-commerce	Develop the range of products available.	JH/ JC				
MHNL Website	Maintain visitor traffic to 50,000 Users & 65,000 sessions on NL website.	JC				

Social media	Achieve 6500 likes on Facebook	JC				
	Achieve 18,000 views on YouTube	JC				
	Achieve 3500 followers on Instagram	JC				
Enewsletters	Distribute a minimum of 24 enewsletters (12 to the public list, 12 to the Partnership list)	JC				
	Achieve 1900 on the enewsletter database.	JC				
Talks & other opportunities	Deliver 10 talks (walks), including online events & attend relevant events.	JH, TH				
Annual Forum	Organise and deliver an annual forum for the public to raise awareness of the special qualities of the NL.	JH, JC				
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				

Regional	Liaise with other NL planners and partner organisations.	IB				
Involve the Community						
Work Area	Action	Lead	MGT Plan Obj	Delivery Plan ref.	Progress report	RAG (Red, Amber, Green)
Volunteer Rangers	Develop and implement a plan for achieving more volunteer input.	JH/ AC				
	Plan and deliver the rota of site visits, meetings and social gatherings.	AC				
	Distribute a monthly volunteer newsletter.	AC				
	Train 10 volunteers via Dry Stone Walling Association (DSWA).	AC				
	Restore 300m drystone wall via weekly practical tasks.	AC				
Nature Recovery Task Volunteers	Maintain a weekly programme of tasks focussed on delivering the Nature Recovery Plan.	AC, NO				
Young Rangers	Programme and deliver their activities aimed at creating environmental	ALL				

	decision makers of the future.					
Mendip Hills Fund	Achieve donations of >£20000	JH				
	Administer the panel to award the grants.	JH				
Partnership, Management, Regional & National Work						
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				
NL Storage	Find alternative facility for tool storage.	JH				
Partnership	Administer 4 x meetings per year minimum.	JH	ALL			
Officer Support Group	Administer 2 x meetings per year minimum	JH	ALL			
Regional representation	Actively participate in regional and Somerset wide environmental partnerships that will benefit the Mendip	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	

	Hills and protected landscapes					
National representation	Attend NLA meetings, contribute to responses, forums and communications	ALL	ALL		Ongoing. Lead Officer meetings. Big Chalk Board	

Management Plan Review – Objectives/Policies