

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at Compton Martin Village Hall, 10am, 21st November 2024

Present:

Partnership Committee

Andy Wear (Chair)	NFU
Jim Hardcastle	National Landscape Manager
David Julian	CPRE
Cllr Mike Adams	North Somerset Parish Councils Representative
Simon Clarke	Somerset Wildlife Trust
Di Sheppard	Bath & North East Somerset Council Officer
Steve Dury	Somerset Council Officer
Tina Bath	Mendip Society
Cllr Paul Crossley	Bath & North-East Somerset Councillor
Cllr Roger Dollins	Somerset Parish Councils Representative
Jo Lewis	Natural England
Esther Coffin-Smith	North Somerset Council Officer
Rachel Thompson MBE	The Trails Trust

Other attendees

Joanna Cheung	Support and Communications Officer
Tim Haselden	Project Development Officer
Lucy Stockton	Farming Engagement Officer
Kelly Davies	Sustainable Recreation Officer
Ian Bowen	Landscape Planning Officer

Apologies

Cllr Edric Hobbs (Vice Chair)	Somerset Council
Lauren Holt	National Trust
Barbra Lakin	Somerset Council Officer
Cllr Nick Cottle	Somerset Council Councillor
Cllr Annemieke Waite	North Somerset Council
Duncan Margetts	Country Land and Business Association
James Bateman	Country Land and Business Association
Cllr Theo Butt Phillip	Somerset County Councillor
Fern Elias-Stagg	Avon Wildlife Trust
James Divall	Somerset Council Officer

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	Partners' Updates	SD – Talked us through new structure of Somerset Council - MHNL will be under Climate & Natural Environment - Recruiting new Head of Service - LNRS in progress, public consultation anticipated in March JH – explained MHNL is hosted by the council, but the team is ringfenced from any job cuts - Requested SD to pursue clarity the district funding from the council SC – Contributing to Mendip NNR management framework and LNRS - BAU on reserves, progressing on Autumn and Winter work programmes, tree safety work - Dormouse project funded by FiPL - Farmer workshops underway RD – Ash tree to work on near Draycott - Thank you for all the work on these reports TB – Mendip Society has a new secretary - Working with young people in the area - New small grants scheme JH – Please bring the new secretary to the next meeting TB – will do DJ – AGM on 28/11/24 - Finger post restoration grants still available - Planning app for 78 houses near Wells was refused - Arranged meetings with two MPs so far, two further meetings arranged - CRoW act section 85 “further the purposes” gives greater powers to local authorities to resist inappropriate development DS – resetting of local plan revised NPPF increase of homes per annum from 717 to 1466. Submit plan for review in 2026.	

		MA – nothing to report RT – Finished four years of tests and trials, no response from defra - Looking for creation, improvement and maintenance - Landowners approved mechanism - Needs leadership, facilitation & funding JH – good timing for management plan ECS – NS going through organisational development - Losing some staff - “Delivering together” Working with town and parish councils to see if they will take public open spaces from council - Four BNG site and we are creating a habitat banking vehicle for those - Purchased 10 acres of open space to create NS Nature Parks - Local plan, also have an increase in the number of houses to provide - Bat spd - North Somerset Nature Parks initiatives - Working with developers to bring in more sites JH – where is the land ECS – outside Nailsea JH – an interesting model, we will follow it with interest JH – waiting for budget cuts from Defra, details expected in March	
5	Paper A – Management Plan Consultation	See appended notes Presented by Jim Hardcastle AW – reminder we need to all contribute to get this Management plan through JH – must be formally adopted by the end of March - Today we need to review the draft management plan - Meetings have been arranged with Local Authorities - There will be a further formal consultation period to consult with the relevant authorities and statutory bodies - Individual objectives are not the policy, the plan is the policy - The plan governs how LAs and other relevant authorities will interact with the National Landscape	

		- Back in Feb we sent out a questionnaire to partnership with the objectives asking for your feedback - We are looking for themes in the consultation feedback - Notable points: - Currently no participation targets for Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity, or recreation - Stage 2 was a SWOT workshop with partnership - Access came through strongly, along with engagement, transport and farming, funding, trees and hedges and volunteering - Planning is going from "due regard" to "duty of regard" to "furthering the purposes" the difference is evidence. A "relevant authority" must evidence how the decision is furthering the purposes of the NL. - Governance review, change the way the partnership works. We need more community input, more ownership & understanding of the issues we face, and the speed that we need to make decisions - Focus on delivery, like the example of NSC, and also the review of wildlife sites that Barbra Lakin has worked on. TB – Was the consultation just for the partnership? JH – Yes - Then we did a full consultation in partnership with Distinctive Communications, their review is in the papers. SD – how many responses did you get? JH – 130. For the Cheddar Gorge Consultation we had 1700, For the Deer Leap consultation we had 170. It is difficult to get people to engage with the management plan, hence involving Distinctive. It was more than the last MP consultation, so it was worth using a consultancy. RD – did they go to local businesses? JH – Yes, there was a long list of stakeholders. The survey of results is in the papers. Changes of note: - Climate Vulnerability Assessment is now included - "Holistic approach" was confusing so we have simplified language there - Learnings from the NNR management group to be shared SC – Can we include restoration? Did that come up in the feedback?	
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	JH – It didn't come up. Did you want it included. SC – I think so, yes. Nature recovery and ecological recovery are key. SD – I agree TB – Absolutely AW – FiPL has assisted farmers with projects that would not normally get funding so I agree JH – BG2 insert the word recovery to become "enhancement and recovery" - Farming objective include climate adaptation & mitigation TB – Mitigation does not actually address the problem, it is just a pay off which doesn't actually solve the problem JH – we need to do both, adapt and mitigate LS – Could we include recovery or restoration there as well? SD – And include ecology or ecological networks. AW – We have an event at Bath & West supporting regen farming, things are in place in agriculture to provide the support. This will support nature recovery indirectly. Things are in place in agriculture. SD – needs to be specified in bold that nature recovery is to be supported through land management SC – It is holistic JL – is this the only objective that talks about climate change JH – no, it runs through lots of them SD – "Furthering the Special Qualities" is that open to interpretation? JH – No the Special Qualities are clearly defined. AW – Re land use do you have a percentage of how much of the Mendip Hills NL is farmed? JH – 89% TH – 26% is for conservation AW – Farming has a big influence on the landscape	
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		JH – Reminds people this is an important document that will be used in the planning system to object to unsuitable planning applications. Also useful when we are putting in funding applications. RD – Have you consulted NFU? JH – Yes - Only 11 people from the partnership filled in the questionnaire at Stage I - We need more farmer representation - CLA are not here TB – We used to have more farmer representation SD – We have the Mendip Farming Cluster LS – Yes it was sent out to farmers JH – 14% of responders at Stage III were farmer/landowners RT - Use the themes to help people engage/draw people in - Some of the specialists in the themes are here - The people who can deliver the plan are not responding TB – Farmers have it very hard and they are not going to have time to respond to this. That is why we are here to represent them. It has to be done collectively AW – need to mention regenerative somewhere JH – As representatives you need to take it back to your groups for their feedback TB – 30 by 30 encourages us to look forward - Will help us to get funding for restoration LS – Would biodiversity or restoration work better than regenerative farming because there is not clear definition right now. A broader term might be more useful TB – Is there accountability for 30 by 30 TB – Should we add Public Transport JH – Yes there are objectives RD – Public transport has to be used by people BREAK JH – Introduces the key addition of ten targets from PLTOF	
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		- We need to have a target in the MP to cover this - Wildlife-rich habitats - 1, 568 total, 78 ha per year - It's a staggering amount LS – Presentation. Wildlife rich habitat - In order to count toward this target, it must be new habitat, not improving current wildlife rich habitat, or restoring a very degraded habitat - LS gives a few examples: Deer Leap, Hazel Manor, pond nutrients PS – there is an opportunity to use decommissioned football pitches, can we use these sites for wildlife rich LS, JH – great idea LS – Lists some of the habitat types relevant to Mendip: native Hedgerows with trees, mixed scrub, wood-pasture and parkland, traditional orchards, lowland mixed deciduous woodland, Ponds, calcareous grassland and more - To be classed as wildlife rich they need to meet the definition given by Defra and be in good condition - Summarises the achievements of FiPL in this categorisation - This has been achieved with £450,000 of funding which is coming to an end next year - Limited land supply - Lots of the land we need to use to achieve this target will be farmland so we need to engage farmers - Defra has said it is an "action-based target" and condition won't be assessed ECS – do you have to assess the condition at the start, baseline survey. Who will do that? SD – I don't think it would be a requirement JL – I don't think that would be expected RD – It doesn't have to be evidence based then? LS – No TB – For a sustainable farming initiative you have to have many surveys in place AW – from farmer's point of view there should be a baseline. Even if you do it yourself. SC – You need a baseline to give a true reflection to understand what you have achieved.	
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		LS – we need to carry on engaging with farmers as the main landowners SD – do you think this target is achievable? LS – I don't know. I think in the first few years it is possible, but I am not sure how to maintain the annual target. AW – there is some funding from Sustainable Farming Incentive that could give results for this. LS – we do need staff to give advice and this fits in with LNRS SD – what staff will you have if FiPL comes to an end LS – FiPL for 12 months after March, without capital funding, so our roles will change. SC – SWT would be keen to build on the partnership we have created with you TB – What about AWT SC – Yes hopefully. It is about partnership and knowledge sharing TB – You also need to contact farmers outside the boundary because they often rent land inside. LS – We do have contact details from farm advisors so we can collaborate RD – do we have a rep from NFU JH – AW LS – dormouse project has involved various landowners and they have created wildlife rich habitat as part of it. And habitat created for dormouse species is also good for other woodland species. Wide scale. Summarises the achievements of the projects TH – Presents the statistics the team has been working on with the NLA - Two sets of targets: 30 by 30 targets, PLTOF targets - Potential area of land managed for nature is 34% - Currently 14% (approx 3000 ha) of that managed well for nature - The 1568 ha target is for half again the amount of land we already have as managed well for nature - We can't include SSSIs	
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	SC – Can you include local wildlife sites? TH – Yes SC – They have potential to help us achieve this target SD – Some are very neglected TH – We need to be careful, because if it is already wildlife habitat, but in poor condition, then improving its condition won't count to these targets LS – It can depend, if it is classed as "significantly degraded", in that case it would count TH – We could focus on the area around the Mendip NNR, and also around the Chew Valley and north facing slopes - Grassland work focus on the south facing slopes - Woodland there is potential in the gorges, north facing slopes and Bleadon - Our previous target for land managed well for nature was 300ha, which has been increased to 1568ha. - We have been encouraged to use these ambitious targets to assist funding JH – remind everyone it is a target for the place, not for the team. Everyone on the partnership can contribute to this, like the example from PC of using decommissioned sports grounds. SD – asks how the two data sets were merged TH – it was done alongside SWT and SERC SD – Did you use SERC data or NE data TH – I will check for you TH – tree planting target was proposed to increased by 1.5%, 351ha. Defra target is 595ha, 3%. - Is 3% achievable? RD – what funding do we have JH – The team can coordinate work but your organisations need to contribute. Reminds us that we won't have FiPL. JL – What would be possible for tree planting? We don't have that much space on Mendip for trees. We need to look at what is realistic. RD – what is cost effective to achieve	
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	JH – It is a challenge TB – Farm Cluster groups will be able to access funding for these schemes JH – Other departments from Defra will be delivering on this alongside us TB – FiPL worked very well on this kind of thing AW – FiPL has kick started the thinking on this RT – Without FiPL you will lose several types of landowners eg equestrian land JH – Suggest we make that point to Defra in a letter AW – yes please RT – I can give you some quotes to use JH – What we are seeing is we do not have the land to deliver this, we will run out and the target needs reviewing TB – There needs to be an incentive - Funding should go to new landowners RD – is there support for farmers to apply AW – It changes so much so it is very tricky - Have to pay for advice RD – Can NFU provide that service? AW – FiPL have done it, FWAG have done it RD - I am hearing that the amount of paperwork is off putting for farmers JH – there is a target about peat which is not relevant for us - Woodland we suggest the 17.5% target should be lowered to 16.3% - Climate Vulnerability Assessment, please get back to me on this point - We have to adopt a Climate Change Adaptation Plan by 2028 - JH will send out these objectives and issues according to your specialisms - Please flag up any issues - We need a summary document - Team will work on target one to propose a more realistic target	
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		- Can I ask if we are happy? Can I suggest 2 weeks deadline RD – Do we need a meeting before Christmas? To grasp the many aspects of this plan. All – Yes ECS – will you still meet with LAs? JH – Yes, to reassure you that it has been through best process AW – Team to present highlights KD – Presents Darker Side of Mendip TH – Presents Nature Calling, and Mendip Nature Connections, Landscape Connections, Deer Leap consultation	
9	AOB		
10	Date of next meeting	Thursday 21st November 10am-12pm Invite has already been sent out.	

Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	10am 21 st November 2024	
Title:	Agenda	
Presented by:	NA	
To be noted		

1. Introductions and Apologies
2. Declaration of Interest
3. Notes of Previous Meeting. To be approved
4. Partners' verbal updates.
5. Management Plan Consultation. Paper A I, II, III

For discussion.

*Three documents summarising the stages of consultation that have taken place.
Please note **Bold Italic** and/or **Red** text that shows significant responses.*

6. Draft Management Plan Mendip Hills National Landscape. Paper B.

For discussion and approval

The draft plan that needs approval from the Partnership, subject to suggestions and amendments made at the Partnership meeting.

*Please focus on the **Red** text that shows significant elements of change from previous plans, particularly the objectives.*

Please focus on target 1 on page 41 as this needs considering.

Please focus on table 2, page 45, as these will need delivering in the Mendip Hills National Landscape as targets for the place that all partners will need to be involved with.

7. NL Team Update. Verbal presentation.
8. AOB
9. Date of Next Meeting: to be discussed.

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee		
Committee meeting date:	21st November 2024	
Title:	Partner Updates	
Presented by:	Jim Hardcastle	
To be noted.		

1. Somerset Council

2. BANES

Reset to Bath & North-East Somerset Local Plan

The revised NPPF and housing figures were published by the government in July for consultation. For B&NES, the draft revised housing figure has increased by 104% from 717 p.a. to 1,466 p.a. (or more than 29,000 new homes over a twenty-year period). Whilst the revised NPPF and housing figure have not yet been finalised and may change, the implications for B&NES are very significant and therefore, in September B&NES Cabinet agreed to reset the Local Plan currently in preparation.

Further evidence base work needs to be undertaken, additional options for development will need to be considered and there will be further community/stakeholder engagement. Resetting also has implications for the Local plan programme. Whilst the revised Local Plan programme has not yet been finalised it will be necessary for a further full public consultation on options/preferred options to be undertaken, probably in summer/early autumn 2025, before moving towards a Draft Local plan. The Council anticipates being able to submit the plan under the current planning system before December 2026 (government's new deadline) for Examination.

3. NSC

- West of England Nature Recovery Strategy (which includes NS) was launched last week – details [here](#) if people haven't seen it.
- Pursuing creation of a Habitat Banking Vehicle to enable us to deliver BNG on Council-owned land to allow us to better manage land for biodiversity
- Purchase of 10 acres of fields to create the first North Somerset Nature Park – our strategic mitigation solution for greater and lesser horseshoe bat – developers will purchase 'units' from us when they cannot achieve their own mitigation on a development site.
- Looking at passing the management of all our open spaces, including rights of way, to town and parish councils to save money. Losing 1 Access Officer post next year (unless funding from T&PCs can be provided). 50% less capacity as a result on rights of way maintenance/improvements. No capital funding in 2025-26 (£100K per year previously from NSC capital).

4. Natural England

- We continue to work on the management framework for the Mendip National Nature Reserve – the management framework will set out how the NNR partners will work together

to deliver the ambitions of the NNR to create bigger, better and more joined up spaces for nature.

- Our agri environment team are beginning to speak to landowners interested in exploring the different ELM options.
- Ash Die back work continues in Ebbor Gorge with more felling needed, along with work to enhance the grassland areas.
- In this special year of celebration for the 75th Anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, (the Act which enabled the designation of areas of outstanding natural beauty) we have produced two new podcast episodes. The links below will take you directly to each episode.

[75th Anniversary Part 1: past and present](#) (30 mins) features conversations with:

Marian Spain – Natural England (The impact of the Act)

Clare Webb – Natural England (Countryside Code)

Julie Merrett - Natural England (National Nature Reserves)

[75th Anniversary Part 2: the next 75 years](#) (25 mins) features conversations with:

Stuart Pasley – Natural England (Resilient Landscapes and Seas)

Julian Gray – National Trails UK and NE Landscape Advisory Panel member

Saskia Luqmani – Protected Landscapes Partnership

Marian Spain – Natural England

5. National Trust

6. SWT

7. AWT

8. Parish Council Representatives

9. Mendip Society

10. CPRE

Events & Competitions:

We recently announced the winners of our photo competition [Details here](#)

We ran a Countryside Day guided walk around New Stowey Farm with Quantock Hills National Landscape team and Stowey Green Spaces Group. Very popular and enjoyable event and a good way of strengthening local partnerships.

Our AGM and Building Better Places event is on 28th November. Nicholas Boys-Smith, Chair of Create Streets, is our speaker and will be focussing on design of new rural housing developments. Elli Moody is coming to represent national CPRE. Over 70 bookings so far – we have invited Parish & Town Councils, Community Groups, Cllrs, Housing Providers, Architects as well as CPRE members.

We spoke at an event in Shapwick run by campaign group SOSLevels in October about loss of farmland due to solar and housing developments. Andrew Lee, Editor of online newspaper Somerset Confidential, was one of the other speakers and has just published an article busting some of the myths around solar - particularly re the amount of energy promised vs reality.

Litter Project:

Our litter project continues to evolve and we have built links with 3 new organisations offering Duke of Edinburgh volunteering to young people. One is a Youth Project in Wiveliscombe, one is a specialist school in Yeovil for severely autistic children & young adults and one is a charity in the Quantocks working one to one with children who have experienced exploitation. We are pleased to provide new opportunities for young people who have not had an easy start in life – thanks to SUEZ who sponsor our litter picking kits.

Fingerposts:

We continue to offer small grants to Parish & Town Councils to help restore their traditional fingerpost road signs. Latest ones on our website.

Planning:

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

We are pleased that the plan for 78 houses on the edge of Wells in a “green gap” was refused. Fortescue Fields Appeal Hearing, 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.

We spoke up against a retrospective planning application re large-scale hardstanding development at Lyndhurst, Vicarage Lane, Draycott, inside the Mendip Hills NL. The proposed development size was disproportionate to the no. of vehicles needed to farm a modest 10-acre smallholding. Application was refused.

Meetings with MPs:

We have set up a series of meetings with new MPs. So far, we have met Gideon Amos (Taunton & Wellington) and Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury & Somerton). Two further meetings set up with Adam Dance (Yeovil) and Anna Sabine (Frome) in early 2025.

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 AONB partnership.

ELM 159 Test

Landscape Recovery Test ELM 159A

TTT is pleased to report that the second test (159A) ‘Incentivising green infrastructure public access and biodiversity creation in land management’, run in the Landscape Recovery programme, has finished. TTT would like to thank the landowners and managers from the ten land holdings, and other stakeholders that participated in the second test and trial, and the Mendip Hills NL unit for their help and support.

These are the key findings. The final report is available on the TTT website <https://www.thetrailstrust.org.uk/>
Additional reports from the test will be available on the website shortly.

1. Strategic vision for access and biodiversity on a landscape scale

Holding participants and stakeholders were enthusiastic about creating and investing in a linear multi-user green infrastructure network, and improving existing access and biodiversity. Combining strategic public access and nature recovery plans, to create a landscape scale network, has many positive ecosystem benefits for communities, environment, biodiversity and nature.

2. Incentivising participation, collaboration and investment

Multiple factors incentivised both the holding participants and the stakeholder investors. Facilitation was most important, nothing happens without it. Face to face discussions incentivised. Important factors were legacy, creating a permanent network, the co-existence and engagement of people, biodiversity & nature, food and farming, economic opportunity and rewards, delivering for local communities and environment. Small realignments of existing paths would be really helpful, safeguarding stock and people. Upgrading existing access rights from walking to multi-user to support horse riding and cycling should be incentivised in the scheme.

3. Incentivising network creation & improvement through effective support

All the mechanisms designed were effective (pictorial images, highway exit advice, Advice & Guidance (A&G) toolkit framework, constructing agreements), or very effective (advice packets, payments, blended finance, Land Management Plan construction). The essential building blocks for green infrastructure network delivery in a scheme had been provided.

4. Advice & Guidance (A&G) gaps in the market

Mechanisms most notable for lack of A&G were pictorial images, highway exit advice (specialist packets), A&G toolkit / handbook and voluntary access creation agreements mechanisms. Valuation & payment, blended finance and LMP creation mechanisms will all require A&G support ensuring 'no gaps'. A well-publicised 'one stop shop' access & biodiversity handbook will ensure that A&G lands with its intended audience.

5. Valuing the green infrastructure network for access and biodiversity creation and improvement

Holding participants and stakeholder investors agreed that land value established the minimum price for a capital payment for a bridleway dedication example. A fairer value would include a 50% operational loss payment. Participants favoured market land valuations, stakeholders slightly favoured similar, but less variable, government green book values. ORVaL (www.exeter.ac.uk/research/leep/researchimpact/current-projects/orval/) could be useful for calculating higher recreational values.

No consensus apparent on dedication of access land rights valuation mechanisms, value or minimum price. Access land was difficult to value as poor-quality, but with high social welfare value. Linear route development creating a connected network was preferred by both groups. Smaller access and biodiversity activities should be fully repaid and large scheme s individually valued.

Permissive access should be supported in a scheme with payment mechanisms reflecting the difference between permissive and permanent access. Converting permissive access routes and trials to permanent access and being rewarded with the capital payment through a scheme was very attractive.

6. Land management plans

CROW Act S16 and express dedication at common law were the most attractive voluntary access creation mechanisms obviously safeguarding investments in land use change and

associated environmental outcomes. The range of mechanisms used in Paths for Communities Scheme (P4C) 'proved that options can be included'. Inclusion of mechanisms creating short-term informal permissive paths and trials was also attractive. Dedication under Highway Act '80 and the formal permissive access mechanisms were unattractive.

Participants were willing to consider conservation covenants but more information and advice is needed.

Data collected through templates and surveys showed that access, biodiversity, facility and agreed options for access creation and improvement commonality existed between all holdings along public access routes. The data was applicable to informing single holding, best practice and landscape scale LMPs. Three of the holdings, all smaller farms, had engaged with a farm business survey, which had not led to any economic or other advantage, research suggested that less public facing holdings would benefit most.

Participants agreed accessing this baseline data would be difficult therefore facilitation and specialist help are required to develop green infrastructure for access and biodiversity, through a scheme in LMP.

7. Impacts and overcoming barriers to access / future access

Holding participants agreed that the scheme support discussed would mitigate most barriers from access faced by land managers and many barriers to access faced by the public.

Stakeholders identified multiple barriers erected by government, with particular emphasis on the Local Authority use of S106 and CIL monies and the policy exclusion of environmental net gain and ecosystem services. Government review of its own processes and policy, supplying A&G and knowledgeable facilitation, and the creation of a blended finance and non-finance pledges mechanism would lead to successful delivery of an access & biodiversity network in any area and through any scheme.

8. New and innovative mechanisms theme, financing the network, blended finance.

Stakeholder investors and holding participants agreed that there was no joined up approach or funding mechanism to deliver the green infrastructure network for access and biodiversity, despite its potential, and opportunities for finance. A mechanism was designed with the help of Somerset Community Foundation to bridge the funding gap with agri-environment money, accept monies directly from S106 and CIL, and make provision for non-financial pledges. Holding participants agreed that the mechanism was good, useful and well planned. A funding route would normally be Defra but schemes 'didn't match this strategic network aspiration'.

9. Leadership and roles

Stakeholder investors and holding participants agreed that provision of local facilitators, trained in access and biodiversity, was the primary role. Mendip Hills National Landscape unit/ partnership was viewed, by most, as the obvious leader to develop the access and biodiversity green infrastructure landscape scale plan with support from the scheme, community, specialists, farm agents, user groups and stakeholders.

The landscape scale LMP was an ideal vehicle to encourage collaborative working and blended finance investment. Somerset Community Foundation (SCF), already managing the Mendip Hills Fund, could manage a non-agri-scheme environment fund. Rural Payments Agency had an obvious role.

The local highway authority (LHA) role in creating, improving or maintaining green infrastructure for public access and biodiversity was very questionable. Participants associated the LHA with the most unattractive voluntary agreement mechanisms, slow processes and lack of motivation

to improve a decaying inaccessible, disconnected and unsafe public access network. Stakeholders associated the LHA with adversarial, non-transparent S106 and CIL funds processes.

10. An access and biodiversity scheme

T&T 159 (test 1) participants said that access and biodiversity creation and improvement needed its own scheme, instead of being levered into an agri-scheme. The current network decay and disconnect is in stark contrast to landowner and land manager willingness to create, improve and maintain access. Participants with significant acreages of land with obvious environmental outcomes potential, but no farm business, are excluded from agri – schemes, except from Farming in the protected landscape scheme (FiPL).

The creation of the strategic green infrastructure public access and biodiversity network in land management delivers on all four of the FiPL themes (nature, climate, people, place).

The FiPL scheme could be the basis for a green infrastructure access and biodiversity scheme and should be retained. Defra should explore expansion of the FiPL model with public and third sector stakeholders such as National Landscapes, Community Foundations, and with private sector investors, to effect inclusion of blended finance and non-financial resources to fund green infrastructure access and biodiversity eco- services and environmental gain.

Consultation Results and Response from Partnership Survey on Existing Objectives

Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan Review 2024

February 2024

Survey sent to the Partnership to determine the relevance of the current objectives, and any changes recommended.

10 responses received from Partnership members.

NL Team response in ***bold italics***.

Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objectives

BG1 Ensure that there is no net loss of characteristic habitats and species.

Still relevant 7

No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 3

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:4 responses

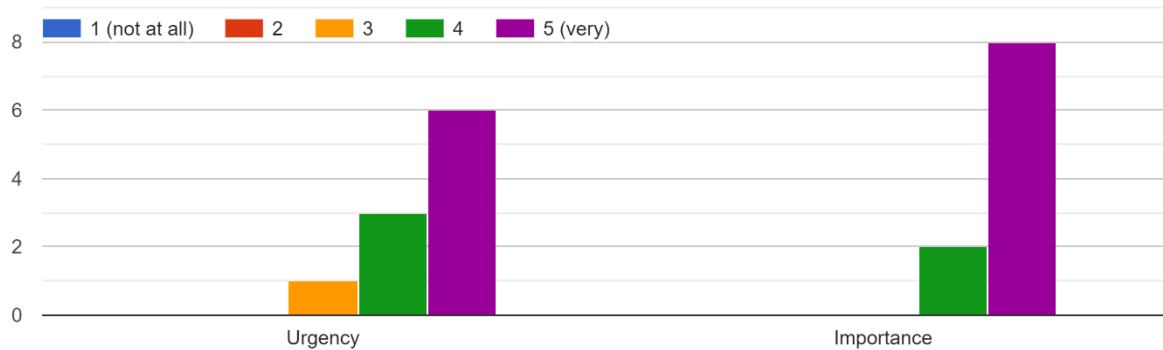
No net loss should be adjusted to state our intention to increase habitat. ***Agreed***

Would be interesting to know how this is measured and whether ADB is included etc and how much we can control loss through climate change. ***Noted. Nature Recovery Plan and subsequent PLTOF monitoring will assess this.***

Would suggest this need to be more ambitious to reflect contribution to the targets. Ensure there is no net loss and seek to increase..... ***Agreed***

Not 'NEEDS changing' but best reworded to reflect the likelihood that the species which are natural to Mendip will evolve as climate evolves and individual species migrate across the planet. It is likely some current species on Mendip will be lost but others gained. This effect has already been documented across the world. ***Reflected in Climate Vulnerability Assessment***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



BG2 Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and enhancement of ecological networks within and adjoining the National Landscape.

Still relevant 10

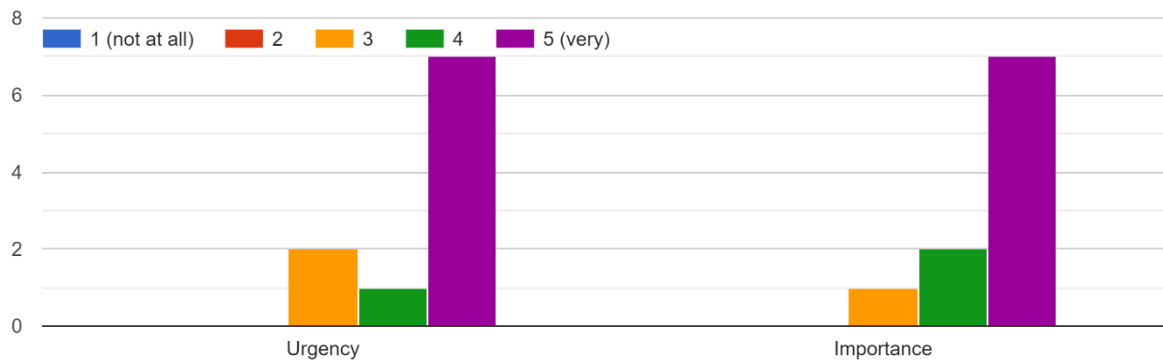
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Keep in mind Mendip of nature and cannot be conserved successfully alone. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



BG3 Increase monitoring and awareness of the biodiversity resource of the Mendip Hills National Landscape so that it is sufficiently understood to continue to guide the successful conservation of the characteristic habitats and species.

Still relevant 10

No longer relevant 0

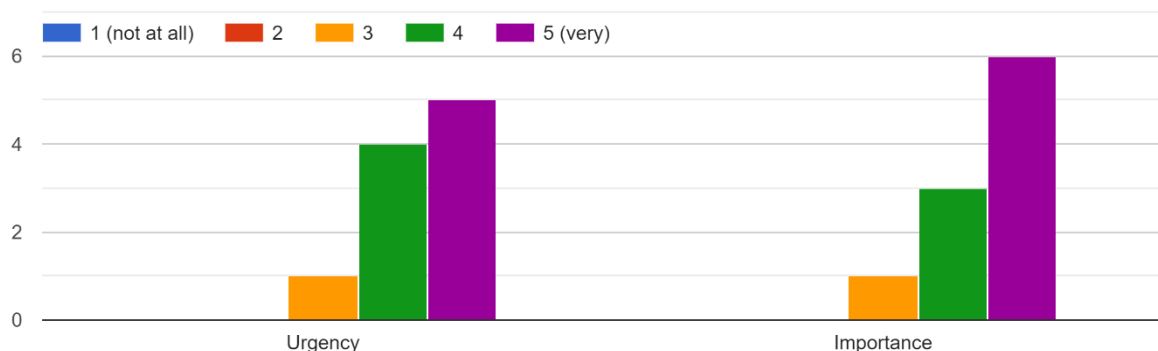
Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

I don't think we do anywhere near enough monitoring, or collating the monitoring that other people undertake. ***Noted, addressed through partnership working and the delivery plan***

Unless we monitor, change cannot be identified and acted upon. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



BG4 Promote a holistic approach to implementing the Management Plan objectives and National Character Area Statements of Opportunity.

Still relevant 9

No longer relevant 0

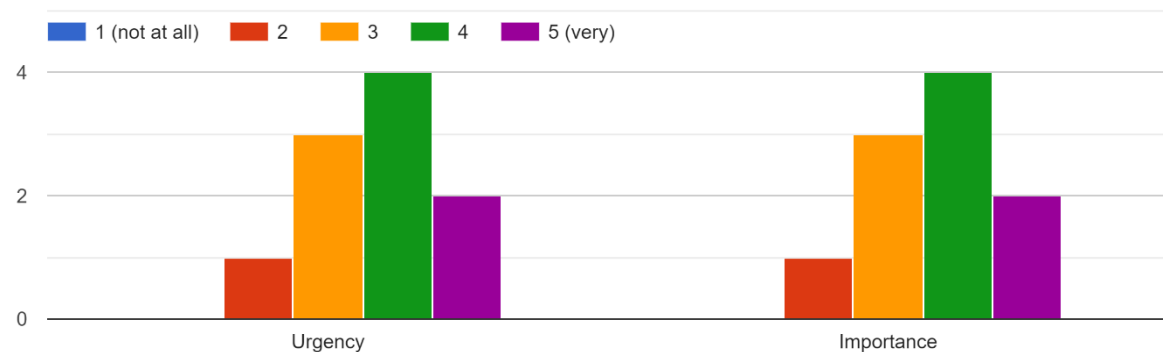
Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

I don't full understand what a holistic approach means in this context so perhaps a reword or revisit. ***Noted. Change to 'Promote a partnership approach' and include Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework.***

Every body's holistic approach to their activity benefits each other's activity. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



BG5 Recognise and celebrate geological sites and features of the Mendip Hills National Landscape to ensure the successful conservation both of the geology and wildlife habitats they provide.

Still relevant 10

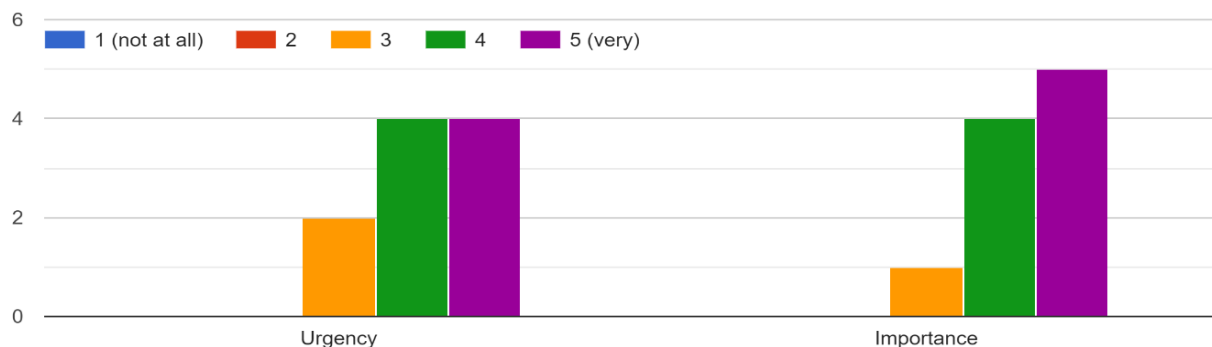
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



BG6 Increase awareness of the Mendip Hills geology, particularly cave systems in relation to the importance they play in water management and water supply.

Still relevant 10

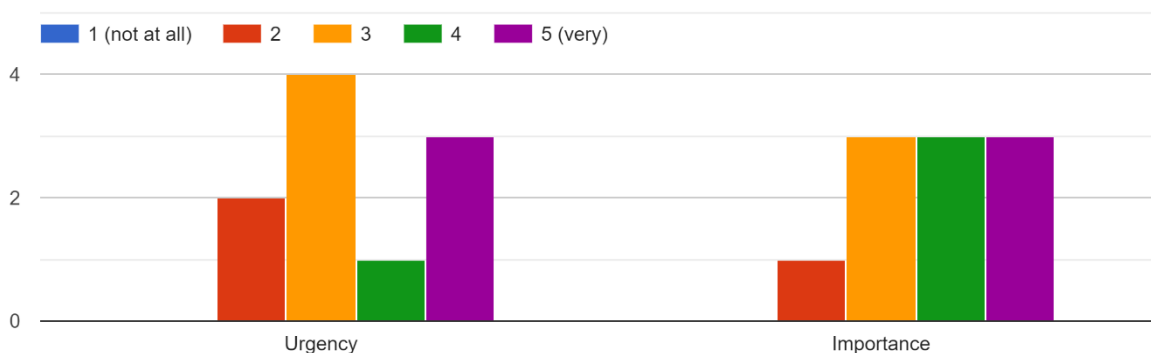
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Would benefit from inclusion of commercial exploitation of the stone - essential in the current economy. Water one of the most important needs for life if not the most important. ***Addressed in Natural Resources section of plan***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Natural Resources Objectives

NR1 Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the National Landscape as a valuable source of ecosystem services with economic and health benefits.

Still relevant 10

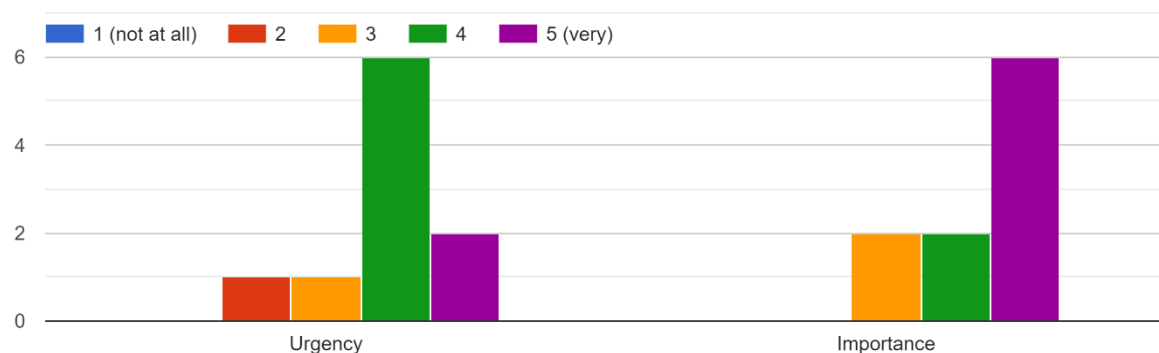
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Health factor always gets support, hard economic factors need more study and explanation. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



NR2 Promote conservation of water resources and enhance their quality, taking measures to reduce low flows and flooding by appropriate management and use.

Still relevant 9

No longer relevant 0

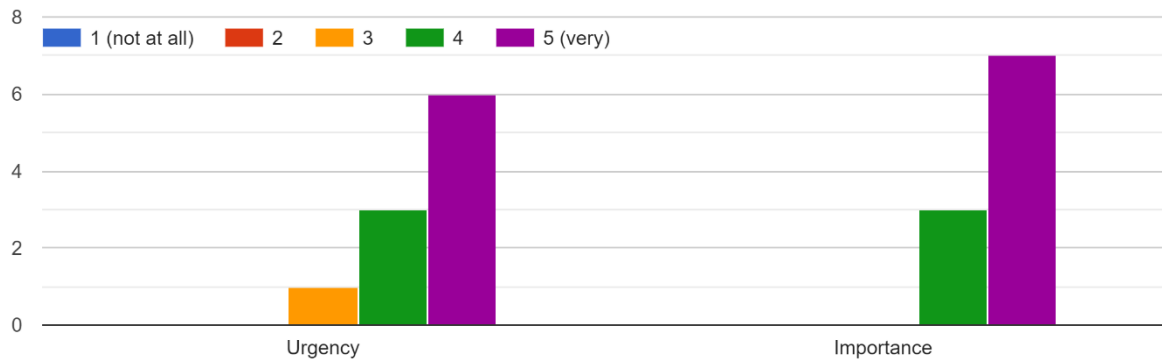
Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

This could include something about taking measures to reduce pollution and improve water quality. ***Agreed. Amend to Promote conservation of water resources, reduce pollution and enhance their quality, by appropriate management and use. No evidence of need for including 'low flows'.***

Vital. **Noted.**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



NR3 Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.

Still relevant 10

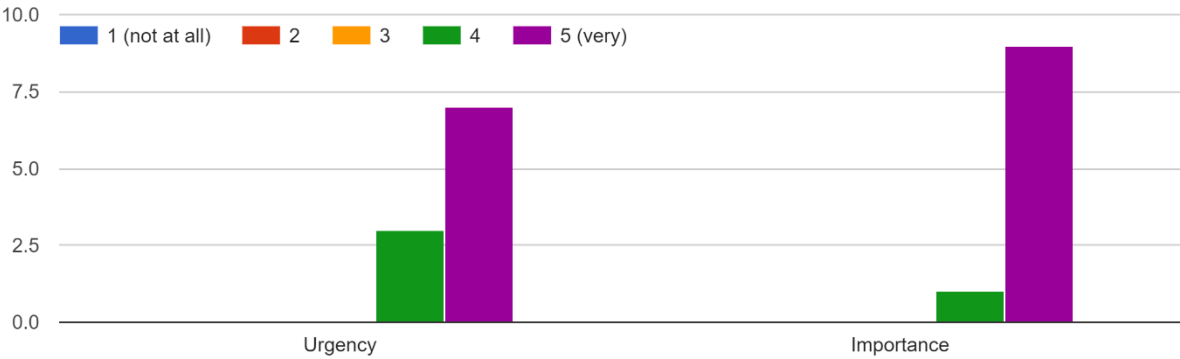
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Ties up with good farming practice. However there are big differences of opinion on the most appropriate practices to adopt. **Noted.**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Land Management Objectives

LM1 Support and promote farming to ensure it remains as the principle land use and contributes to climate adaptation and mitigation and to the furthering of the special qualities of the National Landscape.

Still relevant 8

No longer relevant 1

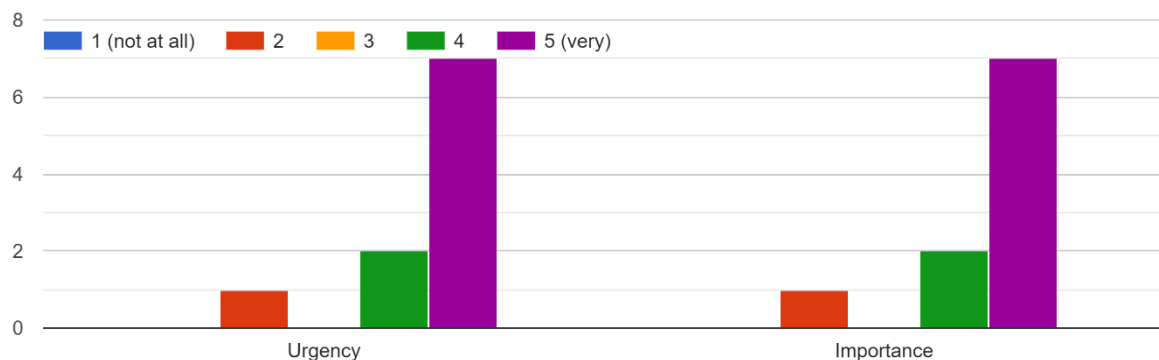
Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

This could be stronger around promoting farming to have a positive impact and reducing negative impacts to the Mendip. ***Agreed. Minor amend to Support and promote farming to have a positive impact on the Mendip Hills NL, contributing to climate adaptation and mitigation and to the furthering of the special qualities of the National Landscape, while remaining the principle land use.***

Again vital as it appears that a lot of 'talk' is not being backed up by supportive political action. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



LM2 Support and promote rural land management that conserves and enhances natural resources, including biodiversity special to the Mendip Hills, landscape character and the historic environment, and that this aids public awareness and enjoyment of the National Landscape.

Still relevant 10

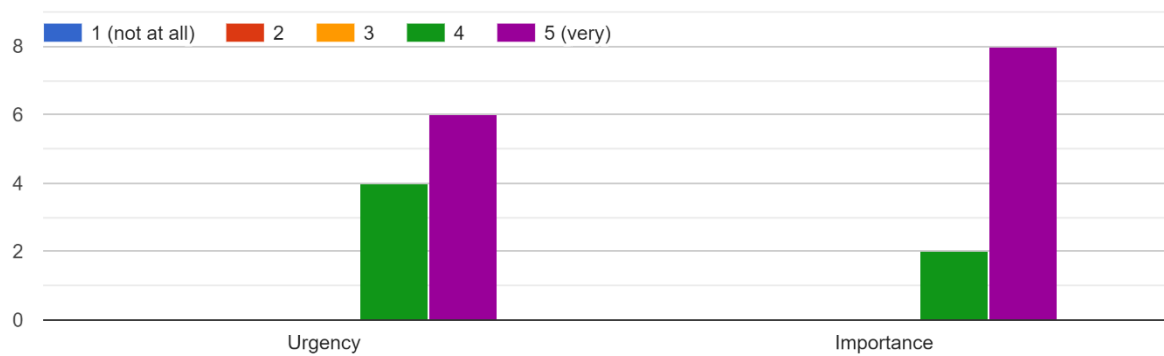
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



LM3 Support and promote a sustainable woodland economy that enhances woodlands and the wider landscape with targeted woodland management of diverse species resilient to climate adaptation and mitigation, and creation in appropriate locations, supporting wood fuel and local community opportunities.

Still relevant 9

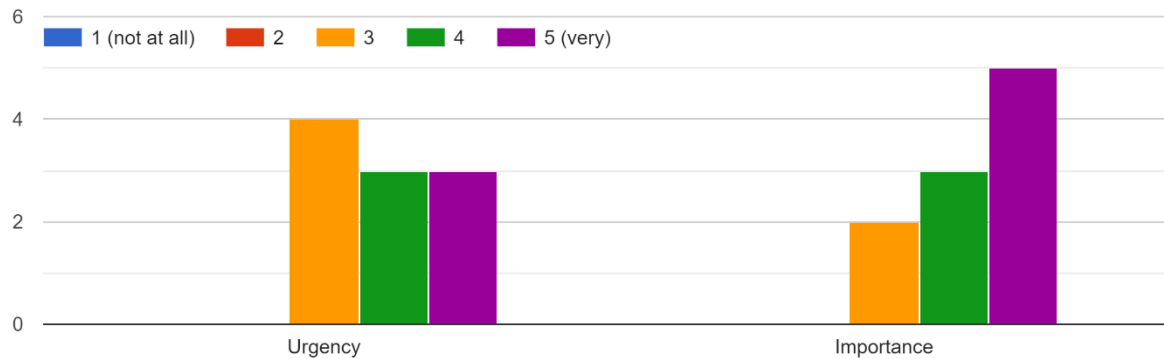
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

I am not convinced by the popular use of tree planting as a permanent answer to climate change. Every tree, like every other living thing, has a limited life and must decay eventually - this recycling its carbon as carbon dioxide. **Noted**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



LM4 Influence the use, restoration and after-use of all quarries to minimise the impact on the landscape, contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation, and be compatible with the purposes of designation.

Still relevant 10

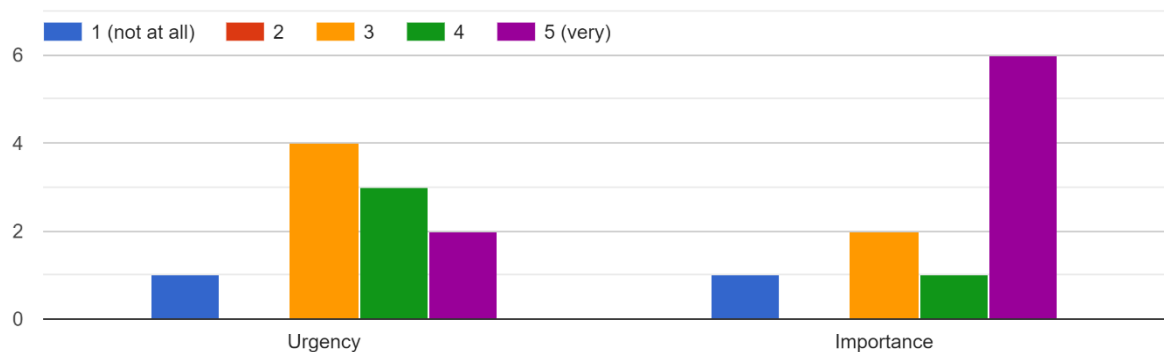
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

The public can already see how nature can recolonise abandoned buildings and workings. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Development and Transport Objectives

D1 Working with the local planning authorities, ensure that development in the National Landscape and its setting is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community need, resilience to climate change and net zero targets, without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills.

Still relevant 10

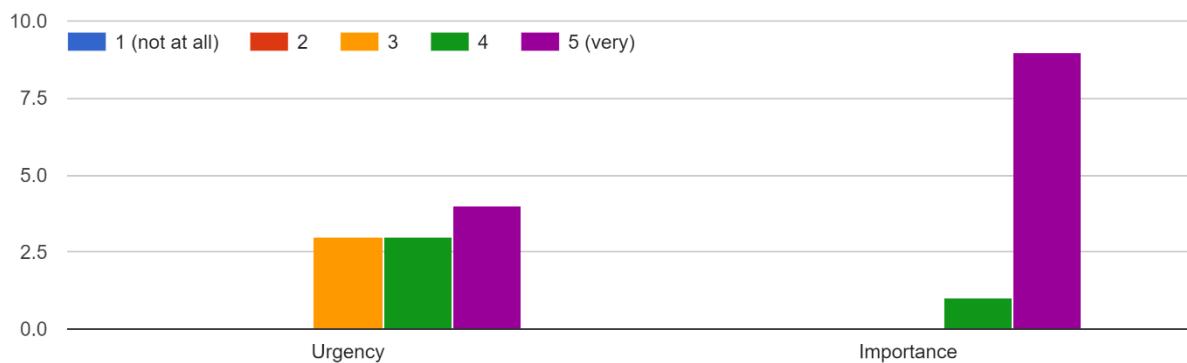
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Local Authorities are agents of change as the National Landscapes aspire to be. **Noted**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



D2 Working with the local highways authorities, ensure that the special qualities of the National Landscape are fully respected in the planning, design, provision and management of all types of transport and associated infrastructure.

Still relevant 10

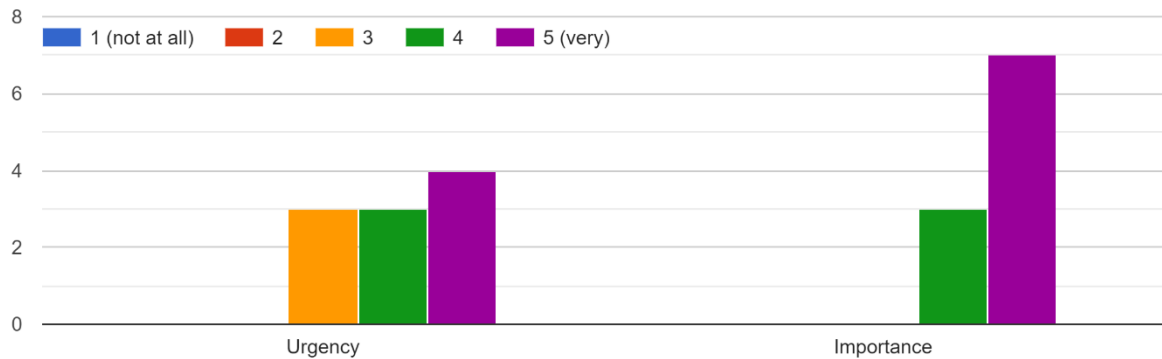
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

More relevant as 'transport' must evolve fast itself. **Noted**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



D3 Encourage reduction in carbon emissions within the National Landscape through reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their setting.

Still relevant 9

No longer relevant 0

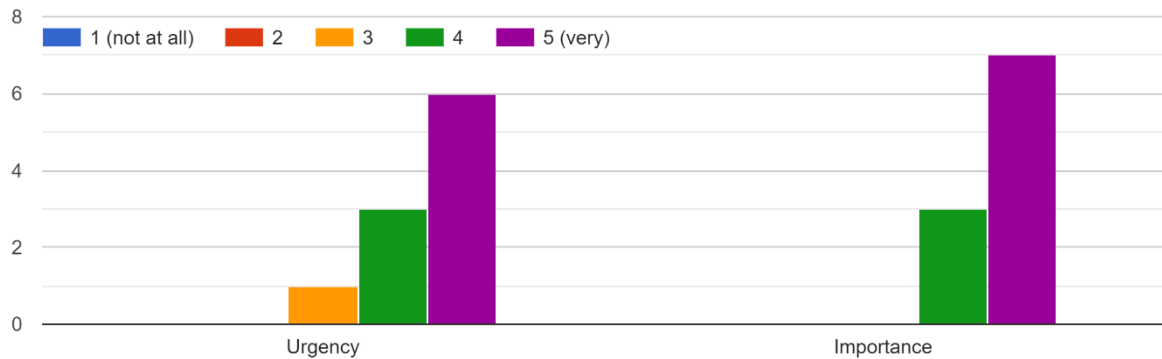
Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

Could this be a bit stronger - Reduce carbon emissions..... **Agreed.**

More rather than still relevant but no more than everyone and every institution needs to do. **Noted**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



D4 Ensure issues of importance for the management of the National Landscape are fully reflected in strategies and plans produced by other agencies and local communities.

Still relevant 8

No longer relevant 0

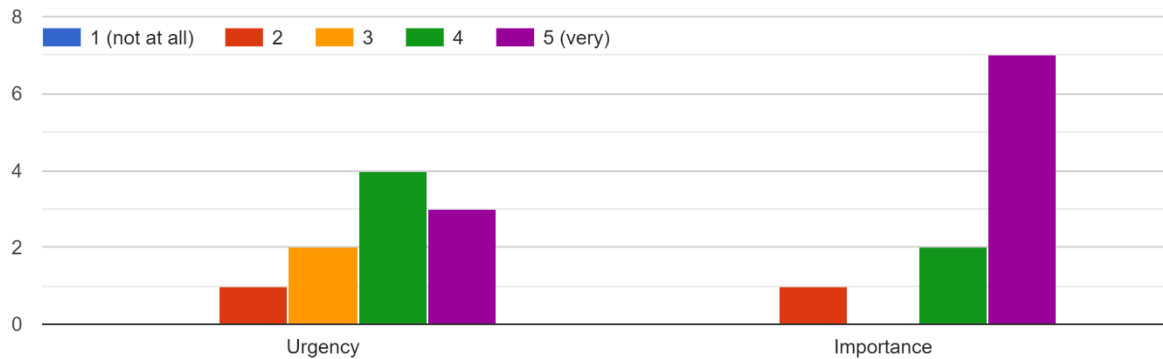
Needs changing 2

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

Still think its important, but maybe needs a change in wording? you can't control or "make" other autonomous organisations abide by NL objectives, but I do think the NL can make sure they have a seat at the table when these plans are being created and fully advocate for the issues to be reflected. ***Noted. Practical delivery requires wide partnership approach but objective should remain the same.***

This seems like a massive undertaking to be implementing into how many community groups and agencies there are. Perhaps a sense check is more appropriate. ***See above***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



D5 The impact of development on the protected landscape and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills would need to be carefully considered, and where supported would require appropriate and acceptable mitigation measures.

Still relevant 10

No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

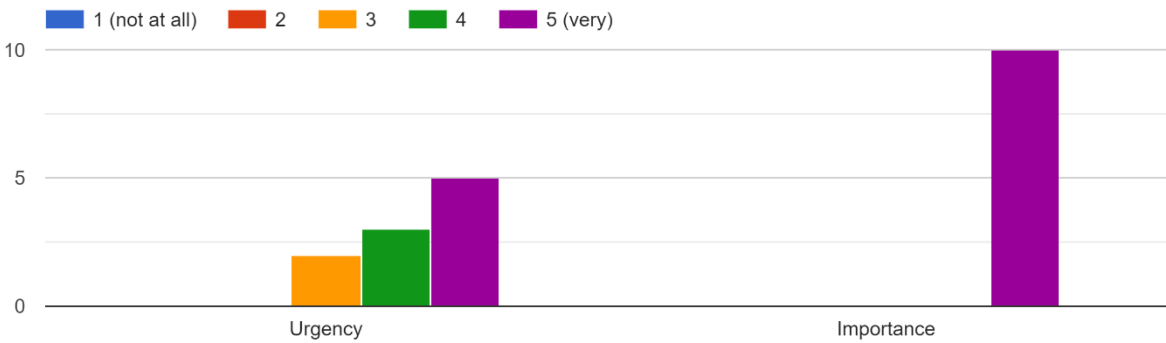
If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

I guess this is essentially BNG which is now a legal obligation of all developments, but I guess this still needs to be in here as it refers to more than just biodiversity qualities.

Noted

Applies to all National Landscapes, National Parks and local spaces, all of which are under serious threat of being absorbed into the brown field environment. **Noted**

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Recreation, Access and Tourism Objectives

R1 Maintain, improve and promote public access and quiet recreational activities with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of the National Landscape designation.

Still relevant 9

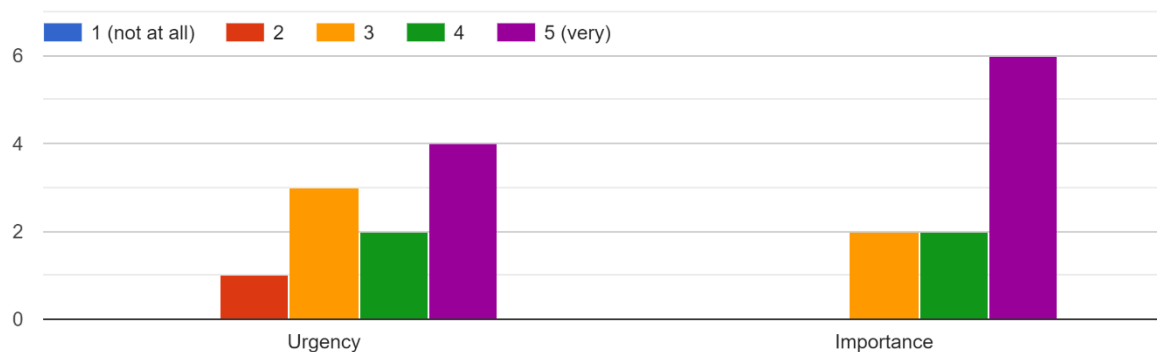
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Needs a comment about noisy and antisocial activities being actively discouraged.
Noted. ***Amend to Maintain, improve and promote public access and quiet recreational activities, addressing anti-social activities, with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of the National Landscape designation.***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



R2 Support the development of tourism that benefits the local economy, conserves and enhances the landscape, and improves understanding of the Mendip Hills.

Still relevant 10

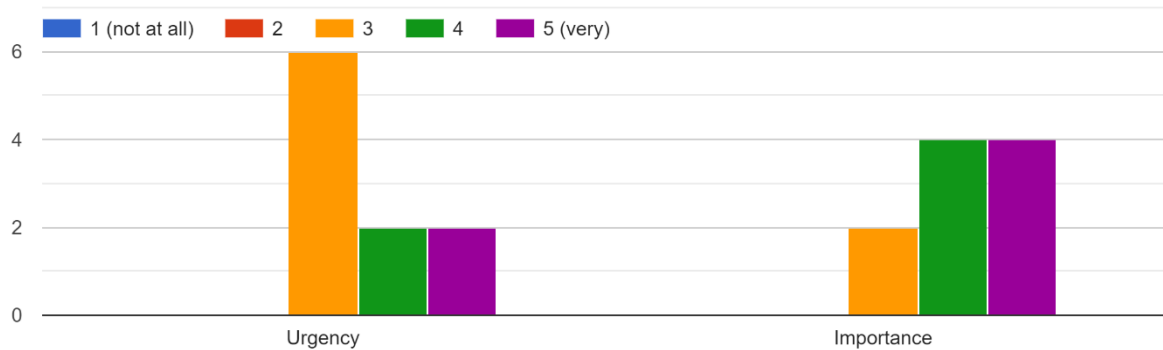
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



R3 Develop and promote more sustainable methods of travel to and around the National Landscape for enjoyment and recreation.

Still relevant 10

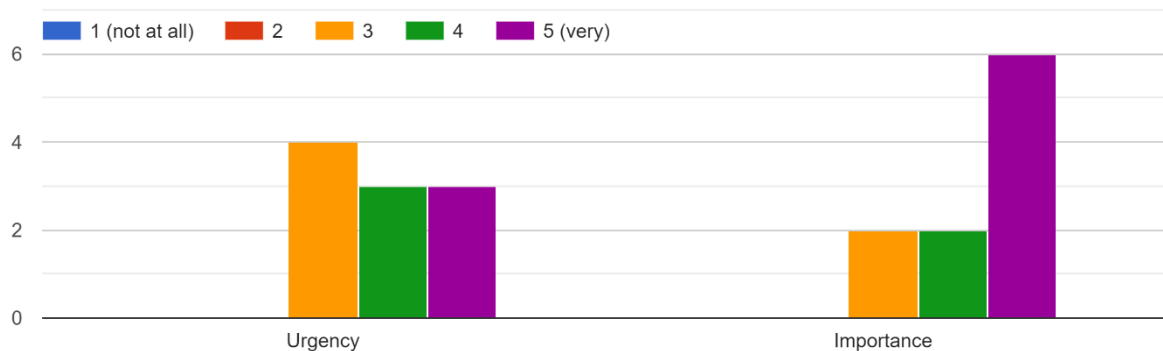
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Can only truly work when 'travel' as a whole is forced to change away from the individual motor vehicle

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



R4 Support healthy lifestyles by encouraging more people to use the Mendip Hills for sustainable outdoor activities.

Still relevant 10

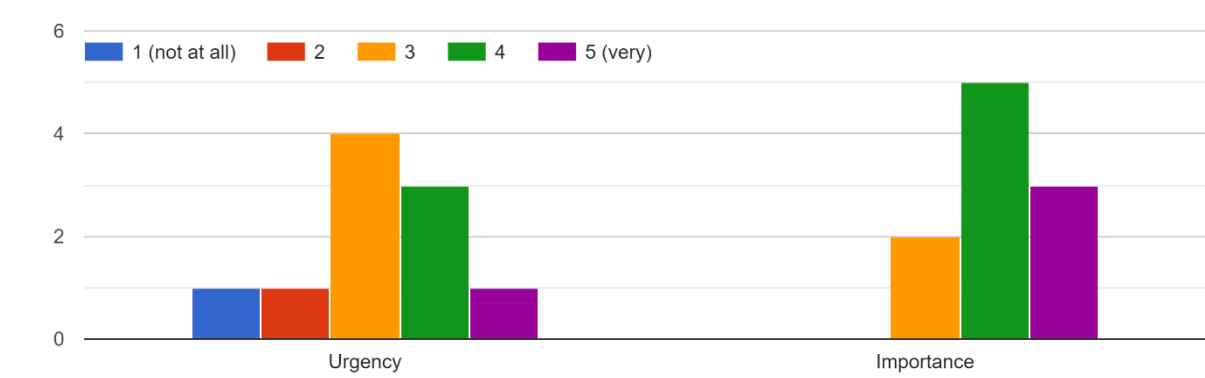
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Landscape Quality Objectives

L1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills landscape is conserved and enhanced.

Still relevant 10

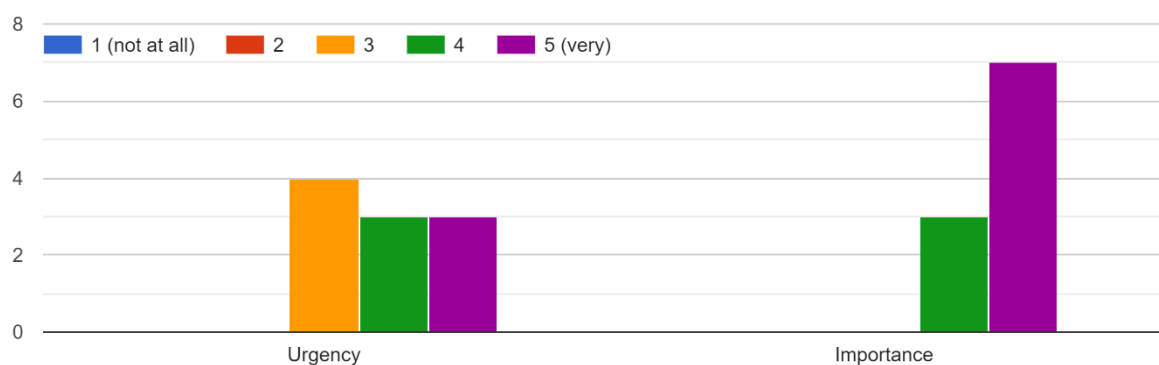
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



L2 Provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.

Still relevant 9

No longer relevant 0

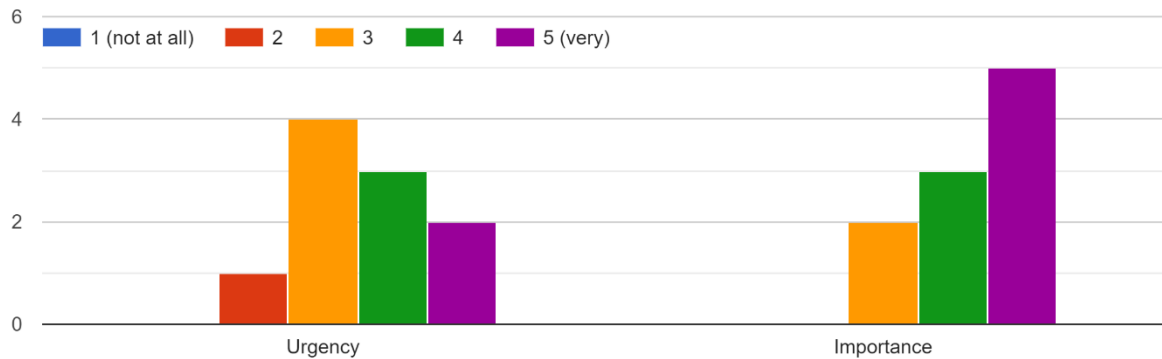
Needs changing 1

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

Quite vague and broad scope - could it be narrowed down? Rural skills? Or Skills for local employment. ***Noted but the skills and approach needed is necessarily broad. Changes not required.***

An available outlet for every individual. ***Noted.***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



L3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the National Landscape.

Still relevant 10

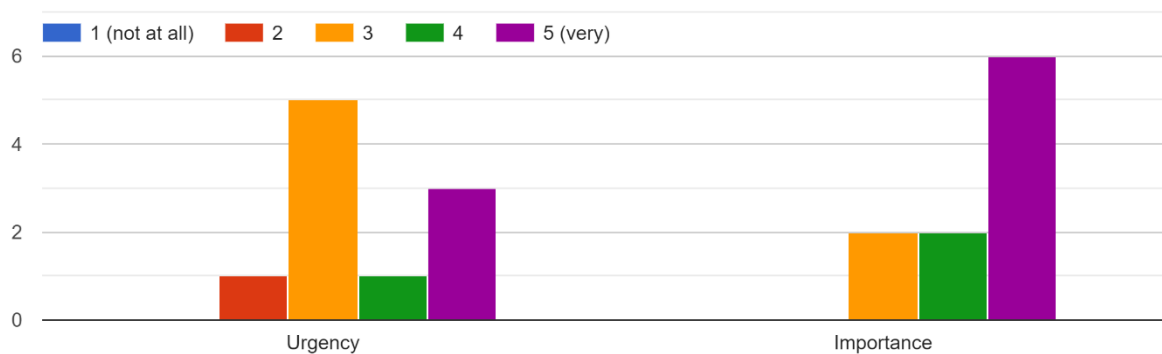
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Difficult subject as can appear like preaching. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



L4 Increase awareness of the benefits of supporting local products and services that help conserve and enhance the landscape.

Still relevant 10

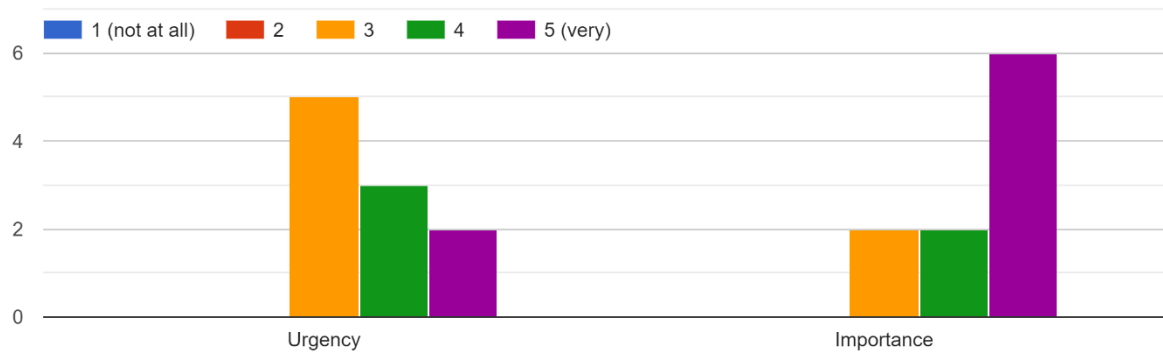
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Enhances feelings of locality and of belonging. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage Objectives

H1 Improve the recording, interpretation and understanding of all aspects of the National Landscape's historic environment to ensure local communities and visitors enjoy a rich experience of the sense of place.

Still relevant 10

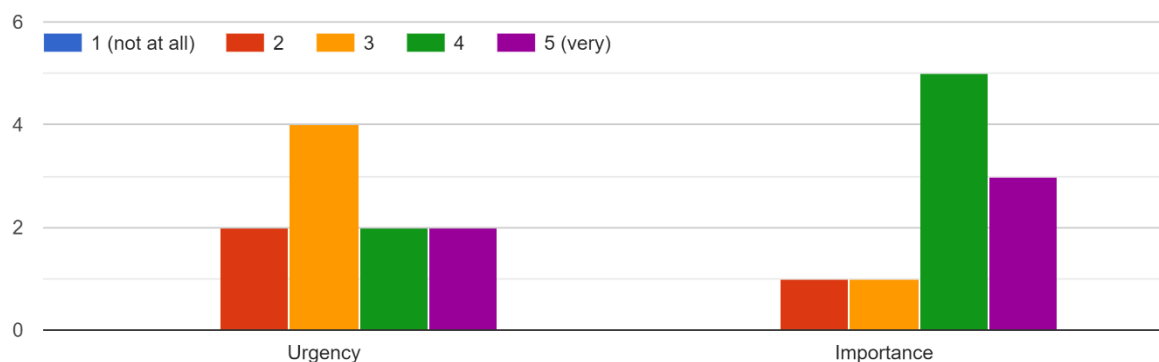
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Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

As all knowledge is desemenated. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



H2 Increase awareness and communicate the significance of the high quality historic environment of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

Still relevant 10

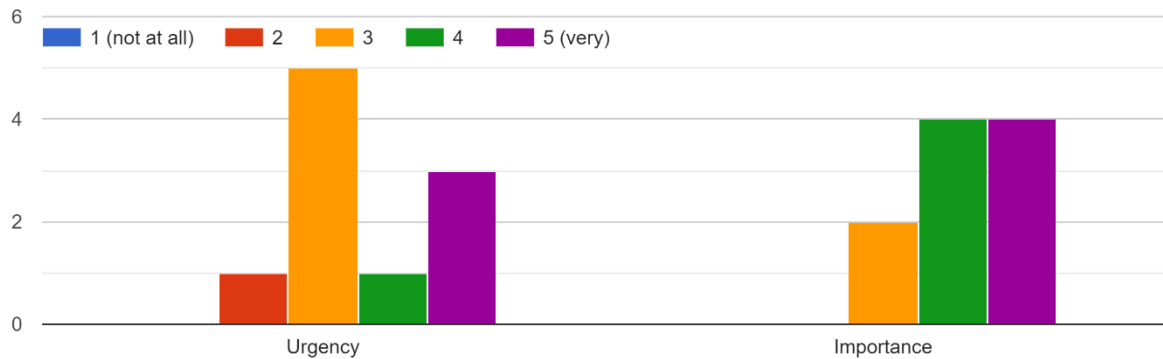
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Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



H3 Promote appropriate management of sites, structures and landscapes designated for their international, national, regional or local importance in the historic environment to ensure no further loss of heritage assets.

Still relevant 10

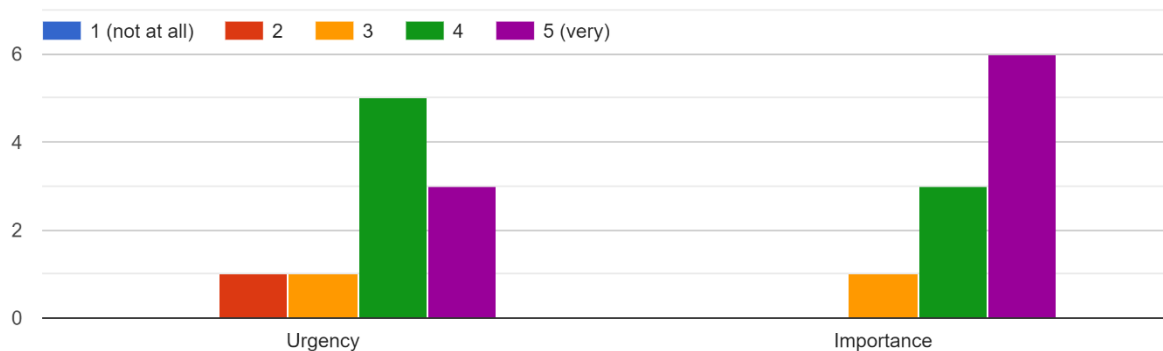
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Participation Objectives

P1 Increase the opportunities for volunteering and the range of people participating to benefit the environment, people's health and wellbeing, and local communities in and around the National Landscape.

Still relevant 10

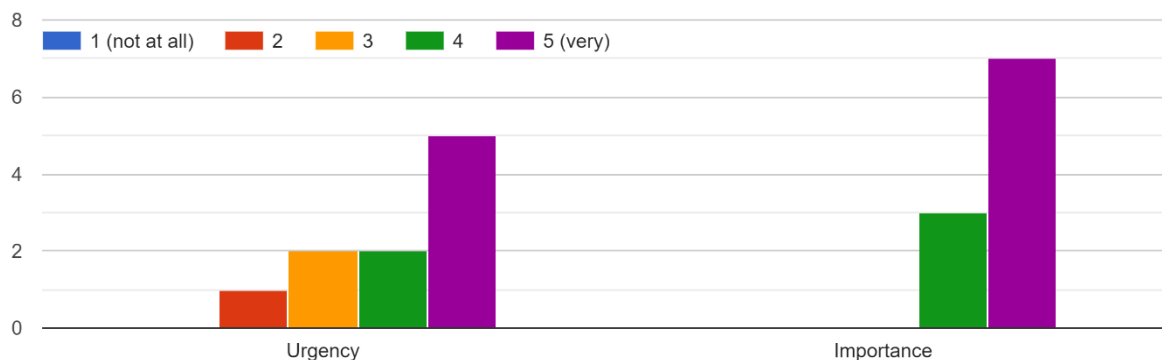
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:1 response

Increasingly important to counter tendencies of alienation from nature. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



P2 Encourage the involvement of local people and the wider community in the management of the National Landscape.

Still relevant 10

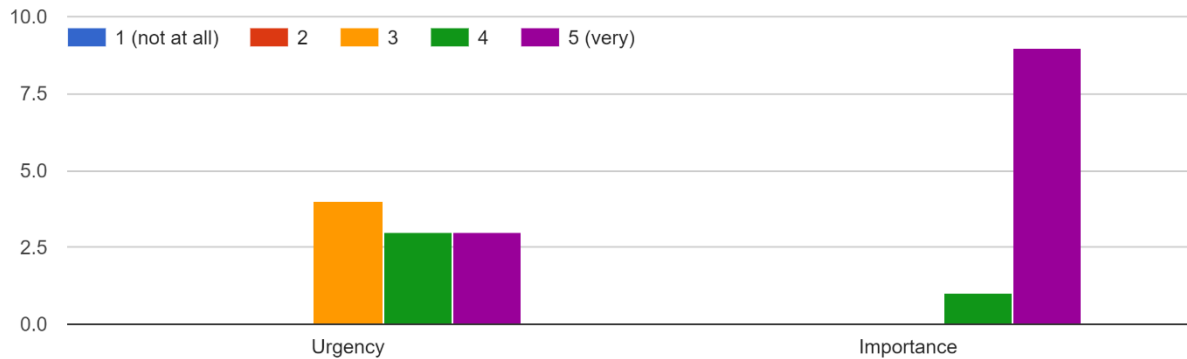
No longer relevant 0

Needs changing 0

If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



P3 Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages and encourage sharing of research and learning tools.

Still relevant 9

No longer relevant 1

Needs changing 0

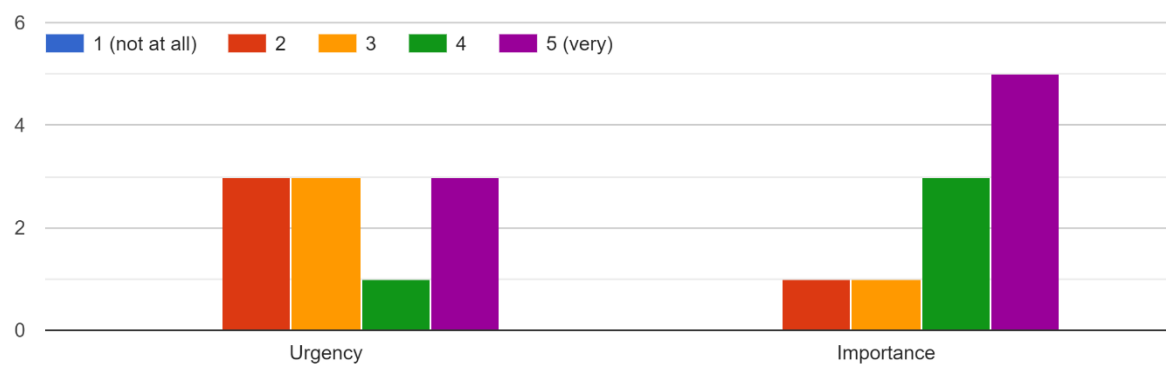
If you selected 'no longer relevant' or 'needs changing' please use this space to let us know how this can change to become relevant:2 responses

I think this aspect is covered in some of the other points and is surplus to requirements.

Noted

Most important to affect the youngsters. ***Noted***

Please let us know, on a scale of 1-5, how urgent and important you think it is to deliver this objective:



Please let us know if there are any themes or objectives that are not covered by the previous objectives:

Please note that the objectives for the new Management Plan will be categorised under the four Defra headings of 'Nature, Climate, People, Place'.

Work is needed to address the issues of visitor pressure and antisocial driving in cheddar.

Noted

Not off the top of my head

I think (that although we keep referring to all residents) we do need a specific objective that targets getting under represented groups accessing the Mendips more. ***Noted.***

Suggest P4 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

I found this questionnaire exercise deeply depressing, ineffective and unengaging. All the foregoing questions are obviously still really important and valuable. It would have been much better to list them so that they could be assessed and viewed as a table if you wanted people to properly be able to rank and rate them. It seems a straight forward exercise to place all of them under the Defra headings. Management, structure and role of the future partnership - I think it's far more important to consider what the Partnership role is in helping to deliver these priorities. It's plainly obvious that the Unit is over stretched and cannot hope to deliver all these priorities by itself. In TTT's test and trials the overarching opinion of participants is the need to work with specialist advisors, community and for the Mendip NL to have a leadership role. There is very little appetite to work with local authorities or Defra's partners. most of whom are disliked and not trusted (except for Natural England). If local people and land based businesses are looking to the NL for leadership the Partnership needs to have a much better defined plan delivery role and be steered by specialists, local (farm) businesses and community representatives - much like the FiPL panel. There is a role for blended finance expertise too. You are asking the wrong question - it's not about what should be in the plan, that is obvious, but how can the plan be more effectively delivered and funded using the obvious and amazing resources we have in the Hills? Currently it feels like we are in a bus where the Unit members are all crammed into the driving seat hanging onto the steering wheel and the partnership is left to loll on the seats only engaged with twice a year when necessary and then there is no real discussion about how much more effective we could be, frankly the partners could all offer so much more if they were 'let' in. ***Governance review to address this.***

Is there a need for something more on how to prepare for climate change and identifying any particular vulnerabilities the landscape has that may need extra efforts to help it adapt? ***Climate vulnerability assessment to be included in plan***

Needs a big push on access, green infrastructure and active/sustainable travel.

Addressed via delivery plan

There is a lot there to deliver already, Need to ensure it works with the objectives of you Nature Recovery plan too. ***Noted. Nature Recovery Plan to be updated.***

NA

BG3 covers monitoring, but at the moment only the key species seem to be rigorously monitored. Without better baseline information on the biodiversity of the Hills, how can we know we are meeting Objective BG1? Perhaps the best way of achieving this is to collate data held by the other organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts, Somerset Environmental Records Centre, British Trust for Ornithology, Forestry Commission etc.

This should be the role of the Environmental Records Centres and the new Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

Is the National Landscape's role in the Planning Process adequately described? Objective D1 suggests co-operation, but I think the role is more proactive than that. The Planning authority does not have a good record when it comes to co-operation or adhering to well-consulted documents such as neighbourhood Plans, Local Plans and Policy Frameworks. To me this objective is diplomatically worded but perhaps rather naïve. Perhaps we could add in a few words as per the underlined italics below; D1 Working with the local planning authorities, and lobbying when necessary.. ***All relevant authorities need to 'further the purpose' now and evidence this.***

All seem to be there - I genuinely think nearly all are important and need urgent attention. ***Noted***

We recognise that we need to do more to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in the Mendip Hills National Landscape. Can you suggest any objectives to support this?

Suggest P4 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

Perhaps explicitly integrating these elements into more objectives than just the tourism/visitor/education elements? We also need to encourage equality, diversity and inclusion in the rural communities that live and work here in the farming community, for example in the farmers and the contractors who work on the walls, the hedging etc.

Noted. Suggest P4 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

This is the question. People access facilities more when they see themselves represented and using the area. Perhaps a goal should be to seek out/create Mendip Champions from within these groups and certainly seek to widen the board to include a louder minority voice. ***Noted. Suggest P4 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.***

A safe, accessible, connected strategic high value network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people, nature and wildlife needs to be delivered and promoted. There are still numerous issues with the condition and accessibility of structures, poor, missing or incorrect way marking, missing signs, inappropriate and misleading signs, obstructions, dangerous exits and places where people are promoted

routes have to walk, ride or cycle along dangerous roads and around blind bends. Many landowners suffer impacts from people and especially dogs but are unaware of the landowner countryside code or the British Standards that should apply on a rolling basis or the rules about people with dogs on access land. The existing access network is not safe for many people nor does it meet disability and equality standards. There needs to be a strategic rolling improvement programme and as paths and places are made safer, promotion of these to help people spread out, along with engagement aimed at overcoming the impacts that landowners and land managers face. ***Noted. Amend R3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature, and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation.***

Ensure all land meets a basic minimum standard, adapt to the reality of climate change by accounting for its impact in the decisions we make. ***Climate vulnerability assessment to be included in plan***

Promote access for all by working to develop a range of opportunities and facilities to meet different requirements of different potential user groups? ***Noted. Addressed in R1***

Rights of Way across the Mendips are not well maintained in very many places, and in some instances dangerous (e.g Velvet Bottom to Black Rock, where a good level, inviting footpath suddenly deteriorate into a steep rocky descent). There are no advisory signs on suitability of access or degree of difficulty anywhere. In many places on the Hills, waymarks are missing, signposts from the roads are missing, gates are sometimes padlocked. Until access is generally improved to an acceptable standard, it is difficult to see us widening our target audiences. Should we identify a stronger lobbying role for the National Landscape on the maintenance of Rights of Way? Some walks are more accessible, better maintained and far more suitable for a wider audience than other. Should these sites be better advertised? ***Noted. Addressed in R1 and through delivery plan work***

This is a universal problem and we just have to consider this objective when any activity is planned and then carried out. ***Noted***

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Management Plan Review 2024: Summary of SWOT Analysis

Results of workshop on the 18th March 2024 with the Partnership to run a SWOT analysis on the Climate, Nature, People and Place themes as part of the management plan review. 15 people attended.

A SWOT analysis is a way of analysing a theme or topic from four different perspectives; Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats.

Summary of subjects and responses for the Mendip Hills NL Management Plan

Broad subjects were repeatedly mentioned, in all SWOT categories throughout the workshop. Repeated mention show these subjects need to be included as issues in the management plan and where appropriate guide action in the delivery of the management plan.

The subjects are:

Access (especially public rights of way) *Addressed via amended R3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature , and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation.*

Engagement *Addressed via the NL Team and other partner organisations ensuring they maintain good quality volunteering opportunities, interpretation at sites and through project delivery.*

Transport *Addressed via D2 Working with the local highways authorities, ensure that the special qualities of the NL are fully respected in the planning, design, provision and management of all types of transport and associated infrastructure.*

and *R3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature , and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation.*

Farmers and engagement with them *Partnership works to maintain farm cluster groups and the extension of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.*

Funding *Local authority commitment needs to be secured and Defra address low core funding support for NL Team.*

Trees and hedges *Addressed via new Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) target to increase tree cover.*

Planning *Partnership to advise local planning authorities on the duty to 'further the purposes', section 245 Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.*

Volunteers *See engagement above*

Working in partnership *Addressed via governance review and subsequent changes.*

Local authorities *Opportunity for local authorities to focus enhanced delivery in the NL and via governance review and subsequent changes.*

Less mentioned but notable as they are mentioned for the first time in a review of the Mendip Hills NL management plan are; peat, the new national nature reserve and the Farming in Protected Landscape programme.

1 SWOT Questions for Place

Strengths - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what strengths do we have at present to deliver the targets? What strengths do we need?

Summary of responses;

- **NNR & NGOs:** Collaborate to create a sense of place.
- **Local Authority:** Planning and strategy for local nature recovery, biodiversity net gain (BNG), and funding mechanisms.
- **Farm Cluster Groups:** Strong in regenerative farming with government funding.
- **Spirit of Place (NT):** Branding for sites like Cheddar Gorge.
- **NGOs & Farmers:** Good relationships and knowledge sharing.
- **AWT:** Provides ecological advice.
- **B&NES Policies:** Protect and enhance the historic environment and landscape, with a focus on AONBs.

Weaknesses - Thinking about the Mendip Hills NL, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what are the weaknesses we are likely to encounter that prevent us from achieving our targets? What do we need to put in place to achieve the targets?

Summary of responses;

- **Regulations:** Unclear and difficult to interpret.
- **Food Security:** Issues with unethical food practices.
- **Planning Control:** Needs to be stricter.
- **Traditional Practices:** Reluctance to change farming practices.
- **Partnerships:** Sites can appear siloed; need better collaboration.
- **Volunteer Rangers:** May lack sufficient knowledge to educate visitors.
- **Partnership Effectiveness:** Needs improvement in working together and meeting more often.

- **Agricultural Land Use:** Often falls outside planning control.

Opportunities - Thinking about the Mendip Hills NL, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what opportunities lie ahead of us for this Protected Landscape?

Summary of responses;

- **Environment Act 2021:** Funding opportunities through targets and private finance like carbon credits.
- **Planning and Purpose:** Furthering the purpose of natural landscapes.
- **Ranger Education:** Training rangers to educate visitors.
- **Local Advisors and Facilitators:** Funding for more FiPL advisors.
- **Farmer Support:** Providing help and support to busy farmers.
- **Nature-Friendly Farming:** Promoting practices that exclude breeding animals for dairy and meat.
- **Ecological Advice:** Provided by Avon Wildlife Trust.
- **MHNL's Role:** Maximizing the use of its offices and encouraging support from individuals and government.
- **Volunteer Interest:** Encouraging volunteering for tasks like repairing dry stone walls and hedges.
- **Cheddar Gorge:** Promoting appreciation of this top national attraction.
- **B&NES Local Plan:** Setting stronger policies and visions, and exploring BNG offsetting potential.

Threats - Thinking about the Mendip Hills NL, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, identify any threats to achieving our targets. What can we, the Partnership put in place to mitigate for the threat?

Summary of responses;

- **Agri-Environmental Schemes:** Difficult to navigate.
- **Policy Enforcement:** People ignoring policies and regulations.
- **Farmer Polarization:** Risk of polarizing farmers against other stakeholders.
- **Nature-Friendly Farming:** Ensuring viability and cost-effectiveness for farmers.
- **Planning Concerns:** Developers raising viability concerns regarding land use.

2 SWOT Questions for People

Strengths - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what are the current strengths that we collectively, or

you as a Partnership member/organisation have in achieving this target? What strengths do we need?

Summary of responses;

- **Farmers:** Abundant land available.
- **Public Support:** Essential for ELMS test and trial, new access payments.
- **National Trust (NT):** “Everyone Welcome” strategy, strong membership, effective communication, and active presence.
- **Local Authority:** Can lobby for local access issues.
- **Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT):** Local groups enhancing community access.
- **B&NES:** Existing planning policies and mapped public rights of way.

Weaknesses - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what are the weaknesses we are likely to encounter that prevent us from achieving this target? What do we need to put in place to achieve the target?

Summary of responses;

- **Long-term Funding:** Insufficient for access.
- **Rights of Way (ROW):** Gates locked, signs missing, and general maintenance issues.
- **Visitor Engagement:** Low in Mendip; ‘welcome hub’ in Brean Down closed.
- **Local Authority (LA):** Funding issues leading to loss of local transport.
- **Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT):** Limited car parking.
- **Footpath Signage:** Needs improvement.
- **Visitor Impact:** Detrimental effects on the physical environment.
- **Collaboration:** Needs improvement with farmers.
- **Public Transport:** Lack of it affects access to less frequented areas.

Opportunities - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what opportunities are there currently that we should be taking up? What forthcoming opportunities are you aware of that we can utilise in the future to achieve our target?

Summary of responses;

- **Public Engagement:** Opportunities to publicize the [MHNL] website widely to attract visitors from outside the area and ensure language inclusivity.

- **Team Wilder:** Dedicated engagement team with 1 in 4 people actively involved in nature.
- **Volunteer Activities:** SWT open access to reserves training.
- **Accessibility Improvements:** Sharing information, sustainable transport, and advertising buses.
- **Community Links:** Multi-use community links, extending cul-de-sacs, and waymarking open access areas.
- **Landowner Incentives:** Rewards for creating, improving, and maintaining access.
- **Visitor Centres:** Brean Down Visitor Centre now in NNR, offering 'tramper' access.
- **Waymarking Programme:** Distinctive for MHNL.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Replacing stiles with gates, developing a multi-user network, and restoring green lanes.
- **Public Education:** Encouraging events like Mendip Rocks! and engaging youth in activities.
- **Local Plan Opportunities:** B&NES Local Plan process to promote access to green spaces and introduce health-related policies.

Threats - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, identify any threats to achieving our targets. What can we, the Partnership put in place to mitigate for the threat?

Summary of responses;

- **Increased Access:** Impact on landscape and wildlife, requiring management.
- **Public Transport Cuts:** Reducing accessibility.
- **Car Dependency:** Need for better parks to encourage walking and cycling.
- **Funding Struggles:** Risk of distraction from main aims.
- **Overuse Diseases:** Impact on livestock.
- **Public Accessibility:** Uncertainty about land accessibility and differing landowner aspirations.

3 SWOT Questions for Climate

Strengths - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what are the current strengths that we collectively, or you as a Partnership member/organisation have in achieving this target? What strengths do we need?

Summary of responses;

- **SC:** Declared climate emergency and has a climate strategy.
- **NT & SC:** Aiming for net zero by 2030.
- **NT:** Focus on climate action and use of electric equipment.
- **Community Commitment:** Individuals and groups dedicated to making a difference.
- **B&NES:** Policies to control light pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Woodland Opportunity Mapping:** Covers B&NES, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire.

Weaknesses - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what are the weaknesses we are likely to encounter that prevent us from achieving these targets? What do we need to put in place to achieve them?

Summary of responses;

- **Roads:** Poor condition, causing bottlenecks.
- **Monitoring:** Need for better methods to understand baseline and ongoing conditions.
- **Tree Maintenance:** Planted trees not maintained.
- **Peat Restoration:** Difficult to facilitate via planning system.
- **Land Ownership:** B&NES has limited land ownership, affecting tree planting influence.
- **Dark Skies Regulation:** Needs better regulation and more survey work.
- **Funding:** Insufficient for various climate-related initiatives.

Opportunities - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what opportunities are there currently that we should be taking up? What forthcoming opportunities are you aware of that we can utilise in the future to achieve our targets?

Summary of responses;

- **Electric Vehicles:** Electric truck for the NL team.
- **Transport Links:** Opportunities to improve bus, bike, and transport links.
- **Renewable Energy:** Encouraging solar panels on roofs and wind turbines.
- **Tree Planting:** Identifying opportunities for tree planting on farmland and increasing hedgerow cover.

- **Climate Resilience:** Management plans for fire and drought.
- **Sustainable Transport:** Strawberry Line for active travel.
- **New Crops:** Opportunities for new industries like vines and fruit.
- **Hedgerow Incentives:** Paying farmers to grow larger hedges.
- **Somerset Council Tree Strategy:** Political support and tree officers in place.
- **Education:** Promoting positive actions for climate among children and adults.
- **Peat Restoration:** Recognizing the role of peat in reducing flood risk and contributing to net zero targets.
- **Green Infrastructure:** Incorporating Natural England Green Infrastructure principles to increase tree canopy cover.
- **Lighting Policies:** Updating policies to minimize blue light content in ecologically sensitive areas.

Threats - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, identify any threats to achieving our targets. What can we, the Partnership put in place to mitigate for the threat?

Summary of responses;

- **Funding:** Insufficient long-term funding.
- **Sustainable Transport:** Lack of infrastructure for e-bikes, EV chargers, etc.
- **Climate Impact:** Fires and drought affecting woodlands and grasslands.
- **Housing:** Insufficient sustainable rural housing.
- **Agricultural Emissions:** Threat from intensive farming.
- **Tree Maintenance:** Planted trees not maintained.
- **Peatland Restoration:** Challenges from extreme weather.
- **Tree Diseases:** Ash dieback and other pests.
- **Climate Change:** Impact on trees and peat.

4 SWOT Questions for Nature

Strengths- Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what strengths do we have at present to deliver the targets? What strengths do we need?

Summary of responses;

- **FiPL Advice Lead:** Guidance for farmers.

- **Farm Cluster Group:** Led by SWT.
- **Nature Recovery Rangers:** Active in the area.
- **Champion Species:** Identified for conservation.
- **Regenerative Farming:** Increasing awareness.
- **Skilled Land Managers:** Knowledgeable advisers and ecologists.
- **B&NES:** National and local nature recovery strategies, existing ecology and landscape policies.

Opportunities - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what are the weaknesses we are likely to encounter that prevent us from achieving these targets? What do we need to put in place to achieve them?

Summary of responses;

- **Nature Recovery Network:** Development at both local and national levels.
- **Farm Cluster Groups:** Further development and support.
- **Green Infrastructure:** Encouraging landowners to create green infrastructure in access spaces.
- **NNR Funding:** Opportunities for large-scale, joined-up working.
- **Holistic Problem Solving:** Tackling issues in a comprehensive manner.
- **Water Usage:** Understanding the water runoff from Mendip.
- **Stockhill Forest Survey:** Assessing changes due to felling and forest floor opening.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** Increasing volunteer involvement.
- **ELMS Test Results:** Utilizing results for opportunities.
- **Visitor and Education Opportunities:** Enhancing visitor experiences and educational programs.
- **Nature-Based Funding:** More funding opportunities for nature recovery and local nature reserves (LNRs).
- **Youth Education:** Focusing on educating young people.
- **Value to Bristol:** Highlighting Mendip's value to Bristol.
- **Somerset Council:** Identifying new areas for nature recovery, tree planting strategies, and using biodiversity net gain (BNG) to assist nature recovery.
- **National Trust (NT) Targets:** Achieving higher nature status, restoring habitats, and planting 10 million trees.

- **B&NES Local Plan:** Opportunities to uplift BNG requirements and link green spaces.

Weaknesses - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, what opportunities are there currently that we should be taking up? What forthcoming opportunities are you aware of that we can utilise in the future to achieve our targets?

Summary of responses;

- **Fragmentation:** Sites not fully connected.
- **Awareness:** Lack of public awareness about nature-specific funding.
- **Maintenance:** Lack of funding for maintaining tree saplings and other nature projects.
- **Resources:** Significant resources needed for monitoring and management.
- **Bat Special Area of Conservation (SAC):** Guidance not formalized, affecting habitat management.

Threats - Thinking about the Mendip Hills National Landscape, your organisation / yourself as a Partner, the NL team, identify any threats to achieving our targets. What can we, the Partnership put in place to mitigate for the threat?

Summary of responses;

- **Funding:** End of FiPL funding and competitive nature of funding.
- **Climate Change:** Extreme weather events.
- **Natural England:** Lack of resources.
- **Dog Management:** Dogs off leads damaging biodiversity and habitat.
- **Public Awareness:** Lack of awareness and better regulation needed.
- **Development Pressures:** Increased pressures from development and commercial activities.
- **Pests and Diseases:** Affecting nature, farming, and health.
- **Evidence for Policies:** Need for robust evidence to justify approaches.

Complete notes from the workshop.

	PEOPLE	CLIMATE	NATURE	PLACE
STRENGTHS	Farmers - we have a lot of land! Need the support of public, ELMS test and trial, new access payment. NT - Everyone Welcome strategy, memberships, comms, boots on ground. Local Authority - local representation can lobby to solve local access issues. AWT - local groups - community access -. B&NES Existing planning policy in place and Public rights of way which are mapped. Green Infrastructure/ Nature Recovery projects or initiatives which improve green spaces for use by the public. The B&NES GI Strategy is currently being updated as a B&NES GI Framework and will include adopting Natural England (NE) GI Standards and Principles which include an accessible greenspace standard.	SCC declared climate emergency - climate strategy. NT - Net zero by 2030. SCC - net zero by 2030. NT - big push on climate action, electric kit. We are committed people so can affect things personally & in our groups. B&NES Existing lighting policy in place presents hooks at controlling light pollution which provides benefits to the environment and greenhouse gas emissions. B&NES has its woodland opportunity mapping tool and guidance which covers the B&NES part of the NL and Forest of Avon are currently rolling this out to North Somerset and South Glos so the North Somerset part of the NL will also be covered.	FiPL advice lead. Farm cluster group (SWT lead). Nature Recovery Rangers. Identified champion spp. Increasing awareness of regenerative farming. Skilled & knowledgeable land managers , advisers & ecologists. & B&NES Requirement of BNG nationally, and in addition to the national requirement of local nature recovery strategies (LNRS). Existing BNES ecology and landscape policy already in place.	NNR - NGOs blur boundaries sense of place. LA - planning and strategy, LNR strategy, BNG, mechanisms for funding, incentivising Ind managers, NFF. Keep FiPL engagement, some farmers who are not in schemes. Funding for more local advisors and facilitators. Farm cluster groups - strong regen farming - Government funding. Spirit of place (NT) identifies a 'brand' for sites eg Cheddar Gorge. Everyone Welcome Strategy (NT). NGOs working closely and having good relationships with neighbouring farmers, graziers, sharing knowledge (farm cluster). AWT - ecological advice. Existing Placemaking Plan Policy HE1 aims to manage the historic environment in the most efficient and effective way, and to sustain its overall value to society. B&NES The policy also seeks to ensure the proper assessment and

				understanding of the significance of a heritage asset and the contribution of its setting in the development process. Existing policy NE2 seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the character and quality of the landscape of the District. The policy also seeks to ensure where development is permitted it conserves or enhances important views particularly those to significant landmarks and features. Additionally, the policy includes reference to great weight being afforded to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty of AONBs (National Landscapes). Regarding target 5: Significant knowledge base and experience within Green Infrastructure and Nature Recovery Team in relation to funding bids and GI/NR related projects including partnership working (e.g. within Chew Valley) but not specific to nature friendly farming and not as targeted as Farming In Protected Landscapes (FIPL).
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WEAKNESSES	Long term funding for access. ROW gates locked, signs missing! Rights of Way not maintained in general. Actual visitor engagement in Mendip and 'welcome hub' in Brean Down has closed. LA lack of funding problems means loss of local transport AWT limited car parking. Better footpath finger posts. Visitors detrimental effect on physical environment. Missing sign posts. Collaboration with e.g. farmers. Lack of public transport, affects the ability to get into the less used areas, we need to encourage people away from the honeypots to less used parts of Mendip. B&NES Current planning policy setting out standards and requirements regarding access for green spaces are set within separate documents the current approach can result in inconsistency in terms of access to open space provided through the planning application process. The new B&NES GI Framework will be co-ordinated with the B&NES Greenspace Strategy and will	Terrible roads causing bottlenecks. Using the right methods to understand baseline & ongoing monitoring and understanding. Trees planted but not maintained. B&NES Restoration of peat would be difficult to facilitate via the planning system. As noted above many agricultural practices falling outside of development would normally be classed as permitted development not requiring planning permission. In any event noted there is no peat in Mendip Hills as related to the B&NES district. As such NE Target: 7 would not be relevant to B&NES. B&NES has very limited land ownership and none in NL, any influence regarding tree planting is through partnership working. B&NES work closely with the Forest of Avon and currently have a tree technician allocated to us until April 2025 who is developing a Parish Council planting project which would extend into the National Landscape with opportunities to plant a hectare of new canopy per parish.	Fragmentation. Overcrowding of people. Better regulation of Dark Skies required. More survey work required. Lack of funding. Sites not fully connected. Lack of funding. Lack of awareness. Not maintaining tree saplings - lack of funding - lack of engagement. Lack of funding for maintenance. Public information & awareness around nature specific funding & why directed to farming & land management. No B&NES Council owned or controlled land in NL, let alone land with such designations. No financial resources available. Significant resources of money, time and expertise needed to monitor target sites across NL, including botanical surveys and well as carry out appropriate management Further work is required regarding B&NES Bat Special Area of Conservation (SAC) guidance which could influence habitat management. Such guidance has never been formalised due initially to potential cross-over with BNG.	Regulations not clear/change - difficult to interpret. Food security - unethical food. Planning control should be stricter. Engrained/tradition practice, reluctance to change farming practice. Sites can appear in silo although we do work in partnership. Farmers overwhelmed and too much info. Plus restricted in resources/time, capabilities, lack of direction. Vol Ranger Team...do they know enough about the management plan to educate visitors? Too many subjects are simplified and not worked through properly - we need to go forward together. The Partnership and unit relationship and working together is not effective. The partners need to be a) specialists, b) have more/better overview & input (work), c) meet more often. Relationship should be more like charity/trustees or FiPL panel. B&NES Use of land for agriculture purposes can mostly fall outside of the control of planning (i.e. agriculture work or development can be classed as permitted
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	ensure confusion is resolved.		Noted a key SAC site Chew Valley Lake sits within the Mendip Hills National Landscape but no Council resources available.	development) requiring land managers to adopt nature friendly farming on their land by 2030 would potentially extend beyond the scope of planning control. Lack of resources to ensure designated heritage assets in nationally protected landscapes are not at risk. For instance, time spent by conservation / historic environment officers assessing whether harm has occurred. In addition, lack of availability of enforcement officers to manage any cases where harm has occurred without required permissions being in place. Lack of financial resources within the Council for project delivery, reliant on external funding sources and finding staff resources to make bids. Very constrained staff resources.
OPPORTUNITIES	Is the website widely publicised to encourage people in from out of the area? Language for all? Dedicated 'Team Wilder' engagement team, 1 in 4 actively involved in nature. SWT open access to reserves training providing volunteer activities.	Electric truck for NL team. Opps for improving bus/bike/transport links. Help people in MHNL to buy heat pumps & install. ID opps for tree planting on farmland/ increase hedgerow cover.	Develop nature recovery network (local & national). Further development of farm cluster groups. Encourage landowners to put/plant green infrastructure in access spaces. NNR funding - joined up working at scale.	Environment Act 2021 - targets should come with funding, private finance - trading carbon credits. NL - planning, furthering the purpose. Education for rangers - therefore visitors. Funding for more local FiPL advisors

	Improving accessibility, sharing information. Super NNR combined approach. Sustainable transport. Accessibility. Advertise buses. Walks to farm holdings. Multi use community links. Extend cul-de-sacs. Way mark & sign open access re: dogs on leads rule. Reward landowners to create, improve & maintain access. Brean Down Visitor centre now in NNR - opportunity for tramper access along Military Road. Waymarking programme (distinctive for MHNL). Replace stile with gates, British Standard, develop multi-user network of green infrastructure, access and biodiversity. Restore green lanes. Develop a pictorial image mechanism to overcome impacts. Long term funding. Liability. Public information/ education. Encourage events like Mendip Rocks! and draw in the young - school time & holiday activities. Always have youth as a 'box' to tick in every activity, box idea applies to other	Management plans and prep for fire & drought. Strawberry Line - NNR active travel and sustainable transport. New industries/ crops e.g vines, fruit. Incentivise /pay farmers to grow higher bigger, wider hedges. Council Tree Strategy - political support, tree officers in place. Solar on roofs in villages, farms & riding stables. Wind turbines. Make a point of encouraging others to do the right things. Natural Landscape should do as much education e.g positive - children & adults. Recognition of role of peat in reducing flood risk & contributing to net zero targets. Grow hedgerows wider & higher. Woodland - let hedgerow grow up (standard trees). Plant hedges & trees in access splays along corridors (green lanes) and along boundaries. Plant tree avenues everywhere, corners of fields. B&NES, clear opportunities presented as part of the new Local Plan process for B&NES. Seen through the introduction of amending	Like roads are good for getting around - hedges and tree strips are good for wildlife - plenty of opportunities on Mendip. All problems need to be tackled in a holistic way. What % of water running off Mendip is used one way or another? Survey Stockhill Forest to see what changes have occurred due to felling spp. lost/ gained due to the forest floor being opened up. Engage with more volunteers. ELMS test results are an opportunity. Opportunities for visitors & education. Opportunities for more nature-based funding & LNRs to help identify priorities; SFI, ELMS etc. Education of young people. Value of Mendip to Bristol. Somerset Council - identify new areas for nature recovery in LNRs, tree strategy to encourage tree planting, use of BNG to assist nature recovery, role as enabler & facilitator to unlock funding. NT targets (land, outdoors, nature) - LON strategy, 10 million trees target, all our land to reach higher nature status,	and facilitators. Farmers don't get up & think 'What shall I do today?' they are busy people and need help & support. Nature friendly farming does not include breeding of animals for dairy and meat. AWT - ecological advice. The MHNL's main opportunity is its existence so it should use its offices to a maximum and encourage more support from individuals to government. Need to encourage interest and volunteering to deal with the work available to repair dry stone walls, hedges etc. Do we appreciate Cheddar Gorge, one of the top national attractions in the UK? B&NES Clear opportunities presented as part of the new Local Plan process for B&NES. Stronger policy or vision being set out detailing the council's aspirations. BNG offsetting may have potential in relation to NE Target: 5 but these systems are still being developed.
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	groups & subjects. B&NES Clear opportunities presented as part of the new Local Plan process for B&NES. For instance, Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework principles and standards which promote access to green space. Introduction of health-related policy which aims to increase access to open space for residents.	existing policy to include a requirement for new tree-lined streets, a locally agreed tree canopy cover target, and incorporate the 'right tree, right place' principle. In addition incorporate Natural England Green Infrastructure principles and standards which seek to increase tree canopy cover. Further opportunities presented in the potential to increase BNG requirements from national requirement of 10% to 20% (subject to appropriate evidence). NE tree targets are very low compared with either current B&NES targets or Forest of Avon / WENP targets. There should be no issues regarding achieving 3 %, however, the key issue is about achieving it in the right place. With regards to lighting the proposed update Placemaking Plan Policy D8 to address requirements for all new external and public space lighting to have minimal blue light content, and to specify a general requirement for a colour temperature requirement in ecologically sensitive areas, and within	restore/create priority habitat, LAWTON principle. B&NES Clear opportunities presented as part of the new Local Plan process for B&NES. Requirement of BNG nationally in addition to options presented as part of the new local plan to uplift BNG from 10%-20%. The national requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies linking green spaces across the country is a further opportunity. This presents an opportunity for joint working with Somerset in which the Mendip Hills National landscape borders alongside B&NES. Review of B&NES green space strategy and Green infrastructure Framework/ strategy.	
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		protected landscapes.		
THREATS	Impact on landscape from increased access/numbers. Impact on wildlife and habitats (needs management). Topography can be difficult for some PPL designations. Cuts to public transport. We are at a critical time - cars are with us for decades yet, make good parks for them so encourage walking and cycling. Danger - getting distracted from the main aims - this is happening with the struggle for funds. Overuse stock diseases. B&NES Questions as to whether land would be made publicly accessible. Consideration of landowners who may have different aspirations for the land.	Lack of funding. Lack of sustainable transport. Lack of infrastructure for e-bikes, EV chargers etc, hire places etc. Climate impact on Mendip woodland & grassland (fires and drought). Threat through insufficient long term funding. Insufficient sustainable rural housing eg insulation/ windows. Threat from farming & intensive agriculture (emissions). Trees planted but not maintained. Peatland restoration - extreme weather. Peatland Partnership - recognition of need. 1Ash dieback - other pests & diseases. Tree diseases particularly affect MHNL. Trees - climate change, Peat - climate change & drying. B&NES Ensuring there is robust evidence in place to justify the approach. Potential for	End of FiPL funding. Climate change. Natural England lack of resources. Dogs off leads damage biodiversity & habitat. Dog poo! Funding is so competitive. Weather extremes (drought, wetter weather, more storm events). Better regulation on Dark Skies required. Development - increased pressures, commercial dog walking. Lack of awareness. Pest & diseases: nature, farming, health & well-being. B&NES Ensuring there is robust evidence in place to justify the approach. Potential for developers to raise viability concerns regarding land cover or use.	Agri-environmental schemes difficult to navigate. People ignore policy & regulations - little enforcement. This is a big question that needs proper working out, otherwise it is in danger of polarising farmers against others. Farmers want to produce maximum, others who put non-food questions first. B&NES Regarding the adoption of nature friendly farming where planning can influence ensuring there is robust evidence in place to justify the approach for instance viability to ensure such practices are cost effective for farmers.

		developers to raise viability concerns regarding land cover or use when seeking to increase tree canopy cover.		
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Mendip Hills National Landscape Team Response Summary

It's important that the diverse use of the area is reflected in the Management Plan.

Areas of Highest Priority

Each question asked respondents to prioritise the objectives in the existing plan. These are the highest ranking priorities with the response in Bold Italics.

- Enhancing biodiversity monitoring in Mendip Hills to support habitat conservation and adaptation to climate change. ***Addressed via Climate Vulnerability Assessment and subsequent actions.***
- Support a broad approach to conserving ecological and geological networks within and around the Mendip Hills. ***Noted. Best practice from Mendip 'super' National Nature Reserve management group needs to be disseminated across the Partnership.***
- Promote farming and land management practices that support climate adaptation, mitigation, and conservation of the Mendip Hills' Unique qualities. ***Amended objective LMI Support and promote farming to have a positive impact on the Mendip Hills NL, contributing to climate adaptation and mitigation and to the furthering of the special qualities of the National Landscape, while remaining the principle land use.***
- Ensure public access and recreational activities in Mendip Hills are inclusive, healthy, and aligned with its conservation goals. ***Addressed via existing P1 and new objectives R3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature, and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation and P4 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.***
- Promote a safe, accessible green infrastructure network that benefits people, nature and wildlife in the Mendip Hills. ***Addressed via new R3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature, and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation***

Statement of Community Involvement

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1. Executive summary

This report has been produced by Distinctive Communications on behalf of Mendip Hills National Landscape (the team).

The team required feedback from the public regarding the management of the Mendip Hills National Landscape to inform the Management Plan covering the period between 2025 and 2030. This allows residents, business owners, stakeholders and visitors to have an input on the priorities to help shape the future of the area.

The team appointed Distinctive to support this process. During a six-week consultation, we asked respondents for feedback on which themes were of greatest concern.

There were 113 responses to the survey. This feedback will help prioritise different areas as the team updates the report. Respondents also shared other thoughts, concerns and opportunities for the team to consider.

This document outlines the engagement that took place, the feedback provided by the community and stakeholders, and recommendations on next steps.

We are grateful to everyone who took the time to engage in this conversation.

2. Background information

The Management Plan identifies what the team believes is necessary to conserve and enhance this special landscape. The Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership leads on the production and review of the Management Plan for the local authorities who adopt it.

As required by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, local authorities have a statutory responsibility to produce and review the Management Plan every five years.

About the proposal

The proposed Management Plan aims to build on the current plan, setting out the priorities and approach for managing the National Landscape area, rather than detailing the specific projects and initiatives intended to achieve these goals. The plan covers key themes of nature restoration, climate change, people, and place, and outlines the strategy required in response to the needs of the area.

This approach is reflected in the consultation method, where stakeholders and interested parties were asked to vocalise their priorities within these themes, helping the team inform the final Management Plan.

3. Consultation approach

In line with [best practice guidance](#), our engagement ran for a six-week period from Wednesday 18 September to Wednesday 30 October 2024.

It was widely promoted, using online methods, local and regional media, leafletting hundreds of residents and businesses, directly emailing 109 stakeholders, and writing to 38 farmers and landowners.

All information was designed to be clear and comprehensive to explain the Management Plan's concept and goals.

We also set up a dedicated consultation email address and telephone line to open additional channels for feedback and ensure the consultation was accessible for all.

The headlines from the consultation approach:

- **Email detailing the consultation sent to 109 stakeholders** – including Somerset councillors, parish councillors, community group representatives and two Members of Parliament.
- **A press release generated eight items of media coverage**, including in *Somerset County Gazette*, *Chew Valley Gazette*, *Wells Journal* and *Central Somerset Gazette*. These media outlets cover a large proportion of the Mendip Hills area.
- **One hundred and fifty flyers distributed** to residents and local businesses, by hand and at events.
- **Thirty eight emails to landowners and farmers**, an important stakeholder group given the nature of the consultation.
- **Organic posts shared on social media:**
 - Five Facebook posts with combined reach of 15,228, 79 reactions, 21 shares, and 15 comments.
 - Two Instagram posts with a combined reach of 779, 51 likes and one comment.
- **Adverts on Facebook and Instagram** with a combined reach of 12,712 and 779 link clicks.
- **Attended the Mendip Ploughing Match**, distributing flyers and engaging with the local community.
- **Visited the Wells Natural History Society**, sharing consultation information and distributing flyers.

This led to 113 respondents completing the survey. In addition, one person got in touch via the consultation telephone line.

The following sections explain this approach in more detail.

Stakeholder outreach: We researched, compiled and prioritised a comprehensive stakeholder list of 109 individuals and organisations that would be impacted by or potentially have an interest in the consultation. These included county, district and parish councils, landowners, and special interest groups.

All stakeholders were contacted by email (**Appendix A**) on 18th September 2024, with details of the Management Plan consultation, informing them how we were engaging, and encouraging them to complete linked survey. The consultation email and telephone number were also provided.

Media engagement: A press release (**Appendix B**) was issued on the 18th September 2024 detailing the consultation and encouraging people to complete the survey. A follow up release (**Appendix C**) was issued on 14th October 2024 as a reminder that the consultation closed in two weeks.

The press releases were issued to local and regional media, securing print and online coverage, including in *Chew Valley Gazette*, *Central Somerset Gazette*, *Wells Journal*, *Somerset County Gazette*, *Wells News Hub* and *Glastonbury Nub News*.

We anticipate that there may have been additional print coverage in titles that we were unable to capture via our online search.

Online engagements: Details of the consultation were shared on the existing [MHNL Management Plan webpage](#), which was updated on the 18th September 2024.

The webpage (**Appendix D**) contained details of the consultation, a link to the survey, and the consultation email and telephone number.

Respondents were also encouraged to view the [current Management Plan 2019-2024](#), [the Nature Recovery Plan](#) and the [State of the AONB \(National Landscape\) report](#) on the same webpage prior to completing the survey, to inform their feedback

Survey: A survey was created on Google Forms (**Appendix E**) asking qualitative and quantitative questions about the Management Plan priorities under the key themes. There was also space for anecdotal feedback and open comments. Some questions were marked as mandatory, others were optional.

We asked for postcodes to provide context to their views.

Completing the questionnaire was the main 'call to action' in all consultation collateral.

In total, 113 people completed the survey. Of these, 47 people left their email address to receive further updates on the project, meaning that almost half (42%) wish to remain update on the process.

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Flyers: One hundred and fifty flyers (**Appendix F**) were designed and distributed directly to residents and businesses by hand, as well as at events. These gave a brief overview of MHNL, a link to the website, and a call to complete the survey.

Social media: Organic social media posts (**Appendix G**) were shared throughout the consultation period on the well-established MHNL Facebook and Instagram channels (6.2K Facebook followers, 2.9K Instagram followers).

Dates of posting:

- 18/09/24
- 20/09/24
- 03/10/24
- 07/10/24
- 10/10/24

These posts had a reach of 15,228 on Facebook and 779 on Instagram. All social media posts directed people to the Management Plan webpage.

In addition, budget was put towards advertising on Facebook and Instagram (Meta), with graphics for carousel adverts created.

The Meta advert ran from 14th to 21st October 2024. The adverts (**Appendix H**) had a reach of 12,712 and 779 link clicks directing people to the Management Plan webpage. The advert targeted men and women in all age groups in Cheddar (+17km), Shipham (+17km), Wells and Weston-super-Mare.

Emails and phone calls: The consultation email address and telephone number were active throughout the consultation period and after the consultation window closed. We received one phone call, which was logged, recorded, and responded to accordingly.

4. Schedule of activity

Activity	Date	Purpose
Management Plan web page updated	18/09/24	Hub of information on the consultation and link to survey.
Consultation launch press release	18/09/24	Publicise consultation and reach local people.
Email to stakeholders	18/09/24	Share consultation information and approach, encourage feedback via survey.
Organic social media posts	From 18/09/24 to 10/10/24	Sharing details with the MHNL's existing following who may be interested in the Management Plan.
Community engagement	25/09/24 and 04/10/24	Attended the Mendip Ploughing Match and Wells Natural History Society, distributing flyers.
Social media ads	From 14/10/24 to 21/10/24	Targeted to reach those areas close to MHNL.
Follow-up press release	14/10/24	Further outreach with consultation information, encouraging feedback.
Email to Mendip Farm Cluster Group (38 members)	01/10/24	Email introducing the consultation and encouraging engagement with the survey.
Flyers	18/10/24 – 31/10/24	Direct contact to businesses and residents likely to be interested in the Plan.
Letters to landowners and farmers	01/10/24	Provide details of consultation to those it may directly affect, encouraging feedback.

5. Who responded

Location: We had responses from 29 different postcode areas. The chart below shows the postcodes of where there were two or more respondents.

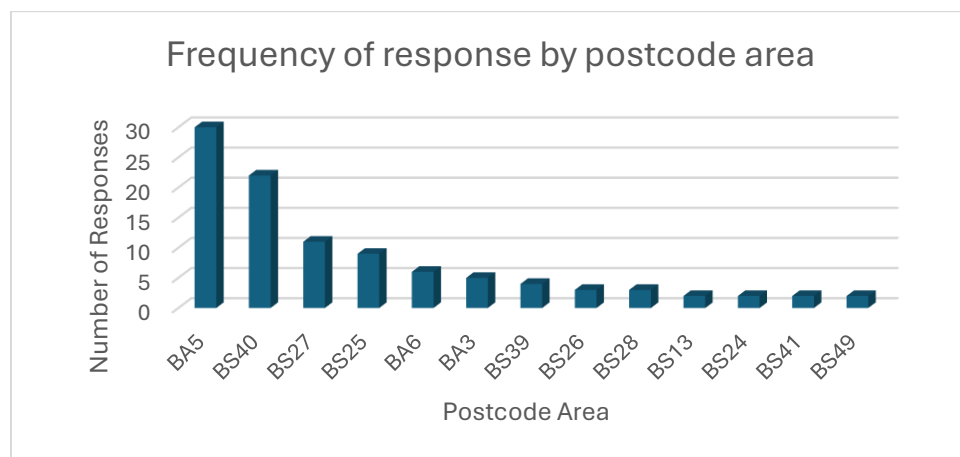


Figure 1. Bar chart presenting the postcode area on the X axis and the number of responses on the Y axis.

Those with the highest proportion of responses:

- BA5 (Wells, Wookey, Croscombe, Coxley, Westbury-sub-Mendip, Priddy)
- BS40 (Wrighton, Chew Magna, Blagdon, Winford, Chew Stoke)
- BS27 (Cheddar, Draycott, Rodney Stoke)

This demonstrates that we successfully reached people within Mendip and the areas immediately surrounding – those most likely to be impacted by the delivery of the Management Plan.

Demographic information: We also asked respondents their relationship to the area. Note, respondents could choose more than one option for this question.

- A local resident (within the Mendip Hills National Landscape area): 66 (58.4%)
- A Bath and North East Somerset resident (local authority): 18 (15.9%)
- A North Somerset Resident (local authority): 16 (14.5%)
- A Somerset Council resident (local authority): 30 (26.5%)
- A visitor to Mendip Hills National Landscape: 35 (31%)
- A local business owner or representative: seven (6.2%)
- A landowner/farmer: 16 (14.2%)

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



This shows we reached people with different relationships to the area. Given the large proportion of visitors to the area, it's vital that the Plan focuses on the needs of visitors, as well as local residents and businesses.

Use of area: Respondents were asked how they use the area. Note, respondents could choose more than one option for this question.

- Dog Walking: 38 (33.6%)
- Walking/Hiking/Rambling/Wheeling: 90 (79.6%)
- Cycling: 30 (26.5%)
- Climbing: 10 (8.8%)
- Caving: 12 (10.6%)
- Wildlife Watching: 66 (58.4%)
- Other recreational activity: 39 (34.5%)

Whilst it is evident that walking and wildlife watching are the prominent uses of amongst respondents, a large proportion who gave their views said they use the area for a range of other recreational activities. It's important that the diverse use of the area is reflected in the Management Plan.

Frequency of visit: The survey asked the frequency each respondent visits the MHNL.

How frequently do you visit Mendip Hills?

113 responses

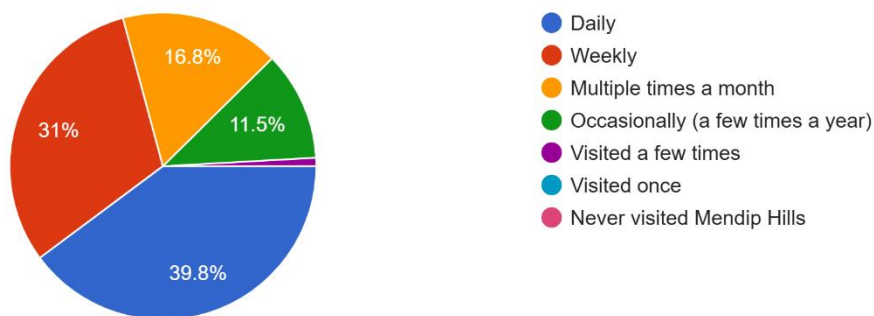


Figure 2. Pie chart presenting how frequently respondents visit the MHNL.

It is notable that only 12.4% state that they visit the area any less than multiple times a month. This illustrates how central the area is to the lives of the people that interact with it, with 70.8% of respondents saying they visit the area every week.

6. Feedback on priorities

This section details the feedback received on priorities during the consultation. A total of 113 responses were received via the survey.

The survey was split into four priority areas:

- Nature restoration
- Climate change
- People
- Place

Within each key area, participants were asked to rank objectives of the Management Plan regarding the central theme in order of priority.

For each key theme, objectives have been sorted into groups of 'higher', 'moderate' and 'lower' priority based on the directionality of clustering in the bar charts below. In cases in which it is possible to derive areas of the highest and lowest priority, these are also stated.

Priority Area 1: Nature Restoration

Respondents were asked to rank five objectives in order of priority.

Priority area 1: Nature Restoration. Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 5 being lowest priority). Please don't select more than one response per column.

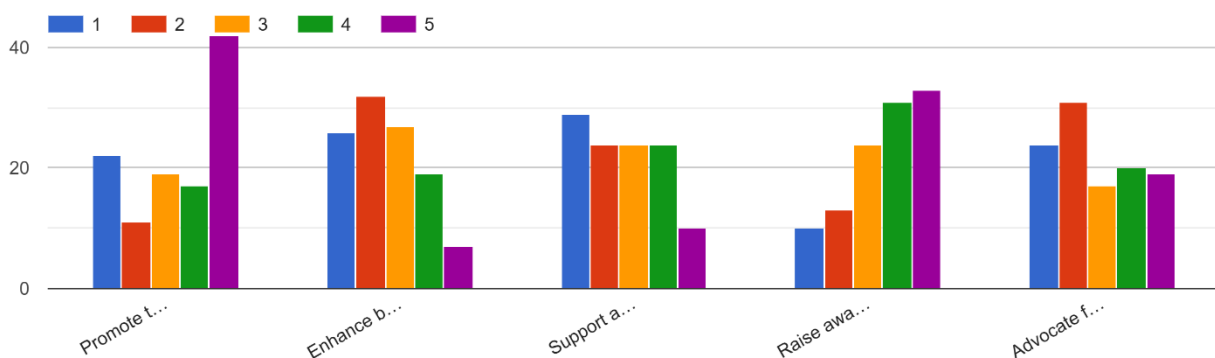


Figure 3. Bar chart presenting how respondents prioritised objectives under the theme of Nature Restoration.

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Area of highest priority

- Enhancing biodiversity monitoring in Mendip Hills to support habitat conservation and adaptation to climate change.
- Support a broad approach to conserving ecological and geological networks within and around the Mendip Hills.

Areas of higher priority

- Advocate for sustainable soil management through regenerative farming to reduce erosion and water pollution, enhancing climate resilience.

Areas of lower priority

- Promoting the Mendip Hills as a source of natural capital, offering economic, health, and climate resilience benefits.
- Raising awareness of Mendip Hills geology, particularly caves, to ensure conservation of geology, habitats and water resources.

Additional themes

- Maintaining the area with regard to local tradition e.g. dry stone walls.
- Re-seeding and reintroduction of endangered species.
- Measures to reduce hunting.

Priority Area 2: climate change

Respondents were asked to rank seven objectives in terms of priority.

Priority area 2: Climate Change. Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 7 being lowest priority). Please don't select more than one response per column.

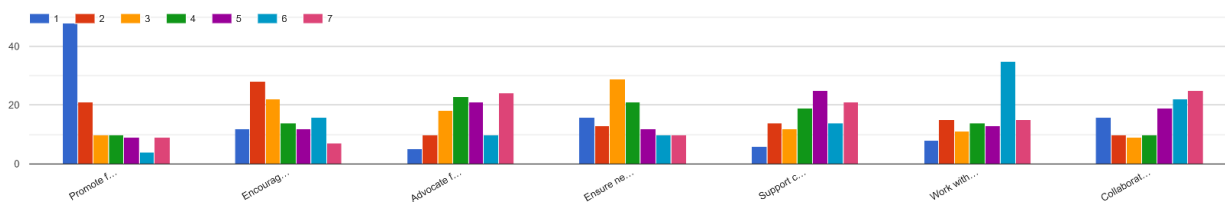


Figure 4. Bar chart presenting how respondents prioritised key objectives under the theme of climate change.

Area of highest priority

- Promote farming and land management practices that support climate adaptation, mitigation, and conservation of the Mendip Hills' Unique qualities.

Areas of moderately higher priority

- Encourage a sustainable woodland economy in Mendip Hills, focusing on climate-resilient species and community driven woodland creation.

Areas of moderate priority

- Collaborate with authorities and communities to ensure strategies and plans reflect the priorities of the Mendip Hills' management.
- Work with local highways authorities to ensure transport infrastructure respects the Mendip Hills special landscape qualities.
- Ensure new developments in the Mendip Hills are compatible with its unique qualities, meet housing needs, and support climate resilience.

Areas of lower priority

- Support carbon reduction in Mendip Hills by promoting energy conservation, sustainable development, and appropriate renewable energy technologies.
- Advocate for quarry restoration and use that minimises landscape impact and supports climate adaptation and the Mendip Hills' designation.

Additional Themes

- Reducing non-EV car use and promoting cycling and walking access.
- Water/flood management.

Priority Area 3: People

Respondents were asked to rank five objectives in terms of priority.

Priority area 3: People. Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 5 being lowest priority). Please don't select more than one response per column.

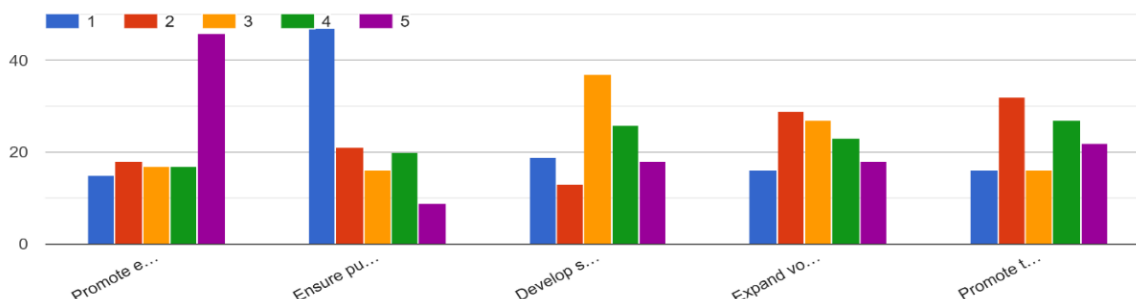


Figure 5. Bar chart presenting how respondents prioritised key objectives under the theme of People.

Areas of higher priority

- Ensure public access and recreational activities in Mendip Hills are inclusive, healthy, and aligned with its conservation goals.

Areas of moderate priority

- Expand volunteering opportunities in Mendip Hills, engaging diverse participants to benefit the environment, community, and well-being.
- Develop sustainable travel options for diverse user groups, enhancing access to and enjoyment of the Mendip Hills.

Areas of lower priority

- Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages, encouraging research and learning.

Area of lowest priority

- Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion within rural communities and tourism in the Mendip Hills, while enhancing its special qualities.

Additional themes

- Importance of horse riding in the area.
- Engagement with Landowners.
- Improve paths.
- Education and engagement into the importance of nature and countryside management.

Priority Area 4: Place

Respondents were asked to rate four objectives in terms of priority.

Priority areas 4: Place. Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 4 being lowest...e don't select more than one response per column.

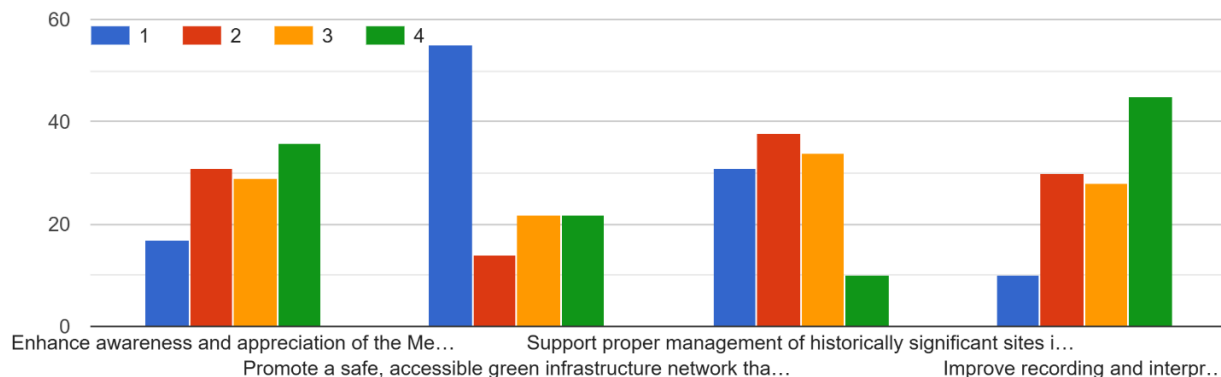


Figure 6. Bar chart presenting how respondents prioritised key objectives under the theme of Place.

Area of highest priority

- Promote a safe, accessible green infrastructure network that benefits people, nature and wildlife in the Mendip Hills.

Area of higher priority

- Support proper management of historically significant sites in the Mendip Hills to prevent the loss of heritage assets.

Areas of lower priority

- Enhance awareness and appreciation of the Mendip Hills' designation and unique qualities.

Area of lowest priority

- Improve recording and interpretation of the Mendip Hills' historic environment to enrich the experience for locals and visitors.

Other Management Plan considerations

Respondents were asked three open questions about Mendip Hills National Landscape. The key themes from each question were derived from a qualitative analysis of the responses:

What do you feel is special about MHNL? *Key themes:*

- Natural beauty and scenic views.
- Diverse and varied landscape, including limestone plateaus, gorges, moorlands, and rocky outcrops.
- Biodiversity of wildlife, unique flora and fauna, and rich habitats, including the limestone grasslands and woodlands.
- Ancient history, industrial heritage and archaeological significance.
- Accessibility and recreational opportunities in the area, particularly for outdoor activities.
- Sense of peace and tranquillity, an opportunity to escape from urban environments.
- Preservation and minimal development, maintaining the unspoilt nature of the area.

What do you feel are the biggest challenges MHNL may face over the next five years?

- Climate change impacts due to unpredictable weather patterns, habitat loss and risks like wildfires and flooding.
- Increased visitation leading to issues such as litter, path erosion and disturbance to wildlife and habitats.
- Limitations due to funding.
- Biodiversity loss due to habitat fragmentation, climate change and agricultural practices.
- Development pressures from local housing and transportation expansions.
- Farming practices creating unbalanced ecological systems.

Is there anything else you would like us to consider for the Management Plan?

- Maintain natural paths and landscapes, avoiding artificial materials on paths to preserve natural feel and limit speeding by cyclists.
- Focus on managing areas affected by habitat deterioration.
- Address light pollution and enforce traffic calming measures.
- Educate on litter management and general visitor impact.
- Enhance bridleway network and equestrian access.
- Collaboration with landowners and local partnerships to achieve landscape goals.

Emails and phone calls: We received one call to the consultation phone line during the consultation, in which the following thoughts were discussed:

- Steps being taken in the upcoming Management Plan to address illegal hunting in the area. The caller said the existing plan doesn't adequately cover this.
- Would like the duties of the police and other services to be referenced in the Plan, indicating a willingness to work with partner agencies to address the hunting.

7. Summary and recommendations

The consultation conducted by Distinctive Communications on behalf of the Mendip Hills National Landscape has provided a wealth of information and feedback which will be important in shaping the Management Plan.

Alongside the insights into the how the team should prioritise objectives, the open feedback sections provided ideas beyond the scope of the identified priorities.

The feedback received is central to the following recommendations:

- **Supporting diversity of use:** Demographic information from the survey demonstrates a wide variety of uses for the National Landscape area, including walking, wildlife watching, cycling and horse riding. The Management Plan should seek to address objectives from these different perspectives, including the lesser-represented groups.
- **Aligning priorities with feedback:** Whilst qualitative feedback suggests that people generally felt all objectives were important, some clear areas of prioritisation were reflected in the responses. The Management Plan should seek to prioritise allocating resources to the objectives that the community have stated are the most important to them, as detailed in section 6 of this report, under each of the key themes.
- **Addressing questions beyond the scope of the National Landscape team:** Although some queries raised are beyond the scope and control of the team, it's important that those who raised these concerns are heard. These questions and comments should be shared with appropriate authorities and organisations.
- **Continued communication:** With 42% of respondents leaving an email address, it is important that engagement continues where they have expressed a willingness to remain involved.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Stakeholder outreach email

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Stakeholder email

Good afternoon,

Shaping our countryside's future

The Mendip Hills National Landscape team is producing the Management Plan which will set the priorities for 2025 to 2030. We are asking for your help to shape these.

We have a statutory duty to produce a Management Plan every five years. The Plan covers nature restoration, climate change, people and place. It sets out the Partnership's approach for managing the Mendip Hills under each of these themes, not the projects and initiatives designed to deliver them – that comes next.

We cannot achieve these objectives on our own. Management of the Mendip Hills requires us to work closely with partners, stakeholders, farmers, landowners and other key groups. Your feedback is hugely valuable in helping us understand areas of concern and opportunity.

How can we shape the future of this special landscape?

We are launching a consultation to invite everyone to share their views. To read more and complete the survey online, please follow: <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>.

We would like to encourage you share details of the consultation with your communities / members too.



If you require a paper copy of the survey, please get in touch and we will arrange for one to be posted to you. Call 0330 107 0535 or email MendipPlan@distinctivemms.co.uk.

The deadline for feedback is Wednesday 30 October 2024. We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix B – Consultation launch media release



Mendip Hills National Landscape

Media release for immediate use

23 September 2024

Share your views to shape the future of Mendip Hills

Mendip Hills National Landscape has launched a consultation to gather feedback on priorities for the management of the countryside over the next five years.

Shaping the 2025 to 2030 Management Plan, the team wants to hear from residents, businesses and visitors to the area about what they think the plan should focus on. The consultation asks what people love about the area, and what steps the Partnership can be taken to improve it. The Partnership is the overarching body that brings all the relevant authorities together that conserve and enhance the national landscape.

The plan covers the themes of nature recovery, climate change, people, and place. It sets out the Partnership's approach for managing Mendip Hills with these themes in mind. These will then inform thinking about the projects and initiatives designed to deliver them.

Jim Hardcastle, manager of Mendip Hills National Landscape, said: "The Mendip Hills is a distinctive and nationally important landscape, with diverse habitats supporting abundant wildlife. We know it's a place that so many enjoy and care about.

"Such a special place requires careful and considered management. As we prepare the next Management Plan, we want to know if we're prioritising what matters most to you – the people who live, work in, and explore the area. We invite you to share your thoughts with us to help shape the future of our countryside.

"From the last review, we could see that people were concerned about the loss of nature, so we turned this concern into a Nature Recovery Plan for the area and a Nature Recovery Ranger who now leads practical work across the landscape. Visitor pressure was another key piece of feedback, which led us to employ a Sustainable Recreation Officer and install visitor counters across the area to help land managers understand how their sites are being used."

The Management Plan is a statutory document required by Natural England under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. It recognises the intrinsic links between conservation, enhancing natural beauty, and promoting access.

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



For more information and to complete the survey, visit <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>. The consultation is open until Wednesday, October 30, 2024.

Should any further support or information be required, the project team can be contacted on MendipPlan@distinctivecomms.co.uk or call 0330 107 0535.

ENDS

For more information, please contact Arianne Smart at Distinctive Communications on arianne.smart@distinctivecomms.co.uk or 07435 763384.

Attached map of the Mendip Hills National Landscape area and photographs may be used in connection with this press release.

About Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership

One of 46 National Landscapes in England and Wales, The Mendip Hills National Landscape is beautiful, but people make it outstanding. Our mission is to protect and regenerate this designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. And to make sure everyone can enjoy it.

As a small team, we work in partnership with many others. Bringing together landowners, the local community and other organisations to create and deliver the Management Plan. Through this plan, our team and partners make sure that Mendip Hills National Landscape is a beautiful, thriving place that all people feel they can be part of.

Designated in 1972, the Mendip Hills National Landscape covers 198sq km from Bleadon in the west to Chewton Mendip in the east.

To find out more, visit <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/>.

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix C – Follow-up media release



Mendip Hills National Landscape

Media release for immediate use

14 October 2024

Share your views to shape the future of Mendip Hills

There are two weeks remaining to share your views on the future of the Mendip Hills.

A consultation launched by the Mendip Hills National Landscape team is gathering feedback on priorities for the management of the countryside over the next five years.

Shaping the 2025 to 2030 Management Plan, the team wants to hear from residents, businesses and visitors to the area about what they think the plan should focus on.

The consultation asks what people love about the area, and what steps the Partnership can be taken to improve it. The Partnership is the overarching body that brings all the relevant authorities together that conserve and enhance the national landscape.

Jim Hardcastle, manager of Mendip Hills National Landscape, said: "Recent extreme weather and flash flooding has made evident the impacts of climate change. Coupled with the evolving needs of countryside users and growing pressures on nature, it is vital that we prioritise what matters most for Mendip Hills. We know this is a place that so many enjoy and care about."

The plan covers the themes of climate change, nature recovery, people, and place. It sets out the Partnership's approach for managing Mendip Hills with these themes in mind. These will then inform thinking about the projects and initiatives designed to deliver them.

Jim added: "Climate change is accelerating and we can see the effects on Mendip now. Last year, an adder was seen in late December as it was so mild. Plants are flowering at different times and insects are emerging out-of-sync with them. And I'm sure most communities around Mendip will have experienced the torrents of water after downpours."

The Management Plan is a statutory document required by Natural England under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. It recognises the intrinsic links between conservation, enhancing natural beauty, and promoting access.

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



For more information and to complete the survey, visit <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>. The consultation is open until Wednesday, October 30 2024.

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Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix D – [Management Plan web page](#)

**Mendip Hills
National
Landscape**

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Mendip Hills National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

MENDIP HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE > **MANAGEMENT PLAN**

MANAGEMENT PLAN



Shaping our countryside's future

We need your views to help shape the management of Mendip Hills for the next five years. Are we prioritising what matters most to you?

The Mendip Hills are a distinctive, nationally-important landscape, marked by steep slopes, gorges, ancient monuments, lakes, and diverse habitats, including wildflower-rich grasslands and wooded areas, supporting abundant wildlife.

Such a special place requires careful and considered management. The purpose of Mendip Hills National Landscape designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

As we prepare the Management Plan for 2025 to 2030 – which covers nature restoration, climate change, people and place – we want to hear from you. What do you love about the area? How can we develop an area resilient to climate change? What steps can be taken to improve access and enjoyment?

We want to know, how can we shape the future of our Mendip Hills?

The Management Plan sets out the priorities and approach for managing the Mendip Hills, not the projects and initiatives designed to deliver them – that comes next.

Before you complete the survey it may help you to look at the:

- [State of the AONB \(National Landscape\) report](#)
- [The Nature Recovery Plan](#)
- [The current Management Plan 2019-24](#)

Then share your thoughts via the survey [CLICK HERE](#)

Or **DOWNLOAD** the survey [HERE](#) and send it back using the address: FREEPOST DISTINCTIVE

Should you require any further support or information, or the plan in a different format please email MendipPlan@distinctivecomms.co.uk or call 0330 107 0535 or write to Mendip Hills National Landscape Team, Charterhouse Centre, Blagdon BS40 7XR. Hard copies can be returned using Freepost DISTINCTIVE

Click here to start the survey

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



FAQs

Q: What happens next?

A: The survey runs from Wednesday 18 September to Wednesday 30 October 2024. The team will consider all feedback in shaping the 2025-2030 Management Plan.

Once the consultation period has closed, we will analyse the feedback, produce a report, and write the Draft Management Plan. We aim to present the plan, shaped by your feedback, to Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership in November.

Once approved by the Partnership, the Draft Management Plan has a further statutory period of consultation before it is presented to the local authorities and Natural England for adoption. It will run from April 2025.

Q: Why are you developing a Management Plan?

A: The primary legislation relating to National Landscapes is set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act). This legislation uses the original term for National Landscapes, 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB).

The Act includes provisions on the designation of AONBs, sets out requirements for the publication of an AONB Management Plan and provides that the single purpose of AONBs is the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty.

We have a statutory duty to produce a Management Plan for the area every five years. The current management plan is for the period 2019-2024.

Q: Where can I find more information about the requirements of the Management Plan?

A: If you would like to learn more about the Management Plan process and requirements, you can read technical guidance from Natural England here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty-aonbs-designation-and-management>.

Q: Who is on the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee?

A:

- Somerset Council
- North Somerset Council
- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Mendip Hills National Landscape Team
- National Trust
- National Farmers Union
- Natural England
- Somerset Wildlife Trust
- Avon Wildlife Trust
- Bath and North East Somerset Parishes Representative
- North Somerset Parishes Representative
- Somerset Parishes Representative
- Mendip Society
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- The Trails Trust

Q: What is a National Landscape or an AONB?

A: In November 2023, all 46 Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) in England and Wales adopted a new name, National Landscapes. National Landscapes still retain the AONB designation and all the protections under the Countryside Rights of Way Act and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Q: I would like to complete a paper survey, where can I get one?

A: If you would like to complete a paper copy of the survey, please call 0330 107 0535 or email MendipPlan@distinctivemms.co.uk and we will post one out to you.

Hard copies of the survey can be returned to: Freepost DISTINCTIVE.

Q: I would like to give feedback outside of the survey, who can I contact?

A: If you have any additional feedback, or should you require any further support or information, please email MendipPlan@distinctivemms.co.uk or call 0330 107 0535.

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix E – Google Form survey

Section 1 of 3

Shaping the Countryside's Future

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Mendip Hills National Landscape - Management Plan Consultation

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on the Management Plan for Mendip Hills National Landscape, 2025-2030.

Before you complete the survey, it may help you to look at the State of the AONB (National Landscape) report; the Nature Recovery Plan; and the current Management Plan 2019-2024, which can be found here: <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>

Please then return to this survey afterwards.

Map of Mendip Hills Area

The map shows the Mendip Hills National Landscape area, including the Somerset Coast and the Mendip Hills. It features various geographical features, roads, and landmarks. A scale bar indicates 0 to 20km. The map is overlaid with a grid of National Grid coordinates.

National Landscape

- Woodland
- Open Access
- AWT: Aves Wildlife Trust
- DWT: Somerset Wildlife Trust
- National Trust

Strawberry Line (National Cycle Route 36)

West Country Way (National Cycle Route 3)

Wild Walk Start

Limestone Link

Mendip Way

Horner's Way

Ordnance Survey maps covering this area: Landranger 182, Explorer 141

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Privacy

Your personal information is captured, held, and processed by Distinctive Communications for the purposes of collecting feedback on Mendip Hills National Landscape's Management Plan. Distinctive Communications is consulting on behalf of Mendip Hills National Landscape team, meaning that we are joint data controllers for the purposes of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Your name and postcode are used to identify you as a single respondent. All your personal information is held in a secure database on a server located in the United Kingdom. It will be held for as long as is necessary to produce the Management Plan.

After section 1 Continue to next section

Section 2 of 3

About you

Description (optional)

Your name:

Short answer text

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please share which group here:

Short answer text

Your postcode (this is used to understand the geographical location of respondents and their proximity to Mendip Hills National Landscape): *

Short answer text

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Are you a... (tick all that apply): *

- ☐ A local resident (within the Mendip Hills National Landscape area)
- ☐ A Bath and North East Somerset resident (local authority)
- ☐ A North Somerset resident (local authority)
- ☐ A Somerset Council resident (local authority)
- ☐ A local business owner or representative
- ☐ A visitor to Mendip Hills National Landscape
- ☐ A landowner/farmer

How do you use the area? *

- ☐ Dog Walking
- ☐ Walking/ Hiking/ Rambling/ Wheeling
- ☐ Cycling
- ☐ Climbing
- ☐ Caving
- ☐ Wildlife Watching
- ☐ Other recreational activity

How frequently do you visit Mendip Hills? *

- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Multiple times a month
- ☐ Occasionally (a few times a year)
- ☐ Visited a few times
- ☐ Visited once
- ☐ Never visited Mendip Hills

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Section 3 of 3

Mendip Hills Management Plan

< >

Description (optional)

Have you seen the Mendip Hills National Landscape name and logo prior to engaging with this * consultation process?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Unsure

What do you feel is special about Mendip Hills National Landscape?

Long answer text

What do you feel are the biggest challenges Mendip Hills National Landscape may face over the next five years?

Long answer text

Priority area 1: Nature Restoration. *

Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 5 being lowest priority).

Please don't select more than one response per column.

	1	2	3	4	5
Promote the M...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enhance biodiv...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support a broa...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Raise awarene...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Advocate for s...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Is there anything under the theme of 'nature restoration' that we might have missed?

Long answer text

Priority area 2: Climate Change.



Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 7 being lowest priority).

Please don't select more than one response per column.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Promote f...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Encourage...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Advocate f...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ensure ne...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support c...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work with ...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Collaborat...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Is there anything under the theme of 'climate change' that we might have missed?

Long answer text

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Priority area 3: People.

Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 5 being lowest priority).

Please don't select more than one response per column.

	1	2	3	4	5
Promote equali...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ensure public a...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Develop sustai...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Expand volunte...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Promote the M...	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Is there anything under the theme of 'people' that we might have missed?

Long answer text

Priority areas 4: Place.

Please rank the following objectives in the order you feel they are most important (1 being highest priority, 4 being lowest priority).

Please don't select more than one response per column.

	1	2	3	4
Enhance awarenes...	☐	☐	☐	☐
Promote a safe, ac...	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support proper ma...	☐	☐	☐	☐
Improve recording ...	☐	☐	☐	☐

Is there anything under the theme of 'place' that we might have missed?

Long answer text

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Is there anything else you would like us to consider for our Mendip Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030?

Long answer text

If you would like to be added to the Mendip Hills National Landscape mailing list, please leave your name and email address below:

Description (optional)

Name:

Short answer text

Email Address:

Short answer text

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix F – Flyer



Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



The Mendip Hills are a distinctive landscape, marked by steep slopes, gorges, ancient monuments, lakes, and diverse habitats, including wildflower-rich grasslands and wooded areas, supporting abundant wildlife. Such a special place requires careful and considered management.

As we prepare the Management Plan for 2025 to 2030 we want to hear from you.

What do you love about the area?

How can we develop an area resilient to climate change?

What steps can be taken to improve access and enjoyment?

We want to know, how can we shape the future of our Mendip Hills?

Visit mendiphills-nl.org.uk to find out more and complete the survey.

Deadline for feedback is **Wednesday 30 October 2024.**

Should you require any further information, support, or this document in a different format please email MendipPlan@distinctivecomms.co.uk or call 0330 107 0535.



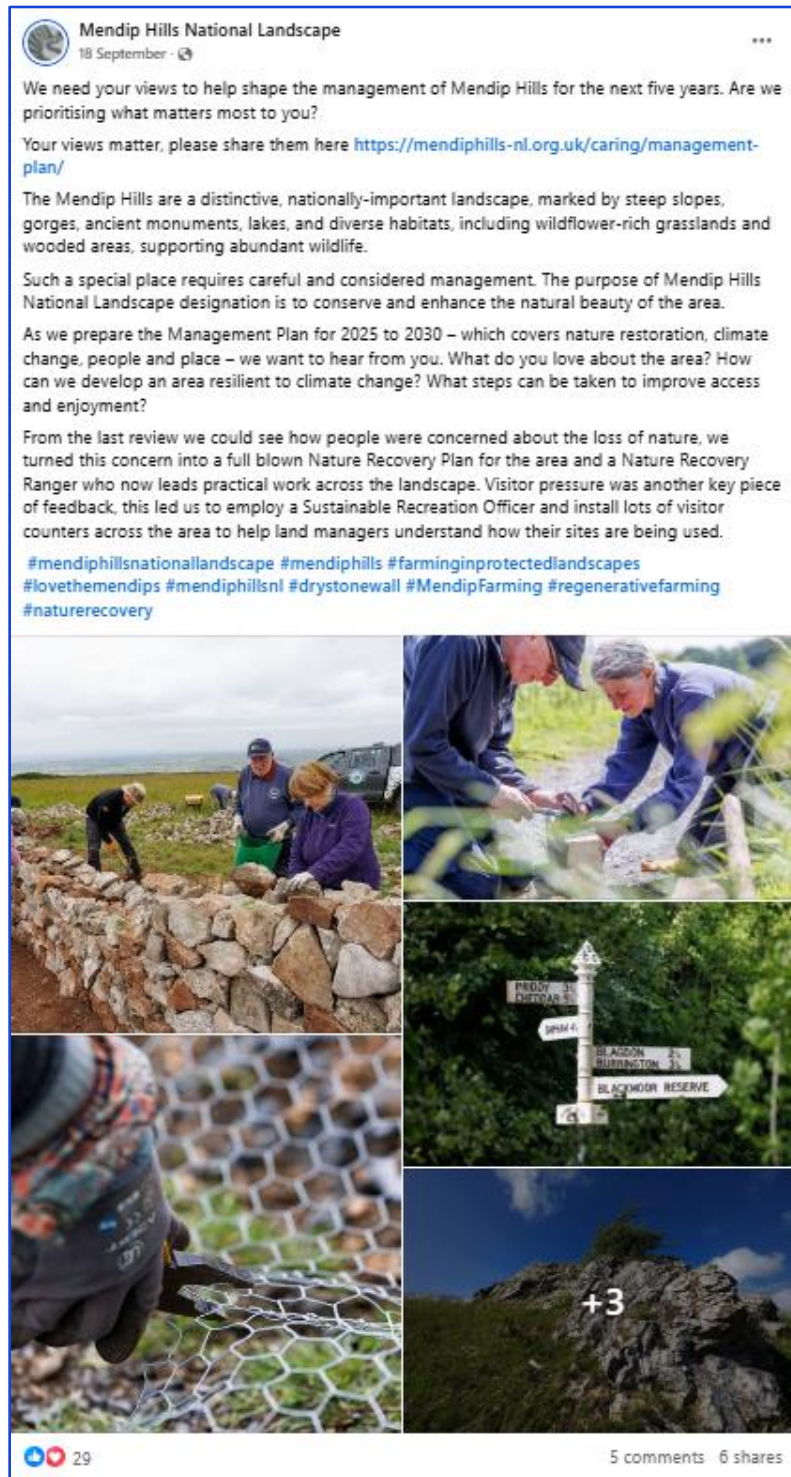
Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix G – Organic social media posts

Facebook:



Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



**Mendip Hills National Landscape**
20 September · 🌐

Before you have a go at the all-important survey where we're asking you to say what the priorities are for the Mendip Hills, take a look at the State of the AONB (National Landscape) report. It's got all you need to know about the area, from light pollution maps to number of people employed in farming.

Some headline stats:
There are 447km of public rights of way
There are 408km of drystone walls
The number of visitors to Deer Leap went up, but the numbers to Dolebury went down between 2019-22
Landholding average size has gone with the number of holdings going up
You can read much more here <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/.../State-of-the-AONB-2022...>
And then fill in the survey here <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>
[#mendiphills](#) [#lovethemendips](#) [#mendiphillsnl](#) [#drystonewall](#) [#MendipFarming](#) [#Mendip](#)

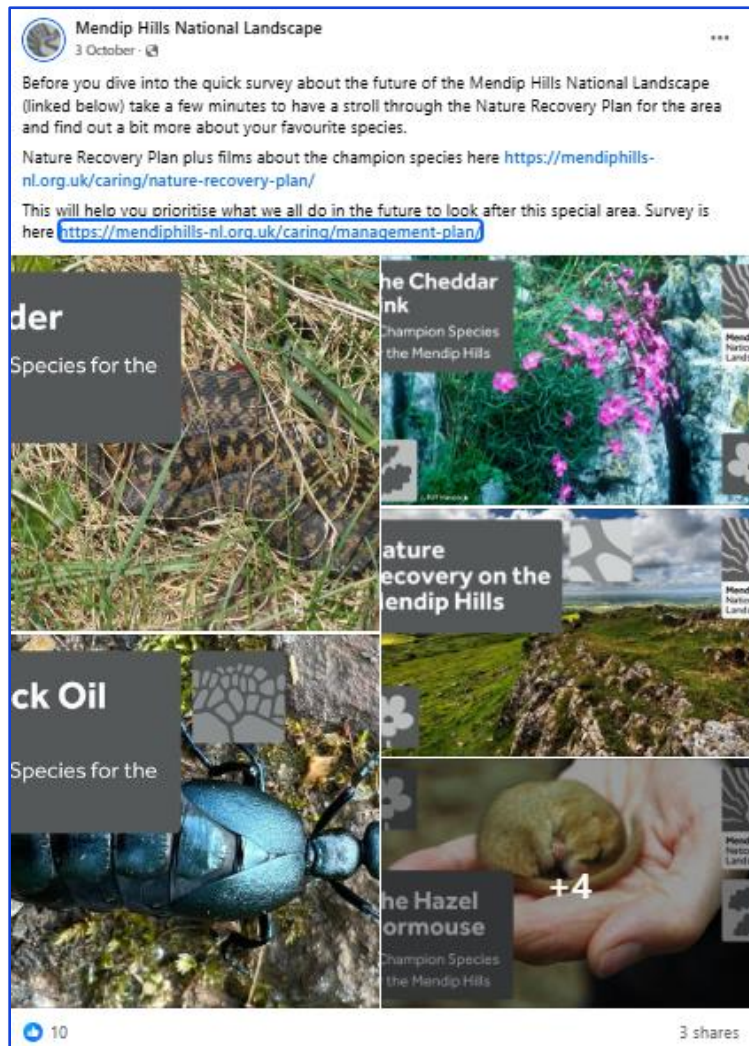


 13

1 comment · 2 shares

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



**Mendip Hills National Landscape**
7 October at 15:22 · 🌐

How would you rank the priorities for the Mendip Hills over the next 5 years?
Restoring nature? Addressing climate change? Improving access? Creating a better sense of place?

Please take 5 minutes to share your views via the survey <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>

Your views will shape the work of all the organisations involved in looking after the nationally important Mendip Hills.



Mendip Hills National Landscape
Charitable organisation

Call now

 15

9 comments

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Mendip Hills National Landscape

10 October at 15:32 · 🌐

...

There are just two weeks remaining to share your views on the future of the Mendip Hills.

The consultation is gathering feedback on priorities for the management of the countryside over the next five years.

Shaping the 2025 to 2030 Management Plan, the team wants to hear from residents, businesses and visitors to the area about what they think the plan should focus on.

The consultation asks what people love about the area, and what steps the Partnership can be taken to improve it. The Partnership is the overarching body that brings all the relevant authorities together that conserve and enhance the national landscape.

Jim Hardcastle, manager of Mendip Hills National Landscape, said: "Recent extreme weather and flash flooding has made evident the impacts of climate change. Coupled with the evolving needs of countryside users and growing pressures on nature, it is vital that we prioritise what matters most for Mendip Hills. We know this is a place that so many enjoy and care about."

The plan covers the themes of climate change, nature recovery, people, and place. It sets out the Partnership's approach for managing Mendip Hills with these themes in mind. These will then inform thinking about the projects and initiatives designed to deliver them.

Jim added: "Climate change is accelerating and we can see the effects on Mendip now. Last year an adder was seen in late December as it was so mild. Plants are flowering at different times and insects are emerging out-of-sync with them. And I'm sure most communities around Mendip will have experienced the torrents of water after downpours. This survey gives people a chance to share what the priorities should be for this special area."

The Management Plan is a statutory document required by Natural England under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. It recognises the intrinsic links between conservation, enhancing natural beauty, and promoting access.

Please take a few minutes to complete the survey here, you can download it and send it back via a Freepost address. <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>



Instagram:

Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future

A group of people are working on a dry stone wall in a rural landscape. A black van with 'MENDIP HILLS RANGER' written on it is parked in the background.

mendiphillsnl • Follow

mendiphillsnl We need your views to help shape the management of Mendip Hills for the next five years. Are we prioritising what matters most to you?

Your views matter, please share them here
<https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>

The Mendip Hills are a distinctive, nationally-important landscape, marked by steep slopes, gorges, ancient monuments, lakes, and diverse habitats, including wildflower-rich grasslands and wooded areas, supporting abundant wildlife.

Such a special place requires careful and considered management. The purpose of Mendip Hills National Landscape designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

As we prepare the Management Plan for 2025 to 2030 – which covers nature restoration, climate change, people and place – we want to hear from you. What do you love about the area? How can we develop an area resilient to climate change? What steps can be taken to improve access and enjoyment?

25 likes
18 September

Add a comment... Post

A close-up shot of a dry stone wall, showing the texture of the stones and a small orange object (possibly a tool or marker) resting on top.

mendiphillsnl • Follow

mendiphillsnl Before you have a go at the all-important survey where we're asking you to say what the priorities are for the Mendip Hills, take a look at the State of the AONB (National Landscape) report. It's got all you need to know about the area, from light pollution maps to number of people employed in farming.

Some headline stats;
There are 447km of public rights of way
There are 408km of drystone walls
The number of visitors to Deer Leap went up, but the numbers to Dolebury went down between 2019-22
Landholding average size has gone with the number of holdings going up

You can read much more here <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/State-of-the-AONB-2022-Report-Final-6June23.pdf>

And then fill in the survey here <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/>

#mendiphillsnationallandscape #mendiphills
#lovethemendips #mendiphillsnl #drystonewall
#MendipFarming #Mendip

26 likes
20 September

Add a comment... Post

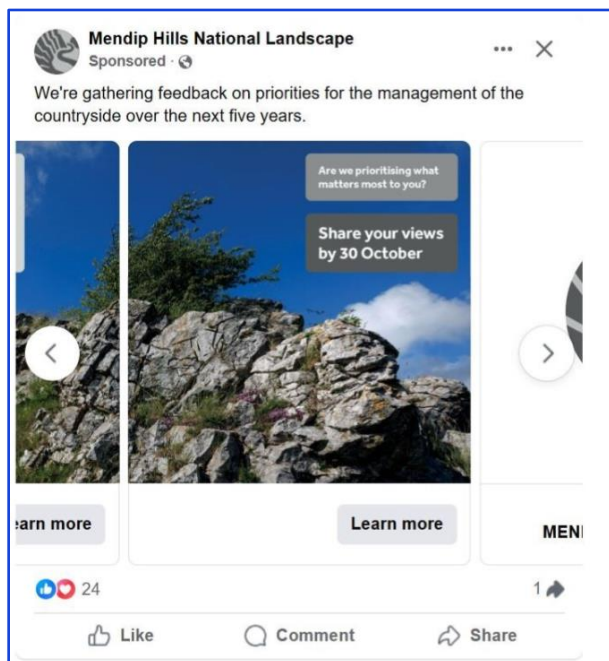
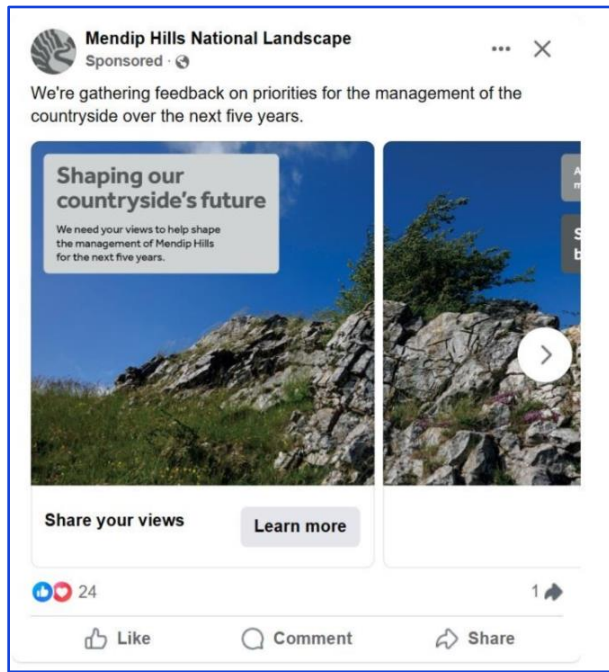
Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Appendix H – Meta advert

Facebook:

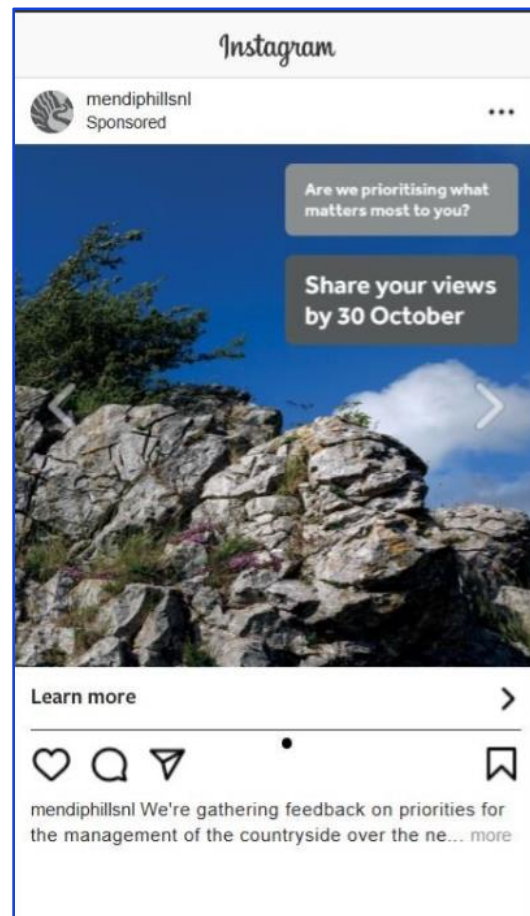
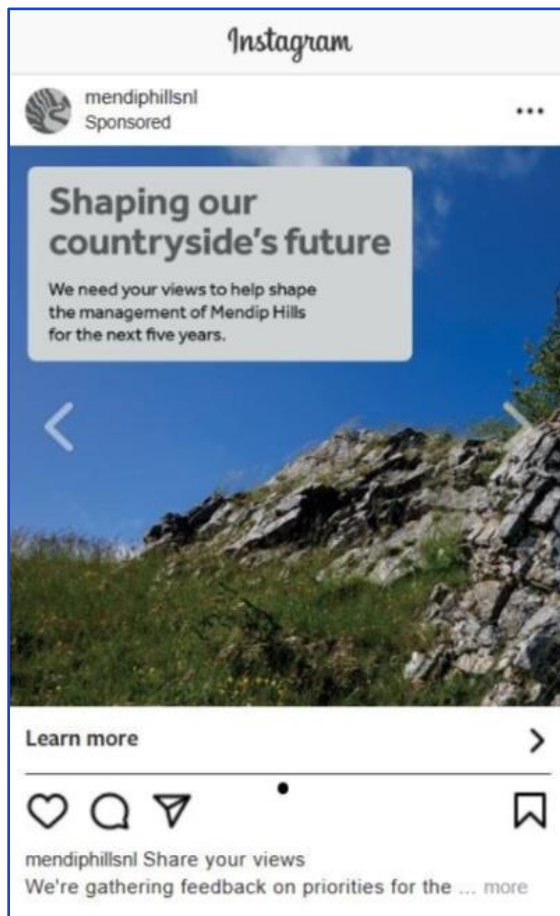


Mendip Hills National Landscape

Shaping the countryside's future



Instagram:





Mendip Hills National Landscape

Mendip Hills National Landscape (designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

DRAFT

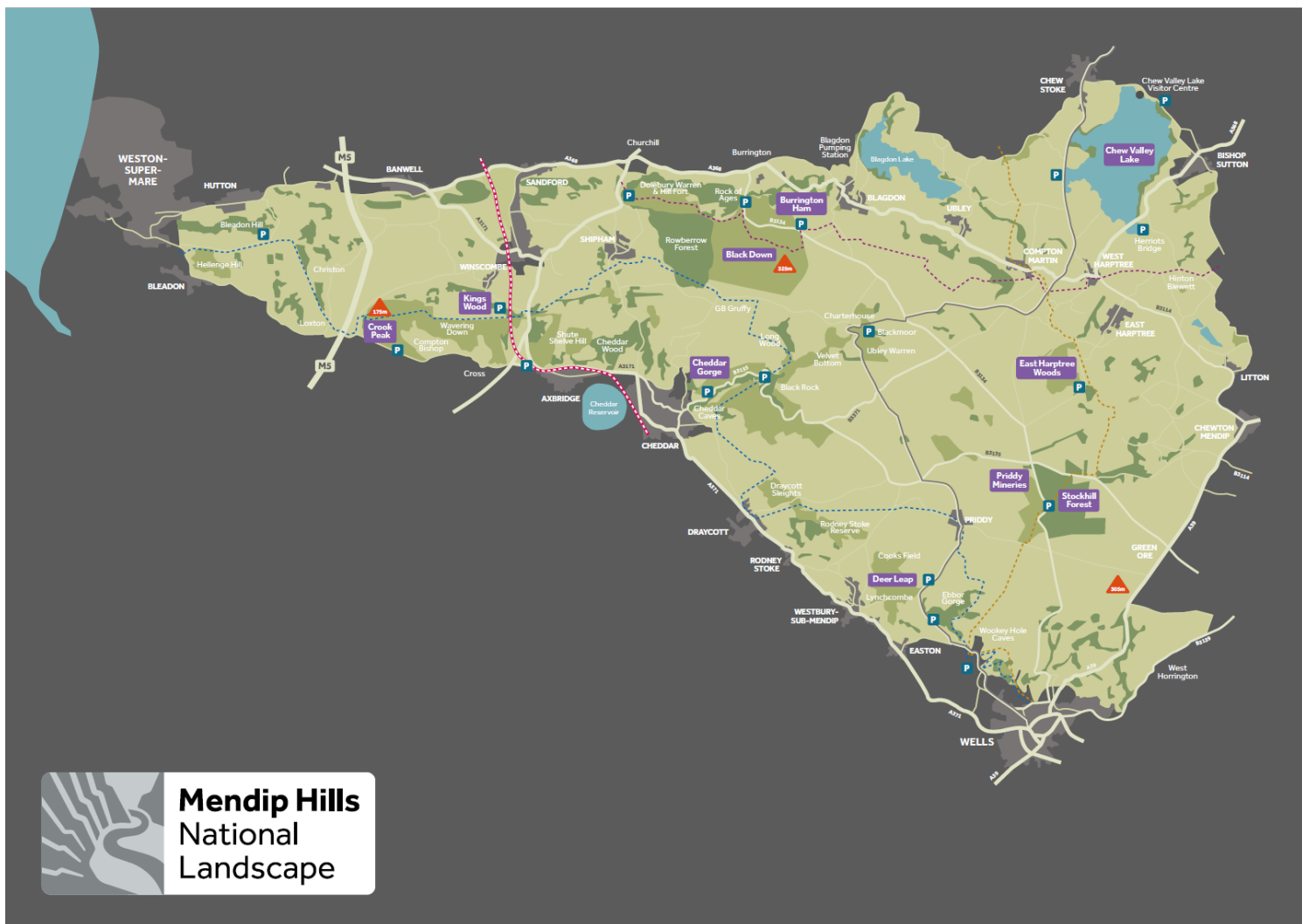
Management Plan 2025-2030

(October 2024)

From 22nd November 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. The Mendip Hills National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is referred to as such in policy, legislation and guidance. For this reason, this document is titled and referred to as the Mendip Hills National Landscape area of outstanding natural beauty management plan 2025-2030. Its statutory purpose remains unchanged.

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Minister's Foreword

To be inserted

Chairman's Foreword

To be inserted

DRAFT

What is a National Landscape?

This plan uses the term National Landscape (NL) for the designated area and National Landscape Partnership/Team for the organisation. It still refers to AONBs when referring to the use of the designation and legislative background.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks were brought into being by the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, and have the same status, and level of protection. NLs are particularly special landscapes, whose distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

In pursuing the primary purpose, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development, that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty, and the needs of agriculture, forestry, and other uses. *Reference: Countryside Commission CCP356(1991)*

'Natural beauty' includes flora, fauna, geological and physiographic features. These aspects of natural beauty are key components of the landscape. However, landscape is also about visual and sensory tranquility, the dark night skies, the relationship between people and place, the interaction between nature and culture. It is therefore very important that the cultural dimension of the landscape, including the historical, intellectual and spiritual elements as well as the physical human shaping of the land is fully recognized.

Further to this the **European Landscape Convention** (ratified by the UK Government in 2006) states 'as a reflection of European identity and diversity, the landscape is our living natural and cultural heritage, be it ordinary or outstanding, urban or rural, on land or in water.'

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 confirmed the significance of AONBs and Section 85 places a statutory legal duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 brought amendment of section 85 (A1) into statute on 26 December 2023, whereby; Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 is amended as follows (emphasis added):

*A1) In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must **seek to further the purpose** of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.*

The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** designates the UK's NLs as Category V – Protected Landscape/seascape – ‘a protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value’.

More information on NLs and their status and protection can be found on the following websites:

Mendip Hills National Landscape (www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk)

Defra (www.defra.gov.uk)

Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

DRAFT

Who is the Plan for and how should it be used?

The Plan for this nationally designated, protected landscape is overarching of local authority administrative boundaries, and other plans and strategies. It identifies what is necessary to conserve, enhance and to further the purposes of this special landscape.¹ The Mendip Hills NL Management Plan is a 'material' consideration in determining planning applications, and at appeals.

Whilst set in the context of national and local policy, plans, and strategies, the NL Management Plan seeks to influence these as they evolve and are implemented, to ensure that they include policies to conserve, enhance and seek to further the purposes of the NL and support the aims of the Management Plan.

The Plan plays a crucial part in obtaining commitment from public entities, which includes taking steps to adhere to the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act Section 85 Duty of Regard. Revisions to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill 2023 stipulate that as of December 2023, the duty has been significantly enhanced in such a way that;

*'In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an area of outstanding natural beauty in England, a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority must **seek to further the purpose** of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.'*

The CROW Act 2000 requires relevant local authorities to produce and adopt a plan which *'formulates policy for the management of the area, and for carrying out their functions in relation to it.'*

'90A Duty of public bodies etc in relation to management plans

(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—

(a) requiring a relevant authority other than a devolved Welsh authority to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of plans under section 89 relating to an area of outstanding natural beauty in England;

(b) setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.'

The NL Partnership, the advisory body for the Mendip Hills NL produces the Management Plan, on behalf of its local authority partners, Somerset Council, Bath and North-East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council.

The NL Partnership through engagement with other stakeholders seeks to deliver this Plan through a coordinated annual Delivery Plan of actions, assisted and managed by the NL Team.

¹ Paragraph 24 of the NPPF (2023) sets out that 'Local planning authorities and county councils are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries'.

The Plan sets out what the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL are in the Statement of Significance. It has considered current issues and future trends to devise objectives which address these, in order to conserve, enhance and restore the special qualities to achieve the Vision for the Mendip Hills NL.

The Plans focus is with the designated area but what happens in the countryside adjacent to the boundary, or within view of the NL is also of significance.

This review of the 2019-2024 Management Plan was undertaken in accordance with the Guidance on the review of NL Management Plans, Countryside Agency (2006). A Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening (SEA), a Habitat Regulation Assessment as required by the European Habitats Directive, and an Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken [prior to the plans adoption].

Relevant authorities

Section 85 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities *'...in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect land [in an AONB] must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty...'*

'Relevant authorities' include all public bodies (county, borough, district, parish and community councils, joint planning boards and other statutory committees); statutory undertakers (such as energy and water utilities, licensed telecommunications companies, nationalised companies such as Network Rail and other bodies established under statute responsible for railways, roads and canals); government ministers and civil servants.

Activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the duty.

Local authority's functions and the Plan

The Management Plan is relevant to any local authority function that may have an influence upon the natural beauty of the AONB, including:

- Planning and development, including neighbourhood planning
- Scheduled monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas
- Building regulations and energy efficiency
- Waste, environment protection, pesticides and pollution
- Libraries and museums
- Animal health and welfare, biodiversity, flooding and marine areas
- Rights of way and coastal access
- Food and food safety
- Public health, mental health, social care and young people
- Highways, traffic management, public transport and parking
- Education

A full list can be found at Statutory duties placed on local government – data.gov.uk

The Plan is also relevant for;

Landowners, land managers and developers: Those who own and manage land in the National Landscape have a vital role to play; the plan aims to guide, support and attract resources for sensitive management of the National Landscape.

Local communities, businesses and visitors: Everyone who lives, works or visits the Mendip Hills can play an active role in caring for the National Landscape; the plan identifies some of the priorities for action and ways to become involved.

Others such as funding bodies, third sector, and voluntary groups and organisations may refer to the plan or use it to gain a greater understanding of the issues affecting the area.

National Planning Policy Framework

National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023. The NPPF applies as a whole to AONBs as it does to non-designated areas and sets out that planning policies and decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. However, two paragraphs refer specifically to AONBs: paragraphs 182 and 183, see below.

The NPPF and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance form important material considerations with regard to development management and confirm that:

- The scale and extent of development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) should be limited
- The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not automatically apply within the Mendip Hills AONB (where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, OR where any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework taken as a whole)
- There is a presumption that planning permission should be refused for major development in AONBs other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest
- Policies for protecting AONBs may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for housing and other development in full (where the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area)
- AONBs are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining, non-designated, areas.

Paragraph 182 of the NPPF states: *‘Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.’*

Paragraph 183 of the NPPF states: *'When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of: a. the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy; b. the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and c. any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreation opportunities and the extent to which they can be moderated.'*

Major development as referred to in paragraph 183 of the NPPF is not defined, but Footnote 64 of the NPPF explains: *'For the purposes of paragraphs 182 and 183, whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.'*

How was the plan prepared?

Date	Task	Who	Complete
Notification			
Sept 2022	Authorisation from local authorities to undertake the review on their behalf	NL Team	Yes
Scoping and review			
Nov 2022	OSG Update	NL Team	Yes
Dec 2022	Commission State of the AONB report using Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in the Protected Landscape Data from Natural England	NL Team & third party	Yes
Nov -Dec 2023	Consider strengths and weaknesses of current Plan – focus on Special Qualities	NL Team	Yes
Nov 2023	OSG Update on interim Management Plan	NL Team	Yes
Jan 2024	Partnership committee members and relevant stakeholders complete a review questionnaire of current plan	NL Team / P'ship	Yes
March 2024	OSG Update	NL Team	Yes
March 2024	Review and assess current management themes at issues and ideas session	NL Team /external support	Yes
Sept 2024	Public consultation on current Plan	NL Team /external support	Yes
Oct 2024	Collate responses on issues from online survey (Appendix 5)	NL Team	Yes
Oct-Nov 2024	Draft new wording for revised plan	NL Team	Yes
Nov 2024	Working draft of Management Plan sent to Larry Burrows for drafting of HRA and also to inform drafting of SEA screening	External support	
Nov 2024	SEA Screening	NL Team	
Consultation and Approval of Full Plan			
Dec 2024	Forward draft of Management Plan, SEA screening, Equality Impact Assessment and Statement of Community Consultation to OSG	NL Team	
Dec 2024	SEA screening sent to statutory consultees	NL Team	
Dec 2024	OSG Update	NL Team	
Nov 2024-Jan 2025	Public consultation on new draft Plan and HRA report	NL Team /External support	
Jan 2025	Collate responses and make amendments	NL Team	
Jan-Feb 2025	Send draft plan to Natural England	NL Team	
Feb 2025	Send final documents to OSG to take through to adoption by LA	LPAs	
Mar 2025	Send approved plan to Secretary of State	NL Team	

Drivers of Change

The Mendip Hills NL Management Plan needs to take account of the wider environment in which it operates, see Appendix X for additional information on drivers for change.

Changes in farming and the rural economy

Leaving the European Union has precipitated change in many aspects of agriculture, environmental law and regulations. Protecting the landscape character of the Mendip Hills NL within the ever-changing pressures on farming and the rural economy is a challenge, however, new farm payment systems provide opportunities to improve conservation, access, and encourage public understanding. The NL Management Plan should be linked to decisions around farm payments. The 2018 Agriculture Bill and the Environment Act 2023 will further shape delivery of the NL Management Plan.

Development

Growth of the settlements in the setting of, and adjacent to the North Somerset boundary at Bleadon, Churchill, Sandford and Winscombe could impact on the special qualities of the NL, in particular dark night skies and tranquility. The bypass at Banwell will enable development to the north of the NL boundary. Axbridge, Cheddar and Wells on the southern boundary, facing significant development pressure. Increased traffic levels, and visitor numbers could also have a serious impact within the NL. Development of onshore wind and solar energy is likely to increase during the life of the plan.

Population Increase

Of the 28 parishes wholly, or partly in the NL, 17 had a population increase between the 2001 and 2011 census.² Local increases are also mirrored by national growth in population. Public benefit through enjoyment of the hills is a significant objective of this Plan. Carefully managed access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling, and rock sports brings physical and mental health benefits, enabling people to enjoy a beautiful landscape, reconnect with nature, and provide support to the local economy. Inappropriate levels, or types of activity can however impact on the natural capital, particularly landscape beauty, tranquillity, and biodiversity, of the NL reducing others' ability to enjoy, and benefit from the area.

Administration

Since the last Management Plan there have been substantial developments relating to the governance arrangements in Somerset with the incorporation of Mendip and Sedgemoor District Councils into the new Somerset Council in 2022. The three local authorities involved in the partnership all face financial difficulties with Somerset Council declaring a financial emergency. The challenges all impact on the Mendip Hills NL, and through engagement with the various committees, and through elected members, we aim to keep issues that affect the area on the agenda of these bodies, and to ensure adequate, and suitable funding streams, and services can be accessed across the NL area.

² State of the Mendip Hills AONB Report 2022

Climate Change

There is broad scientific consensus that the global climate is changing. However, the precise nature of these changes, and the consequent impacts on the special features of the NL is complex and uncertain. Under climate change the Mendip Hills are likely to get warmer; summers will continue to get hotter and drier, and winters will continue to get milder and wetter, with inevitable exceptions.

Climate change is likely to result in periods of heavy rain that may cause more frequent flood events from surface runoff, increased flooding of settlements at the foot of the hills, rock fall, soil erosion, and associated impacts on water quality. Increased carbon dioxide, and a longer growing season could potentially lead to double cropping with impacts on soil condition due to increased cultivation. This may lead to different crops suited to a warmer climate. Increasing occurrences of droughts would lead to increases in water demand for crop growth, business, and domestic use, and drying out, and erosion of soils.

Increased storminess, drought, and prevalence of pest and diseases may result in damage or loss of ancient woodlands and mature, ancient, and veteran trees. Changes to seasonal temperature and rainfall could begin to change tree productivity. Tree provenance of native species will become more important. Species migration, and loss of small, or isolated habitats, and populations are likely. Composition and productivity of habitats will change and require management.

Climate change poses threats to the historic environment. Intense rainfall causes erosion of archaeological sites, and increased extremes of soaking and drying heighten risk of ground subsidence and accelerate the decay of stonework. Changes in vegetation patterns may cover and damage archaeological remains, and leave others exposed and desiccated.

Mitigating climate change through development of renewable energy and new build is likely to present challenges to conserving and enhancing landscape character. Whilst every building should strive to reduce its carbon footprint, mitigation should not be at the expense of the surrounding landscape, and traditional buildings. The embodied energy contained within historic buildings should also be acknowledged in any energy efficient proposals.

Please see the Climate Vulnerability Assessment, page XXX

The Benefits of the Mendip Hills NL

25 Year Environment Plan - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment DEFRA (January 2018)

The 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a long-term approach to protecting and enhancing a variety of natural landscapes and habitats, with goals of cleaner air and water, plants and animals which are thriving, and a cleaner, greener environment. The first line outlines the vision, "It is this Government's ambition to leave our environment in a better state than we found it".

The 25 Year Environment Plan includes, on page 65, that 'Some of England's most beautiful landscapes and geodiversity are protected via a range of designations including National Parks and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)... Over the next 25 years we want to make sure they are not only conserved but enhanced'.

The Plan further sets out, on page 56 and 57, that *'In England, a quarter of our landscape is designated in this way, around 10% as National Parks and 15% as AONBs. We will make sure they continue to be conserved and enhanced, while recognising that they are living landscapes that support rural communities... While development is not prohibited in National Parks or AONBs, major development should take place only in exceptional circumstances'*.

A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. The Mendip Hills NL has a wealth of natural capital and the benefits we get from the NL's attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) are often described as 'ecosystem services'.

Taking account of all the economic and non-economic benefits we get from ecosystem services enables decision makers to exercise judgement about how we use our environment. Such an approach is often called an 'ecosystems approach'. In all considerations, it is important that decisions value the natural capital and ecosystem services of the Mendip Hills NL to the economy.

Ecosystem services include provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services. Table X, highlights some of the Mendip Hills NL Ecosystem Services that are provided nationally, regionally, and locally. Services of national importance reflect the special qualities of the nationally protected landscape. The Mendip Hills NL's natural capital and ecosystem services it provides are supported through objectives in this Plan.

Mendip Hills NL Ecosystem Services

Provisioning services	
- Water supply	The entire area lies over an important Carboniferous Limestone aquifer which is designated as a Major Aquifer Unit, making a major contribution to public water supply, and supplying Bristol, and the surrounding area via Cheddar, Blagdon, and Chew Valley reservoirs. The Mendip aquifer also supplies the hot springs in Bath.
- Food	Cheddar has a long tradition of, and is internationally associated with, cheese production. Dairying is prevalent on the plateau, including national food producers. Cider apples are grown commercially in the Wrington Vale, and in community orchards on the northern edge of the NL.
- Timber	Foresters in the NL produce timber in extensive plantations, smaller-scale timber harvests come from farm woodlands.
- Fuel	Woodlands, including small farm woodlands, provide fuel.
- Genetic diversity	Local livestock breeds help maintain genetic diversity.
Regulating services	
- Water flow and flood risk	Most of the NL is within a Groundwater Source Protection Zone due to its contribution to public water supply. Groundwater quality is generally good. The ecological quality of the emergent rivers is largely moderate. Parts of the Mendip Hills fall within the Congresbury Yeo catchment, part of the North Somerset Moors Catchment Sensitive Farming Priority Catchment.
- Disease and pest regulation	Healthy and diverse ecosystems are less vulnerable to pests and disease and can help regulate them.
- Pollination	Pollination of crops is important for food supply – healthy ecosystems such as lowland heath and flower meadows, support this service.
- Climate regulation and carbon storage	The commercial forestry plantations and wooded combes, plus the heathland store large amounts of carbon in the shallow peat, with deeper peat in smaller areas.
Cultural services	
- Cultural heritage and historic environment	The history of the landscape is evident ranging from prehistoric settlement and activity to World War 2 archaeology. The prehistoric henges of Gorsey Bigbury and Priddy Circles, form in combination with over 300 Bronze Age barrows, a ritual landscape of national significance. Large hill forts from the Iron Age, such as Dolebury, and smaller sites such as Banwell, are evidence of a complex pattern of territories and lordship. Quarries and pitted landscapes are evidence of lead mining and other extraction activity, some of which continues today. Field patterns reflect the various histories of enclosure and settlement.
- Spiritual values	The NL's landscapes and tranquility provide spiritual inspiration and enrichment from nature for many people.
- Aesthetic values	

Due to the height contrast between the surrounding levels, the NL is renowned for the views it provides.
- Sense of place The distinctive landform provides residents and visitors with a sense of place, and cultural heritage.
- Education The Mendip Hills have a long tradition of providing outdoor adventure and education activities, formally at locations like Charterhouse Centre, visiting groups and Duke of Edinburgh Awards.
- Recreation and tourism The Mendip Hills are accessible to the large populations of Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare, and the smaller surrounding settlements. Access to the outdoors is fundamental to promoting healthier lifestyles. Tourism is important to the local economy, Wookey Hole and Cheddar Gorge drawing in large numbers of visitors. Walking, cycling, horse-riding and rock-sports are also popular activities.
Supporting services
- Wildlife / biodiversity Mendip still has representation of many rare and threatened species and acts as a stronghold for some. There are 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) covering 2721 ha, 3 Special Area of Conservation (SAC), 1 Special Protection Area (SPA), and 2 National Nature Reserves within the Mendip Hills NL. Ash woodland and calcareous grasslands are internationally designated, and also sites for greater horseshoe bats.
- Soil The vast majority of soils covering the Mendip Hills are at risk of erosion where poor management could result in loss of stabilising vegetation. This is exacerbated by the steep slopes, and high precipitation. Sustainable systems of arable cultivation, and appropriate levels of livestock to reduce poaching, and soil exposure, particularly on steeper slopes are encouraged.
- Nutrient cycling Plants, animals, and micro-organisms play a crucial role in the cycling of nutrients essential for the delivery of ecosystem benefits.

Natural beauty

Natural England National Character Areas (NCA)

Natural England has produced National Character Areas profile documents for each of the 159 NCAs in England. NCA 141 Mendip Hills covers most of the NL except for the Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes which are covered by NCA 118 Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges.

The NCA profile for the Mendip Hills (141) highlights that the area is '*renowned for its tranquility and inspirational qualities ...*' and recognises that '*Light pollution from development threatens the extent of the recognised dark skies and out-of-character development is a continuing risk to the essential nature of the area.*' Within the NCA Statement of Environmental Opportunity under SEO1 it set out '*Safeguard inward and outward views and to the distinctive hill line and conserve and enhance the special qualities, tranquility, sense of remoteness and naturalness of the area*'.

The NCA profile for Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (118) highlights that to the south of Bristol, 'the land fall to the Yeo and Chew valleys, where Chew and Blagdon lakes, within the Mendip Hills NL, are prominent features near the foot of the Mendip scarp. These lakes also provide a valuable source of drinking water and are designated as Drinking Water Protected Areas under the Water Framework Directive.

Statement of Significance – The Special Qualities of the Mendip Hills NL

Rising from the Somerset Levels are the distinctive Mendip Hills, that with the lakes of Chew Valley and Blagdon, form the 198sq kms that is the Mendip Hills NL. The special qualities that together create the Mendip Hills NL sense of place and identity are:

- The dark skies, tranquility³, sense of remoteness, and naturalness of the area.
- The distinctive limestone ridges and scarp slopes, rising from the Somerset Levels and Moors, and windswept plateau punctuated by spectacular dry valleys and gorges, ancient sinkholes and depressions, and impressive rocky outcrops.
- Views towards the Mendip Hills and the distinctive hill line. The views out, and panoramas, including across the Severn Estuary to Wales, the Somerset Levels and Moors, and the Somerset Coast.
- A sparsely populated plateau, with settlements of Mendip stone largely confined to the spring line.
- The diverse and visible geology that ranges from Devonian to Jurassic in a relatively small area, making it one of the best areas in the country to

³ Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (LI and IEMA 2013) define tranquility as 'a state of calm and quietude associated with peace, considered to be a significant asset of landscape'. Information on tranquillity can also be found in the Landscape Institute Technical Information Note 01/2017.

appreciate the relationships between geology, landscape, and natural history, including the iconic Cheddar Gorge.

- Caves, for their wildlife, geological, archaeological importance, including Aveline's Hole the oldest cemetery site in Britain, and Goughs Cave one of the most important Palaeolithic sites in Europe that provides a breeding site for Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats.
- The limestone aquifer supplying water to the reservoirs of Cheddar, Chew Valley, and Blagdon lakes, and providing habitats of local and international importance for birds with Chew Valley Lake designated a Special Protection Area for bird species.
- The Chew Valley and the Yeo Valley - a farmed landscape with distinctive hedgerow patterns and hedgerow trees, providing interconnected semi-natural habitats.
- Dry stone walls that criss-cross the plateau farmlands grazed by sheep, beef and dairy cattle, are a key feature of the karst landscape and provide a unique habitat for wildlife corridors.
- Steep south-facing slopes of flower rich, limestone grasslands, including the Mendip Limestone Grasslands Special Area of Conservation, and the area known as the Strawberry Belt of horticultural activity producing soft fruits.
- Ancient woodland and wooded combes on the north and south slopes offering varied habitats of national, and international importance for a wide diversity of wildlife, including dormouse and bats.
- A landscape tracing human settlement dating back 500,000 years. Henge monuments, barrows, and hillforts through to World War 2 sites are prominent features on the plateau, as are remnants of Roman and Victorian lead mining.
- A landscape engaging people in a wide range of interests and outdoor pursuits, including caving, climbing, cycling, and quieter activities, including bird watching and walking, to experience the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL.

Particular combinations of these special qualities form **11 distinctive landscape areas identified in the Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment (1998)**

The Vision

Our Vision for the Mendip Hills NL in 15 years

The vision, aligned with the Management Plan themes, outlines the desired future state of the NL in 15 years. It is anticipated that this goal will be realized through the implementation of this Plan and future iterations.

The Vision

The Mendip Hills National Landscape offers a wealth of opportunities for all people and wildlife to benefit from the nationally protected landscape. The living landscape conserves and enhances natural beauty, supporting the economy, health and wellbeing of our society.

We will realise this vision by achieving the themes of Nature, Climate, People, Place.

NATURE – biodiversity, geodiversity and natural resources

The vision for Nature will be resilient and coherent ecological networks in place providing more, bigger, better, and joined up habitats, with the restoration of characteristic species. The creation of the Mendip National Nature Reserve in October 2023 contributes towards this coherency throughout the Mendip landscape. The area's diverse geology will be understood and managed for its importance, both in terms of the biodiversity, and ecosystem services that benefit wildlife, people and business.

Integrated land use management that will restore and continue to enhance the area's natural capital including soils, food, and water supply.

CLIMATE - land Management and development

The vision for Climate, the National Landscape is important for the mitigation of climate change and through appropriate land management it has the capacity to adapt to climate change. As the main land use agriculture continues to contribute to enhancing landscape character, ecological networks, and the provision of benefits: such as clean water. Native woodland will be managed for wildlife, climate change mitigation and recreation, as well as fuel.

Development in, or near to the Mendip Hills NL will be truly sustainable contributing to the Government's climate change targets/ net zero targets as well as for social, and economic needs of the area. Development will enhance, and respects the special qualities of the area, including visual and sensory tranquillity.

PEOPLE – Participation, recreation, access and tourism

The vision for People is improving participation, and in particular, those in harder to reach communities in our cities and towns.

Provision for enjoyment by a diverse population, from both within and beyond the NL boundary, through a wide range of active, and quiet pursuits that the area can sustain. The area will be accessible, regardless of individual mobility, wealth or background.

Significant numbers of the local community accessing training and learning to benefit their involvement in the conservation and enhancement of the Mendip Hills NL, either through direct employment in the rural economy, or as custodians of the landscape, influencing decision makers, or volunteering.

PLACE – landscape quality, historic environment and cultural heritage

The vision for Place is a wide understanding and appreciation of the Mendip Hills as a protected area of distinct character, created over time by the interaction of people and nature. Its ecological, biological, cultural, and scenic value conserved and enhanced. Collaborative partnerships working together with a shared understanding of the purposes of the National Landscape.

Enhanced understanding of the National Landscape's historic environment and cultural heritage, with appropriate management in place to ensure all sites, structures, and landscapes are conserved and enhanced, and local communities, and visitors enjoy a rich experience of sense of place.

Management Plan Themes

To achieve the vision for the Mendip Hills NL, the Partnership and stakeholders have set out objectives under the 4 themes, Nature, Climate, People and PLace. Although there are objectives for each theme, the Plan should be taken in its entirety and recognise the relationship between themes and ecosystem services as shown on Table 1, page XX and XX. The themes and their objectives are not in any order of priority.

There is an introduction to each theme followed by issues, and then objectives to address the issues. Relevant indicators to monitor change are shown for each theme. Actions associated with each objective are set out in the subsequent Delivery Plan.

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NATURE

Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objectives:

BG1 Increase the characteristic habitats and species of the Mendip Hills.

BG2 Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and enhancement of ecological networks within and adjoining the NL.

BG3 Increase monitoring and awareness of the biodiversity resource of the Mendip Hills NL so that it is sufficiently understood to continue to guide the successful conservation of the characteristic habitats and species.

BG4 Promote a partnership approach to implementing NL Management Plan objectives, Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework and National Character Area Statements of Opportunity.

BG5 Recognise and celebrate geological sites and features of the Mendip Hills NL to ensure the successful conservation both of the geology and wildlife habitat they provide.

BG6 Increase awareness of the Mendip Hills geology, particularly cave systems in relation to the importance they play in water management and water supply.

Indicators (data provider)

% of SSSIs in favourable/recovering condition (NE)

% of geological SSSIs units in favourable/recovering condition (NE) Condition of broad habitats (NE)

Geology, soil type, as well as human influences such as agriculture and mining, have resulted in the Mendip Hills distinctive landscape features, and give rise to the variety of habitats, and their dependent flora and fauna.

Over millennia, humans have reduced the cover of woodlands, creating open habitats such as grassland. Land enclosures enabled farmers to create more agriculturally productive grasslands from heathland. In the more recent past, technological innovations have enabled significantly increased the agricultural yields of grassland, which has also changed the character of grassland habitats. Species rich grassland habitats are now increasingly rare and only occur where low intensity management takes place, and on inaccessible areas difficult to plough.

Habitats of importance in the Mendip Hills include heathland, acid grassland, calcareous grassland, neutral grassland (meadows), calaminarian grassland (occurs on lead mined spoil heaps), purple moor grass, and semi-natural ancient woodland with typical Mendip species, ash and lime.

The spoil heaps from lead mining provide distinctive Mendip habitats due to the high levels of lead, cadmium, and zinc that are toxic to most plants. These metal rich habitats contain species such as spring sandwort, alpine penny cress and sheep's-fescue.

Limestone crags and cliff faces are home to many plant species including the rare and protected Cheddar pink (the flower of Somerset) in Cheddar Gorge. The thin limestone soils support grassland insects and invertebrates. Many of the caves are roosting and hibernation sites for bats.

The Mendip Hills NL contains many sites designated for their biodiversity, including the European designations:

Chew Valley Lake Special Protection Area (SPA)
North Somerset and Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Mendip Limestone Grassland Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Mendip Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

There are also 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for their national importance. 96% of the 2712 ha designated SSSI is in favourable, or unfavourable and recovering condition. Local Wildlife Sites act as buffers, stepping stones, and corridors for these nationally designated wildlife sites.

Protected landscapes have been identified to deliver more resilient and coherent ecological networks, healthy and well-functioning ecosystems which deliver multiple benefits for people and wildlife. Building the resilience of ecological networks will enable the ecological network to respond to climate change. The Mendip National Nature Reserve was declared in 2023 encompassing two existing national nature reserves and 29 other SSSI.

The area is noted for its geodiversity, with a large range of rock types ranging from Devonian to Jurassic exposed in many natural rock outcrops and quarries.

Carboniferous limestone has created the Mendip karst landscape, a terrain formed as percolating rainwater dissolves the rock, forming gorges, depressions, underground drainage and caves. Streams emerge at the foot of the hills where the limestone meets less permeable rock. Many of the geological features are designated SSSI and or Local Geological Sites.

The 'Netherworld' of Mendip is significant and cave exploration is ongoing. In 2012 the largest Mendip cave was discovered, which has some of the best stalactites and stalagmites in the UK.

The British Geological Survey (www.bgs.ac.uk/mendips) and Mendip Cave Registry and Archive (www.mcra.org.uk) are sources of information. Mendip quarry companies have invested in proactive relationships with the public, offering opportunities to visit, and the Somerset Earth Science Centre at Moon Hill Quarry has initiated, with partners several geology related projects that promote research and learning.

Work to understand the current state of the network has been ongoing for some years with support from the NL Partnership. Somerset Wildlife Trust continues to map distribution of all remaining habitats in the Mendip Hills National Character Area (NCA). Ecological network maps are updated on an annual basis and will continue to be refined as survey reveals new areas of priority habitat.

Priority restoration areas within the ecological networks have been identified and work is currently being targeted in these areas to build coherence and resilience of the networks. **The Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan and the two Local Nature Recovery Strategies that will cover the area includes targeting management advice and Environmental Land Management schemes and other public investment in the most efficient and effective way to deliver multiple public benefits including biodiversity.**

In addition, the Plan will assist local authority's duty under the NPPF which sets out that to protect and enhance biodiversity plans should 'Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors, and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation'.

Issues

The pressing issue for biodiversity and geodiversity is loss of ecological network and geological features, condition and fragmentation of habitats, due to changes in land use including energy crops, intensification of agriculture, new development, and less resources for management.

The management group for the Mendip National Nature Reserve are preparing an over-arching management plan but it will be equally important for land adjacent and in-between each of 31 sites comprising the national nature reserve to be involved.

The Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Somerset and the West of England will need to be championed and used by their target audiences to create effective action for nature. The strategies set local priorities for nature recovery and maps areas where action to help nature will have the biggest impact, which will help to better target funding and resources for nature recovery. Both strategies that cover the NL are in-line with the Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan.

There is a need to understand and recognise the geological importance of cave systems for their geological, and biodiversity importance. Caves need to be protected from damage by land use e.g. pollutants in water run-off, broken sewage pipes, soil erosion, tipping and infilling of swallets, and inappropriate recreational use, and where use disturbs roosting bats.

Natural Resources objectives:

NR1 Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the NL as a valuable source of ecosystem services, economic and health benefits.

NR2 Promote conservation of water resources, reduce pollution and enhance their quality, by appropriate management and use.

NR3 Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.

The principle of conserving natural resources within the Mendip Hills NL, using them in the most sustainable way, and enhancing their contribution to the needs of society, is fundamental in the future management of the area. Water and soils are considered under this theme. Quarrying, woodland and forestry, and farming are considered under Land Management theme.

Water management, both quality and availability, will benefit many ecosystem services, including soil quality, soil erosion, and biodiversity.

The three reservoirs, Chew, Blagdon and Cheddar, supply water to 1.2 million people and businesses in the Bristol Water area. Both Chew Valley Lake, and Blagdon Lake are internationally important for wildlife. Chew and Blagdon Lakes are designated as Drinking Water Protected Area Safeguard Zones along with the catchments that drain to them. The Environment Agency, Bristol Water, Natural England, and other partners are developing action plans to address the sources of nutrients in the lakes.

Flooding from run-off is increasing affecting villages along the A368 and A371 and flooding has been experienced in the Chew Valley and Cheddar, where the streams and river emerge. North and Mid Somerset, and the Bristol Avon Catchment Flood Management Plans cover the NL.

Large part of the NL is within a Groundwater Source Protection Zone due to its contribution to the public water supply. Ground water quality is generally good overall although there is a need to reduce sources of diffuse agricultural pollution into the groundwater and water courses, and run-off, and soil erosion into watercourses.

Grazing is restricted around the Chew and Blagdon reservoirs to prevent contamination. The NL is adjacent to the Somerset Levels and Moors, and the North Somerset Moors Sensitive Farming Priority Catchments, where issues of nitrogen enrichment, phosphates, and sedimentation have been identified affecting the quality of Chew Valley Lake. The area surrounding each of the reservoirs is designated a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, where farmers have to comply with EU regulations to reduce nitrate loss from agriculture.

Bristol Water needs to reduce the nitrate concentrations, and are working with farmers to reduce nitrate leaching, and run-off, for example using cover crops over winter, and by stopping slurry applications when nitrate will not be used by crop uptake. Bristol Water continues to educate consumers about economical use of water. Constraints to limit, or stop water being abstracted during low flow situations may become more frequent with a changing climate.

Issues

Whilst the run-off from land in this predominantly upland area is low, steep slopes in some areas can increase run-off rates locally, and with changing weather conditions has resulted in local flooding. It might be possible to reduce this by expanding and maintaining semi natural habitat particularly woodland on the steep slopes and boundary features e.g. walls, and hedgerows.

There is an increased risk of soil movement where run-off risks soil deposition in water, and cave systems.

Further demands on the public water supply through increases in population may exacerbate over abstraction. Demand increase from new development may be offset by increased efficiency in existing housing and industry.

www.environmentagency.gov.uk Groundwater Protection zones, Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, Flood Management Plans

www.naturalengland.gov.uk Sensitive Farming Catchments

www.bristolwater.co.uk – Chew, Blagdon and Cheddar lakes

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CLIMATE

The National Landscape is a very special place that has a fundamental role in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Land Management objectives:

LM1 Support and promote farming to have a positive impact on the Mendip Hills NL, contributing to climate adaptation and mitigation and to the furthering of the special qualities of the National Landscape, while remaining the principle land use.

LM2 Support and promote rural land management that conserves and enhances natural resources, including biodiversity special to the Mendip Hills, landscape character, the historic environment and aids public awareness and enjoyment of the Mendip Hills NL.

LM3 Support and promote a sustainable woodland economy that enhances the Mendip Hills NL woodlands and wider landscape with targeted woodland management of diverse species resilient to climate adaptation and mitigation, and creation in appropriate locations supporting wood fuel and local community opportunities.

LM4 Influence the use, restoration and after use of all quarries to minimise the impact on the landscape, contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation and to be compatible with the purposes of designation.

The Mendip Hills landscape is largely a result of the way the land has been shaped by different land uses, and maintained by farmers, landowners, and estate managers over the centuries. As such, those with a stewardship role in the Mendip Hills are an integral part of conserving and enhancing the landscape, and managing natural resources.

Farming is the major land use with 64% (12584 ha)⁴ of the NL being agricultural land. Of this farmed area 80% is temporary or permanent grass, and only 11% is arable. Grazing livestock is the predominant holding type. There is also some dairy and arable farming on the plateau. Beef, and sheep grazing are concentrated on the small, irregular fields and remnant sheep walks (sleights) of the escarpments, where the soils are thinner.

A number of farms owning traditional breeds have long been providing stock to graze land under conservation management for organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts, and National Trust. Much of this land is the steep slopes and gorges with public access, and where there is little benefit to the farmer, but is vital to control scrub on these grassland areas.

The species rich grasslands provide important nectar sources for pollinating insects and are in close proximity to the arable farming of the plateau. Pollinators are critically important to the horticulture of the Strawberry Belt, growing mainly soft fruit which is focused on the high-quality agricultural land between Axbridge and Rodney Stoke. Proximity of semi-natural habitats, and encouraging use of field margins in arable land, is important to allow pest regulating species including insects, birds, and mammals to move

⁴ State of the Mendip Hills AONB Report 2018

across the landscape.

There are a number of traditional and new orchards in the area, along with community managed orchards.

Increasing consumer awareness, and demand for high quality products from sustainable farm management has contributed to an increase in the number of farm shops, and farmers supplying direct to local businesses. Encouraging growth in this sector will benefit climate regulation, and local culture.

Working with the local farming community to safeguard future food production whilst enhancing key ecosystem services such as biodiversity, water quality, water regulation (flooding), regulating soil quality and soil erosion, pollination services, and genetic diversity, geological and historic features is essential.

Woodland covers 14.5% of the NL⁵, and significantly contributes to the landscape character and biodiversity. Half of the woodland, some of which is ancient woodland, is semi-natural broadleaved woodland, situated mainly on the north, and south facing slopes of the hills. The Government's Forestry Policy Statement⁶ recognises the value of our native and ancient woodland and the need to maintain existing ancient woodland and increase the net area of native woodland.

The Forestry Commission manages the conifer plantations at Rowberrow, Stockhill, and East Harptree, to maximise timber production and public benefits. Guided by Forest Design Plans, they are gradually being transformed into more diverse woodlands. These, and other areas of woodland are accessible to the public for recreation, and the value to people in having this access should be recognised.

Quarrying is an important part of the Mendip economy. Callow Rock, and Batts Combe are the two major quarries in the NL, both extracting carboniferous limestone. To lessen their environmental impacts, quarries are required to meet acceptable levels of noise, dust, vibration and visual intrusion. Work has been undertaken by Somerset Council and Somerset Wildlife Trust to build into policy an ecological approach to restoration

Issues

Farm payments are likely to be closely linked to 'public goods' around natural capital, conservation, and access. In addition to promoting good management of species rich priority grasslands, it will also be important to encourage uptake of options that promote wildlife benefits.

A range of 'green finance' options are emerging such as Biodiversity Net Gain. There uptake and impact is at a very early stage but there are positive possibilities.

There are woodland areas that potentially would benefit from management for wildlife, economic, or recreational benefit, or a combination of these. As the value of timber (conifer), and wood fuel has improved over the last 15 years, private woodland owners may now consider sustainable management of woodland that would benefit biodiversity

⁵ State of the Mendip Hills AONB Report 2018 (2865 hectares)

⁶ Keepers of Time – A statement of policy for England's Ancient and Native Woodland (Defra/Forestry Commission, 2005)

and landscape, and the sequestration and storage of atmospheric CO₂.

Opportunities for new **large** woodland planting are relatively limited, as particularly on the plateau, it needs to be in keeping with the open landscape character, and on the southern scarp that is mostly calcareous grassland, they are nationally important and designated SSSIs. However, there may be opportunities for targeted woodland creation in appropriate locations, to deliver a range of social, and environmental services benefits, such as mitigating surface water run-off.

Typical Mendip species being ash, the risk of ash dieback or *Chalara fraxinea* affecting woodland areas is significant, and will require landowners and managers to share information, and monitor impact.

Although the quarry permissions to operate for significant periods into the future landscape, biodiversity, and recreational use of redundant quarries needs to be considered alongside other potential provision, to ensure that the way in which quarrying takes place, and the after use is planned to create long term benefit and restore natural capital.

CLIMATE

Development and Transport Objectives:

D1 Working with the local planning authorities, ensure that development in the NL and its setting is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community need, resilience to climate change and net zero targets, without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL.

D2 Working with the local highways authorities, ensure that the special qualities of the NL are fully respected in the planning, design, provision and management of all types of transport and associated infrastructure.

D3 Reduce carbon emissions within the NL through reducing energy consumption, applying energy conservation measures, encouraging more sustainable patterns of development, and utilising renewable energy generation technologies that are of an appropriate type and scale for their siting.

D4 Ensure issues of importance for the management of the NL landscape are fully reflected in strategies and plans produced by other agencies and local communities.

D5 The impact of development on the protected landscape and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL would need to be carefully considered, and where supported would require appropriate and acceptable mitigation measures.

Although the NL embraces 28 parishes lying wholly, or partly within its boundary, there are few major settlements in the NL, most are spring-line villages with only Priddy on the plateau itself. Sensitive planning, and design of development is crucial in retaining the character, and appearance of the landscape particularly the open spaces within villages,

and the dispersed nature of development.

Responsibility for determining planning applications, and transport matters lies with the local planning and highways authorities. The NL Partnership Committee 'Guidelines for the referral of planning applications' determines which applications are referred to the NL Team's Landscape Planning Officer for comment.

Within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework, there is a need to manage development pressures and land-use changes, both within, and in the setting of the NL with sensitivity to maintain a balance in promoting economic and social viability, whilst retaining the character of the landscape and enhancing biodiversity. Strategies such as Green Infrastructure Plans, Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping, and Landscape Character Assessments may assist in securing this.

Two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) areas include the Mendip Hills NL, and it is hoped that they will consider both the rural economy and recognise the benefits of a maintaining high-quality landscapes. Their current areas of their work; transport infrastructure, upgrading of digital infrastructure, urban green infrastructure, flood relief work all stands to benefit the local economy.

Issues

The response in terms of development to the potential challenges of climate change and the impacts on the designated landscape are important issues to address. The need to reduce carbon emissions to tackle climate change is widely recognised and there are numerous measures in place to reduce energy use, improve energy efficiency and to reduce reliance on fossil fuels by generating electricity via renewable energy sources. Where protected landscapes are concerned, the environmental benefits of generating electricity from renewable sources must be considered against the potential adverse impacts that renewable energy infrastructure may have on the character, and quality of our finest landscapes.

Whilst any surface operations associated with fracking are not permitted within National Parks, the Broads, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NLs), and Source Protection Zones (SPZ)¹, licences have previously been issued to explore for oil and gas underneath nationally protected landscapes. A Written Ministerial Statement (May 2018) further sets out proposals that would effectively fast track fracking proposals. The NL Partnership has serious reservations about the process of fracking within nationally protected landscapes (sub-surface), and within the setting of the Mendip Hills NL, where this would have an impact on the designated area.

Traffic continues to detract from people's enjoyment of the environment and raises safety issues for vulnerable road users. Public transport needs to be improved to reduce the impact and enable greater access for people with mobility problems and those without access to private cars. Traffic including Heavy Goods Vehicles impact on the NL in variety of ways, including tranquillity, visual impact and damage to buildings.

In 2024 a consultation was undertaken around the potential use of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order to temporarily close Cheddar Gorge to vehicle traffic. The results showed approx. 80% of respondents were in favour of this to create a safer and more enjoyable way to experience the natural wonder of the gorge. Resources need to be

identified to progress this work.

Development pressure on the NL comes from many sources, including proposals within the setting of our northern boundaries for significant housing growth that will bring the urban area closer to the edge of the NL, increasing road traffic, and recreational use, and with the potential to impact on the special qualities that create the sense of place, and identity of the Mendip Hills NL. There are also development pressures along our southern boundaries which may impact on the NL. The impact of development on the protected landscape and the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL would need to be carefully considered, and where supported would require appropriate, and acceptable mitigation measures.

Tourism is an important element of the economy of the NL. It is expected that there will be continuing demand for new tourist-related developments in and around the NL. It will be important to ensure that such development is sustainable and does not detract from the landscape that visitors come to enjoy.

Demand for new equestrian and agricultural buildings continues. The NL Guidelines for Horse-related Development and Agricultural Buildings Design Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents seek to influence their design and setting and assist local planning authorities when making planning decisions that affect the NL.

Noise and activity arising from developments together with lighting, can have an adverse impact on the areas tranquillity and dark sky. Mapping of light pollution has shown that the area of dark skies in the Mendips is shrinking. The NL Partnership Position Statement on Dark Skies seeks local authorities and others to minimise the impact of lighting.

Issues and characteristic features relating to the conservation and enhancement of the NL should be incorporated in local plans, and Neighbourhood Plans. A number of villages have identified a need for affordable housing to support rural communities.

Design of roads, signage, and lighting can have a significant impact on the visual appearance of the landscape. Removing unnecessary visual clutter, and consideration of any new signage, is essential for an area in which three local authorities boundaries meet. There is a need for highways authorities to use discretion when following national regulations, and to demonstrate they are furthering the purposes of the NL.

PEOPLE

Recreation, Access and Tourism objectives:

R1 Maintain, improve and promote public access and quiet recreational activities, addressing anti-social activities, with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of the National Landscape designation.

R2 Support the development of tourism that benefits the local economy, conserves and enhances the landscape and improves understanding of the Mendip Hills.

R3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature, and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the NL for enjoyment and recreation.

R4 Support healthy lifestyles by encouraging more people to use the Mendip Hills for sustainable outdoor activities.

The NL landscape is a resource to be enjoyed by all sectors of our diverse society, for active, and quieter recreational pursuits. Outdoor recreation is proved to benefit people's health and wellbeing through exercise, and opportunities to escape the pressure of everyday life. Being within a 30-minute drive from Bristol, Weston Super Mare, and Bath, the Mendip Hills NL is accessible to these urban populations, as well as the local rural communities.

Walking, cycling and horse-riding are popular activities, with several well-known recreational routes across the NL including the Strawberry Line (National cycle route 26), Limestone Link, The Mendip Way, Monarchs Way, and West Country Way (National Cycle Route 3). The Mendip Hills NL are also visited for their historical interest, and for the wild and tranquil areas that provide opportunity for quiet enjoyment including bird watching.

Most visitors to the Mendip Hills NL are day visitors, but tourism is increasingly an important part of the local economy as farmers diversify providing holiday accommodation and rural facilities (shops, pubs, public transport) that need to attract additional business to survive. Growing interest in green tourism has potential to create new employment opportunities.

The NL Team has installed visitor counters at 15 locations. The results are downloaded and sent to the landowner and the Partnership. Most were installed in 2019 prior to the pandemic. The results show that visitor figures to the area have taken 3 years to return to 2019 levels. Each location has its own particular trends making it statistically unreliable to draw broad conclusions for the entire PL. The data therefore becomes more robust and able to demonstrate trends the longer it is collected.

Organised outdoor activities are an important part of the Mendip Hills rural economy bringing in nearly £6 million directly to outdoor businesses, with those businesses spending £1.46 million⁷ locally. There are a significant number of businesses who use the Mendip Hills for outdoor activities and events that includes climbing, caving,

⁷ Economic Value of outdoor activity in the Mendip Hills AONB report (2006)

abseiling, bushcraft, archery, and mountain biking. There has been changes in the outdoor industry over recent years with some smaller companies not trading while Mendip Activity Centre has expanded.

Cheddar Caves and Gorge, Wookey Hole Caves, and Bristol Water's Chew Valley and Blagdon lakes are major tourist attractions, making significant contributions to the rural economy.

There are opportunities within the Mendip Hills to increase the average spend of visitors, and develop products and packages having a high quality landscape to base them. The Mendip Way is a good example of partners working together to do practical improvements along the route then promote it nationally to draw in overnight visitors and experience the special qualities of the area.

A recent research report from The Trails Trust for Defra published in 2023 demonstrated the importance of new access also providing an increase in habitat. The report also presented a compensation structure and toolkit for establishing new access with landowners and how the landowners involved in this were supportive.

The provision of information, and interpretation, can increase understanding and enjoyment of the Mendip Hills, as well as attract visitors. The NL Team produces a Visitor Guide to the Mendip Hills, and downloadable walks in the Mendip Hills, as do other organisations including the National Trust, and Somerset Wildlife Trust.

There are a significant number of walking, running, and cycling events organised each year, some for charity fundraising. The NL Partnership has produced guidance for event organisers, to help minimise impact of events on the landscape. Partners also work together to manage the impacts of these events on the right of way network.

Issues

Managing the demand for recreation in a landscape that is designated for its natural beauty that is also a working environment with the majority of land under agriculture and in private ownership, is challenging. The continuation of visitor monitoring programmes is essential.

Conserving landscape and scenic beauty so that the NL continues to attract visitors is key for the local tourism economy. The need for economic growth and new development should not be at expense of landscape quality, and this has been recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Alongside the maintenance of the existing rights of way network which needs more attention, the NL needs to increase access provision to spread the current impact and cope with future increases in use caused by the increase in housing in the area. The new farm payment systems and other types of financial support need to be tailored towards compensating landowners for new access and the maintenance of the existing network, especially as public sector funds are very limited at present.

Areas of conflict may arise between different user groups where activities (legal and illegal) have impacted on people's enjoyment.

Intense rainfall has seen a number of well used rights of way heavily eroded by surface material being washed away, compounded by ongoing heavy usage. Site management measures will need to be introduced to tackle some of these issues, which may require seasonal restrictions on use of certain routes or areas, and during long dry periods when there is an increased risk of fire.

Habitat deterioration, or loss of sensitive wildlife habitats due to an increase in number of tourist visits, increased leisure use, and, or new access could occur without careful management. Habitat deterioration or loss occurs from trampling, and this can be exacerbated on steep slopes, and by nitrogen enrichment from dog fouling.

Providing appropriate information including online, and on site, for different, and new audiences is important to ensure people can access the area and are aware of its importance.

The low level of public transport provision inhibits visiting much of the Mendip Hills for those without access to a car.

PEOPLE

Participation objectives:

P1 Increase the opportunities for volunteering and the range of people participating, to benefit the environment, people's health and wellbeing and local communities in and around the NL.

P2 Encourage the involvement of local people and the wider community in the management of the NL

P3 Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages and encourage sharing of research and learning tools.

P4 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the Mendip Hills National Landscape.

Understanding the purpose of designation, what makes this NL special, with the need for sensitive management is crucial to the delivery of this Management Plan. People must have the opportunity to experience, enjoy, and learn about the NL, and why it is special. The NL Partnership plays a key role in raising awareness of the NL, largely through the NL Team. The NL Team provides information on request through printed and digital formats, including the NL Visitor Guide. In addition to these, there are other visitor outlets, and partner websites.

Making people feel welcome and providing a high-quality experience is central to encouraging people to appreciate, realize the opportunities it offers and be involved in the care of the NL.

The NL Team supports a number of events including the annual Mendip Rocks!, Top of the Gorge, and agricultural shows, as well as promoting research and learning that both

assist in raising understanding, awareness, and encourage participation.

Colleges and universities use the area for study, and research projects.

The local communities demonstrate a strong appreciation for the area. Most villages have a local history group, and, or run a traditional annual event, or have undertaken a conservation project. However, there is great potential to do more, and use people's interest to develop skills to manage the NL. Assisting communities to influence decisions and contribute to the protection and enhancement of the NL through better understanding of the designation, its boundary, and special qualities is recognised.

Increasing people's awareness and involvement amongst under-represented groups requires targeted approaches. In the past the Somerset NLs have had joint projects to address mental health issues through contact with nature. The NL Team currently has a Nature and Wellbeing Specialist Officer with only one year of funding. This officer has introduced groups to the NL who would not normally visit.

The Mendip Hills NL Young Ranger scheme established in 2005, provides a structured programme of training, and countryside experience for young people from surrounding schools. Modelled on the EUROPARC Junior Ranger scheme, the NL is part of the EUROPARC Atlantic Isles Initiative to develop a UK Young Ranger network.

Volunteering opportunities is provided by several of the organisations on the Partnership. Volunteers also help in offices, and long term placements are taken up by students to gain work experience.

The Mendip Hills Fund was established with Somerset Community Foundation by the NL Partnership in 2014. The NL Team manages the independent panel and fundraising, with the Somerset Community Foundation administering the grant applications. Grants are available for projects in the NL, and East Mendip, that conserve and enhance the landscape, raise awareness of the area, and support the local community. Funds are raised through a variety of visitor giving schemes, contributions from local tourist business and events that use the NL. Each year the fund is able to distribute around £10,000.

Issues

There is currently a fragmented approach to use of the Mendip Hills for people's health and wellbeing by the health sector. Developing new partnerships through the local authorities Public Health and Wellbeing Boards is an opportunity to seek to address this.

Maintaining and developing existing volunteer programmes and schemes, and offering new opportunities is a challenge with current levels of funding.

The adoption of the 'champion species' via the Nature Recovery Plan has shown benefits through community involvement and awareness. Online videos, identification cards, talks, walks and social media content, practical work and surveying have all been carried out. This engagement and participation has led to better and more habitat and an increase in understanding population numbers and spread.

There are further opportunities to share research and learning, as often when completed or published, research and learning stays with the particular education body, individual, or organization. If shared it could assist with wider understanding of the NL, and its special qualities.

There is a need to encourage more residents to understand and support the purpose of the NL through their involvement in local activities including neighbourhood plans to conserve and enhance the NL (see also Development and Transport Objective D4).

DRAFT

PLACE

Landscape Quality Objectives:

L1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills NL landscape is conserved and enhanced

L2 Provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.

L3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the NL

L4 Increase awareness of the benefits of supporting local products and services that help conserve and enhance the landscape.

The carboniferous limestone that underlies much of the Mendip ridge has given the area its distinctive landscape of rolling hills, gorges, lines of dry-stone walls, and attractive stone, settlements on the spring line. The area has a tangible sense of tranquillity and remoteness that are highly valued by those who choose to live here and the many visitors. At the highest points, such as Black Down areas of sandstone covered by heathland contrast with the limestone grassland and give variety to the landscape. Views out from the edge of the plateau and slopes are widely appreciated.

The gentler landscape of Chew Valley adds a further dimension. The two reservoirs of Blagdon Lake (built 1899) and Chew Valley Lake (built 1956), provide large expanses of water, set within a rich farmland landscape. The landscape has been strongly influenced by the activities of man from prehistoric times to the present. The plateau is rich in the remains of Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Roman activity, including lead mining and dry stone walls, mostly dating from the 18th and 19th century. Both farming and quarrying continue to change the landscape.

The Mendip Hills NL Landscape Assessment (Countryside Commission 1998) identified 11 distinctive character areas. Consideration of the landscape needs to take account of the special qualities that make each of these character areas.

In addition to this Natural England National Character Area profiles that cover the NL 141 Mendip Hills and 118 Bristol, Avon Valley and Ridges, need to be considered. Each profile includes a description of the natural and cultural features that shape these landscapes, current drivers for change, and as working documents they draw on current evidence and knowledge of these landscapes.

Issues

There are many factors changing and bringing pressure on the Mendip Hills NL landscape. Covered under other themes these include development pressures, changes in agriculture, decline in species, increase in road traffic and recreation, loss of dark sky, and the loss of landscape detail such as gruffy ground (remnants of shallow lead mining), rock outcrops, and field boundaries. These need to be managed within and near the NL boundary, to ensure that the essential character and its setting is conserved and

enhanced.

PLACE

Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage objectives:

H1 Improve the recording, interpretation and understanding of all aspects of the NLs historic environment to ensure local communities and visitors enjoy a rich experience of the sense of place.

H2 Increase awareness and communicate the significance of the high quality historic environment of the Mendip Hills NL.

H3 Promote appropriate management of sites, structures and landscapes designated for their international, national, regional or local importance in the historic environment to ensure no further loss of heritage assets.

AONB designation recognises the importance of heritage and reinforces the need to protect and manage characteristic features. The Mendip Hills have evidence of human settlement dating back to Palaeolithic times, 500,000 years ago. Henge monuments, barrows, and hill forts on the plateau are some of the most prominent features of the area. The historical value of the area is incredibly rich, and important and includes 198 Listed Buildings and 172 Scheduled Monuments. Interest and participation in this subject is high, leading to previously unrecorded sites and features being recorded.

Customs and traditions that have historic and cultural associations with the land, and activities of local people, are important too. This includes Mendip cave exploration begun in the late nineteenth century, the Rock of Ages service which marks the origin of the famous hymn, the hedging and ploughing matches promoting rural skills. There are very few weekends when there is not an event happening in the Mendip Hills that is not custom, or tradition related and demonstrates community engagement with their heritage.

The Historic Landscape of the Mendip Hills by Elaine Jamieson was published in July 2015 and brings together a wide variety of new and past research on the historic landscapes of the Mendip Hills. The publication presents a synthesis of the results of recent fieldwork undertaken by Historic England and traces this region's past, revealing ways in which it has shaped the landscape we see and value today.

Historic England have produced Lidar data for the Mendip Hills NL and this is available on the website (<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/methods/airborne-remote-sensing/lidar/>). In 2012 the NL local authorities, with support from the NL Partnership, digitised the areas Tithe Maps to make them accessible to assist understanding of the landscape.

The South West Heritage Trust was founded in 2014 as an independent charity for Somerset, Devon and the South West. They celebrate and protect the heritage, helping people to enjoy it now and in the future. They bring together services previously provided by Somerset and Devon County Councils, who remain their main funders.

A State of Heritage report was commissioned by the NL Team from the South West Heritage Trust in 2024. Alongside collating the current known information about the historic landscape the report also identifies where research would help.

The annual Mendip Rocks! programme of events raise awareness of the geology and archaeology of the Mendip Hills. This is a joint project between the NL Partnership, Somerset Earth Science Centre and the Mendip Society.

Neighbourhood Plans are important tools for identifying and raising awareness of characteristic features. Together with Historic Landscape Character Assessments they contribute to the planning decision-making process.

Issues

The recommendations from the State of Heritage report 2024 will need to be shared and acted upon.

Dry stone walls are unprotected, dependent on individual landowners to maintain and restore them. Whilst several significant walls have been repaired, reduced agri-environment funding for wall restoration has resulted in a decline in activity.

Ploughing, and other agricultural practices continue to damage and threaten sites including gruffy ground, a remnant of mining activity. Lack of grazing has resulted in increase in scrub, and some sites being obscured from view, and suffering damage from tree roots. Burrowing animals, recreational use of sites, and new development also threaten the historic environment and individual sites.

Climate change poses particular threats to the historic environment. Intense rainfall causes erosion of archaeological sites, and increased extremes of soaking and drying heighten risk of ground subsidence and accelerate the decay of stone work. Changes in vegetation patterns may cover and damage archaeological remains. An area experiencing many of these issues is Burrington Commons. In 2011 an Archaeological Management Plan was produced for this area and used in the successful bid to Heritage Lottery Fund for the Discovering Black Down project that started May 2013.

Active promotion, and guidance for communities on how to access and use sources of historical information is required if historic landscape character is to influence planning decisions, and management of sites.

Delivering the Management Plan and Monitoring the State of the NL

In addition to monitoring the successful delivery of the Management Plan, the Partnership will monitor the state (or condition) of the NL. Both types of monitoring play important roles in identifying key issues, and in assessing the continued relevance of Management Plan objectives and associated actions.

Every five years, prior to the review of the management plan, the Partnership will publish a State of the Mendip Hills NL report.

At a local level statutory agencies operating in the area, particularly Natural England, Historic England, and the Environment Agency together with the local authorities, make positive contributions to efficient collation of data for monitoring as part of their general duty to conserve and enhance the NL.

The Mendip Hills NL Partnership produces a 5 year Delivery Plan in support of the Management Plan, an Annual Activity Plan, and Annual Reviews to report progress (see www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk).

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)

To support Protected Landscapes in meeting their huge potential for nature, climate, people and place Defra are establishing ambitious targets for National Parks and National Landscapes. These targets will promote the actions that are most needed to achieve positive changes. They will set the ambition for how Defra expect Protected Landscapes to achieve the Environmental Improvement Plan.

Thriving plants and wildlife targets

Protected Landscapes have significant environmental potential, containing almost half of England's priority habitats. They also contain over half of our most precious sites for biodiversity, land designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). To ensure these habitats are reaching their full potential for nature recovery, Defra have set targets to motivate more activity on the components needed to ensure wildlife can thrive.

The protection, restoration, creation, and management of priority habitats will increase species abundance. It will help turn the tide on extinction risk and support our international commitment to protect 30% of land by 2030 ([30by30](#)). The adoption of nature friendly farming practices will help stop biodiversity loss and increase species abundance alongside sustainable food production.

It is important to note these targets are for the landscape as a whole and will only be achieved by a wide partnership. Protected Landscape bodies and partners should seek to increase the amount of land in favourable management through meeting the targets below and other available means. This will maximise the contribution that Protected Landscapes can make towards our national targets for nature recovery.

The methods and programmes of work to achieve the targets and outcomes will form part of the associated delivery plan for the management plan.

Targets 1, 7 and 8 are being apportioned for each Protected Landscape. See Mendip Hills NL targets below in Table XX.

Target 1

Restore or create more than 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats within Protected Landscapes, outside protected sites by 2042 (from a 2022 baseline).

How much of this target could be met in Mendip Hills?

If the target was pro rata'd based on this Protected Landscapes' area without any local factors this would be 1,567.57 ha.

This would be equivalent to 78.38 ha per year between 2022 and 2042.

With local adjustments this is XX.XX ha per year between 2022 and 2042.

Target 2

Bring 80% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042.

Target 3

For 60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028.

Target 4

Continuing favourable management of all existing priority habitat already in favourable condition outside of SSSIs (from a 2022 baseline) and increasing to include all newly restored or created habitat through agri-environment schemes by 2042.

Target 5

Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030.

Mitigating and adapting to climate change targets

Protected Landscapes contain some of the UK's most important carbon stores, including significant tracts of peatland, woodland and hedgerows providing important carbon sinks for achieving net zero. To ensure we are maximising the opportunities for climate mitigation within our Protected Landscapes we have set targets for restoring peat and increasing tree planting. Restoration and ongoing management of these habitats is essential for sequestering and storing carbon into the future, and therefore reducing net greenhouse gas emissions. They can also provide natural flood management and other benefits for farmers and local communities.

Protected Landscapes are leading action to achieve net zero at a landscape level, working with residents, businesses and communities, aiming to reduce emissions and deliver nature-based solutions. We have set a target to support them in this ambition and strengthen their important contribution to our world leading target to achieve net-zero by 2050.

Tree planting and peat restoration at scale will support new skills and green jobs, attract

private investment and help grow the rural economy.

For the long-term protection of our iconic landscapes, action is needed to increase their resilience and that of the communities within them. We must mitigate climate risks through nature-based solutions and adapt to the unavoidable impacts, planning for a changing future.

Target 6

Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels.

Target 7

Restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050.

How much of this target could be met in Mendip Hills?

If the target was pro rata'd based on the area of existing peat present within this Protected Landscape, without any local factors, this would be 21.12 ha.

This would be equivalent to 0.75 ha per year between 2022 and 2050.

With local adjustments this is XX.XX ha per year between 2022 and 2050.

The Mendip Hills has very little deep peat due to local conditions, 50.44ha or 0.25% of the area so there is very little opportunity to increase coverage. It will be more beneficial to protect all sites that have peaty soils and prevent them from drying out.

Target 8

Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline).

How much of this target could be met in Mendip Hills?

If the target was pro rata'd based on this Protected Landscapes' area (i.e. 3% of the Protected Landscape area itself, not the area of existing woodland) without any local factors this would be 595.41 ha.

This would be equivalent to 21.26 ha per year between 2022 and 2050.

The total amount of woodland within this Protected landscape in 2050 would then be 4,614.65 ha or 17.5%

Currently the amount of woodland is 14.5%.

With local adjustments – an increase to 16.3%, total 351ha, 12.5ha per year between 2022 and 2050.

Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment targets

Protected Landscapes are designated for their natural beauty and provide a range of health and wellbeing benefits and educational opportunities. We know these benefits are not currently being enjoyed equally by all parts of society. Protected Landscapes have a distinctive sense of place and represent our shared heritage and national identity. These special qualities must be protected for everyone to enjoy. The EIP made a commitment that everyone in England should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space. It also committed to reduce other barriers that prevent people from accessing green and

blue spaces, such as physical challenges, lack of confidence and lack of information. Protected Landscapes should be setting the standard for meeting this commitment, leading efforts to increase responsible access and engagement with nature.

To ensure that more people have the opportunity to enjoy and learn from these special places, we have set targets to improve accessibility for all. Protected Landscapes are leading the way to promote accessibility to the natural environment. They are using a range of tools such as engaging schools, providing disabled facilities and improving trails and waymarking. Targets will also conserve the important sense of place that these landscapes bring to our country and communities.

The government wants to boost visitor numbers in a safe and manageable way for local areas, allowing people, communities and businesses to reap the benefits of tourism, growing the rural economy, whilst preserving heritage and natural assets.

We rely on Protected Landscape bodies to gather relevant data to measure progress towards our beauty, heritage and engagement outcome. We will continue to work with Protected Landscape bodies and other partners to explore the benefits of further developing targets to improve and promote accessibility and engagement.

Target 9

Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using existing metrics in our Access for All programme.

Target 10

Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes.

The Mendip Hills NL Nature Recovery Plan (NRP)

The Nature Recovery Plan has been developed in collaboration with the NL Partnership and a range of stakeholders, landowners, and local experts. It is a deep dive into the species and habitats of the Mendip Hills NL and sets out how to help them recover across this special landscape.

The National Landscape Association committed in 2019 to developing Nature Recovery Plans (NRP) to help contribute to this commitment, as set out in the Colchester Declaration¹³. NRPs for each NL will be produced with contributions from stakeholders including government and non-governmental organisations, and landowners; they will also be subject to peer review by specialists and will be based on sound data including from Local Record Centre's as well as national datasets.

The Nature Recovery Plan identifies Priority Habitat, statutory and non-statutory sites, condition assessments of SSSIs to produce nature recovery network maps. Priorities have been set, Champion Species identified and local prescriptions created that coincide with the 11 different landscape character areas.

Priority habitats present within the Mendip Hills:

- Calaminarian grassland
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Deciduous woodland
- Good quality semi-improved grassland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland fens
- Lowland heathland
- Lowland meadows

No main habitat but additional habitats present

- Ponds
- Ponds, Reedbeds
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- Reedbeds
- Traditional orchard

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Targets for the Mendip Hills National Landscape

Table 2. The apportioned targets from the PLTOF and Nature Recovery Plan have been combined here to show what needs to be achieved in this protected landscape.

Targets	Nature Recovery Plan	Defra PLTOF	Locally adjusted PLTOF
SSSIs in favourable condition by 2040/2042 (%)	75%	80%	80%
SSSIs in favourable condition by 2050 (%) [currently 43%]	100%	100%	100%
Tree/woodland cover increase by 2050 (ha)	351	595	351
Tree/woodland cover total by 2050 (%) [currently 14.5%]	16.3%	17.5%	16.3%
Statutory and non-stat sites for nature increase by 2050 (ha)	792		
Statutory and non-stat sites for nature total by 2050 (%) [currently 26%]	30%		
Priority habitats increase by 2050 (ha)	297		To be determined
Priority habitats total by 2050 (%) [currently 12.5%]	14%	1568ha. (78ha per year starting 2022)	
Wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites restored/created by 2042 (ha)			
30by30 now [using locally devised metrics]	29.5%		
30by30 increase (ha)	6138		
30by30 2030	31.0%		
30by30 2050	35.5%		
No. of extra sites surveyed or events held for Champion Species by 2025	26		
No. of new 'homes' for Champion Species by 2025	60		
No. of sites where habitat is improved for Champion Species by 2030	60		
Creation / restoration of linear features by 2030 (km)	14		

Table XX Targets from the PLTOF and Nature Recovery Plan.

Climate Change Adaptation Plans

The UK government's third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) introduces the requirement for all protected landscape bodies to produce Climate Change Adaptation plans for their landscape by 2028. This plan will be embedded and linked with the Management Plan. They will include specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely actions and objectives designed to adapt PLs to climate change.

Adopting Climate Change Adaptation Plans will be essential in minimising and managing the impacts of climate change on England's protected landscapes. Alongside the publication of NAP3, climate change adaptation should be fundamental to the development of the ambitions set out in Management Plans, and the way in which they will be achieved. Climate Change Adaptation Plans should consider the impacts of climate change on all parts of the PL including nature, people and place. Climate Change Adaptation Plans are to be completed on a 5-year cycle, preferably in line with the Management Plans.

Climate Vulnerability Assessment

The following table is an initial headline assessment designed to introduce the concept into the plan now prior to a complete assessment produced before 2028. The special qualities are used as the starting point for assessment. The full adaptation plan will need to look at more features of the landscape as the current special qualities contain a range of features worthy of closer examination.

In simple terms the UKCP18 projects a greater chance of hotter, drier summers and warmer wetter winters with an increased chance of extreme events. Source [UKCP18](#)

The RAD column refers to:

Resist – maintain ecosystem processes, structure, and composition with present-day or historical conditions.

Accept – allow current-change drivers to transform ecosystems to something that is different from present-day or historical conditions.

Direct – steward ecosystems to conditions that are more desirable than what would be achieved with accepting change.

Special Quality*	Rain +	Temp. +	Extreme events	Reasoning	Response	RAD	Opportunities
Dark skies, tranquility & sparsely populated plateau	L	L	L	Unlikely to have significant visual effect on the landscape. Wildfires on heathland sites could affect the character. Possible long term effect of more development pressure on the plateau as Somerset Levels faces increase flooding.	Establish and maintain a healthy mix of habitats and planting to maintain landscape character, mitigating against loss of individual species. Manage heathland grassland sites to reduce risk of wildfires. Local planning authorities to monitor development pressure and ensure the purposes of the NL are furthered.	D	Nature will benefit from creating more diverse habitats.

Limestone aquifer	L	H	M	Water levels will fluctuate highly from lots of rainfall and deluge events to prolonged spells of high temperatures causing drought. Increased demand for water by society leading to more extraction of water and more storage facilities; from reservoirs to tanks on farms.	More natural flood management solutions required to slow the flow and even out the fluctuations. Swallets will need to be maintained more regularly to ensure they are not blocked.	D	Nature will benefit from installing natural flood management solutions.
Historic environment	M	L	H	Built heritage structures above ground will be vulnerable to increased damage from water penetration and frost damage leading to more rapid degradation of ruined buildings. General archaeological sites such as earthworks and remnant field systems will be vulnerable to erosion, which may cause damage to features. Waterlogged features (eg, relic ditches, pits) may dry out and loose preservation.	The most significant built structures above ground should have their condition monitored for signs of rapid damage. Historic England for Monuments at Risk will cover Grade 1 and 2* buildings (but not Grade 2 and below). Scheduled monuments should have their condition regularly assessed by Historic England for Monuments at Risk.	A	Involvement of the community in monitoring and understanding their historic environment. Drought periods may expose new archaeological features.
The Chew Valley	M	M	H	Lowland grass areas will be subject water logging but due to deeper soils should cope with increased temperatures. Arable fields will be subject to loss of soils from run off or windblow when dry. Hedgerows and woodland areas will be less affected by increased rain and temperatures if they are healthy.	Focus on healthy soils, field margins to prevent run off, higher and wider hedges for shade and to trap run off. Natural flood management installations. The Chew Valley can absorb more tree planting in hedges, shelter belts and field corners.	D	Farm engagement to increase knowledge around soil health. Sequestering carbon through bigger and better hedges and more tree planting. Reinforcing the landscape character through tree planting. Training and employment via traditional hedgerow management to prolong the life and value of the hedge. Natural flood management will increase the range of habitats.
South facing slopes	H	H	H	High temperatures will increase droughts on thin soils. Increased rainfall will remove thin soils in places. Grazing will become more complicated to ensure the stock have enough to eat and don't increase the damage to the soils. Increased risk of wildfires. Vehicles movements will increase damage to soils. Scrub and woody species expected to grow faster requiring increased levels of management. High potential for the landscape character to change.	Increase mosaic of habitats on all sites. Increase hedges and drystone walls to provide shelter. Requires a more flexible approach to grazing and the use of new technology to manage flocks and herds. Different types of grazing animals may need to be introduced. Fire breaks will need to be cut.	A	Land managers working in a more coordinated way around grazing and the provision of water. Carbon sequestration via bigger and better hedges. Use of traditional skills around walling and hedging.
A landscape enjoyed by many	M	M	M	Reduced opportunities to use the area for recreation during rainfall and high temperature periods, plus extreme events, will have	Create better green infrastructure to cope, including better surfacing and drainage, more planting and appropriate	A/D	Improved green infrastructure will increase connectivity for wildlife.

				an impact of peoples physical and mental health increasing pressure on other health sectors. Right of way network negatively affected by increased rainfall causing erosion and contributing flooding incidents. Outdoor events more likely to be adversely affected resulting in cancellations. Reduced likelihood for land owners to grant permissions for events when damage may be likely.	management of hedges along routes for shade. Create shaded areas at key visitor sites. Require event organisers to produce contingency plans for different weather types.		A more accessible network will allow a greater diversity of people to use it.
Views in and out	L	L	L	Views out may be more affected by an increase in solar farms and wind turbines. Unlikely to change the views in.	Local planning authorities to monitor development pressure and ensure the purposes of the NL are furthered.	D	
Limestone ridge	L	L	L	The ridgeline and landform is unlikely to change. Increased woodland planting and more scrub to increase a mosaic of habitats as a response to other vulnerabilities identified may result in minor changes.	Vulnerabilities identified here that pose a greater risk need to be addressed as a priority.	A	Opportunities identified resulting from other responses will have more benefits to the Mendip Hills NL.
Visible geology	M	L	M	Wetter and drier conditions can both cause increased erosion, affecting both features themselves and access to them. Drought and high temperatures could adversely affect organic cave deposits through desiccation. A longer growing season caused by generally warmer temperatures will mean vegetation grows faster and for longer and may impact features such as scree slopes and rocky outcrops. Extreme events such as floods increases slope instability, the washing away of sediments & soils and the likelihood of swallets or caves system to collapse. Increased concentrations of co2 in the atmosphere increases dissolution of karst features.	Natural systems are dynamic and the most sustainable management approach requires an acceptance of the inevitability of change by, for example, allowing the renewal of cliff exposures through erosion and collapse; this allows natural processes to proceed. Sustainable management requires an adaptive long-term view that works with the changing landscape, focusing on conserving and ensuring a diversity of geological sites and geomorphological features and processes through auditing features, monitoring them and recording change.	A	Involvement of the community in monitoring and understanding their geological environment. Natural flood management will increase the range of habitats.
Caves	M	L	M	Cave deposits and other waterlogged archaeological deposits - intact cave deposits will be at risk of erosion in times of exceptional floods. There will be a risk of desiccation of waterlogged contexts in times of extreme drought with consequent loss of organic material.	The most significant intact cave deposits should be identified and monitoring of their condition undertaken especially in/after extreme events.	A	Involvement of the caving community in monitoring and understanding their geological environment. Natural flood management will increase the range of habitats.
Ancient wooded combs	M	M	H	Healthy woodlands will be fairly resilient to high and low rainfall, but woods	Ash dieback has had a large, negative effect on the health of our woodlands	A/D	Support community tree nurseries that collect seed from the Mendip Hills.

				suffering from ash dieback will be more vulnerable to heavy rainfall-induced erosion or dry/ hot conditions effecting ancient ground flora. This will also be true for extreme events. Ash dieback-compromised woodlands will be more effected by high winds and lack of moisture. Extreme events can cause leaf-drying & drop or storms take out veteran trees.	and how we respond to this is important in terms of response to expected climate change impacts. A wide range of species and good structure is important. General approach should be to allow natural re-generation but very bare areas, steep areas with a lot of erosion may need some re-stocking. The approach should be to use trees of local provenance. Monitoring of re-generation will influence future decision-making on need for re-planting and future species choices.		Involvement of the community in monitoring and understanding their woodland environment. Support networks of woodland owners to share information and insight.
Drystone walls.	L	M	L	High temperatures cause desiccation of the exterior of the wall (mosses etc.) and this allows extremes of rainfall to undermine structural integrity of the wall, leading to increased need for patching & repair. Roadside walls in particular are more vulnerable from increased rainfall standing on the road leading to extra splash from traffic. Due to their location these walls are harder to access to repair but are of high landscape value due to their visibility.	Ensure dry-stone walling skills are retained, staff and volunteers are well-trained. Focus on patching walls as less labour intensive, improves the structural integrity of the wall faster, requires less new stone and causes less disturbance to wildlife. Building new walls is still important for connectivity and shade. Drystone walls are relatively low in terms of vulnerability to climate change but provide high value for mitigation through connectivity between habitats, refuge, shade and buffering against extremes.	D	Patch and build more walls as they are of high value to nature, reinforce the landscape character and provide opportunities for mitigating the effects of climate change. Use of traditional skills around walling and hedging. Involvement of the community in monitoring and understanding the walls..

* For a more comprehensive description of the special qualities see section XX

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership and Team Structure

The **Mendip Hills NL Partnership** holds the formal status of a Joint Advisory Committee to the three local authorities. The diverse representation of partners allows the partnership to have an independent 'voice' separate from the local authorities. Members of the Partnership are expected to apply their expertise and experience to contribute to the realisation of the NL's vision.

The **Officer Support Group** is comprised of appropriate officers from every local authority partner, along with a representative from Natural England, the Partnership Chairman, and Vice-Chair. The main duties and obligations of the Officer Support Group include offering assistance to the NL Team via the NL Manager and the Partnership Committee, collaborating with the Manager to determine the structure and topics of the agendas for the Partnership Committee meetings, and establishing the procedure for implementing the decisions made by the Partnership Committee.

The **NL Team**, under the guidance of the NL Manager, comprises a compact group dedicated to carrying out the responsibilities of the Partnership. This team receives support from volunteers such as rangers, practical task volunteers, and Young Rangers. For further details on Defra's Core Functions of a National Landscape Team, please see below.

The Partnership establishes **Working Groups**, as and when required, to provide specialist advice and guidance on issues relating to policy development, the review or delivery of the NL Management Plan, project development and implementation and any other matter where the Partnership decides that it would be expedient.

Mendip Hills NL Partnership Committee, 2024

Somerset Council
North Somerset Council
Bath and North-East Somerset Council
Mendip Hills National Landscape Team
National Trust
National Farmers Union
Country Land & Business Association
Natural England
Somerset Wildlife Trust
Avon Wildlife Trust
Bath and North-East Somerset Parishes Representative
North Somerset Parishes Representative
Somerset Parishes Representative
Mendip Society
Campaign to Protect Rural England
The Trails Trust

For further information on governance, and activity of the NL Partnership, including annual reviews, and current membership see - www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk

Defra's Core Functions of a National Landscape Team

- a) Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the NL vision and the CRoW Act NL Management Plan.
- b) Promoting the NL vision and management plan to help distinguish the NL from adjacent countryside.
- c) Advising upon, facilitating and coordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan.
- d) Advising Local Authorities on their activities within NLs, to encourage them to go beyond normal levels of service (attain the highest possible standards) in countryside management.
- e) Monitoring and reporting on progress against NL Management Plan targets.
- f) Monitoring NL landscape condition.
- g) Accessing resources for management activities.
- h) Working with and contributing to the NL activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally.
- i) Providing a management role to co-ordinate NL protection through the actions of the NL Service, the NL partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level.
- j) Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the NL.
- k) Providing landscape related planning advice.

Appendix 2 - AONB designation, policy and legal framework

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to 'conserve and enhance natural beauty' but the architects of the 1949 Act recognised other underlying principles which were important aspects of the designations' success. These included the need to maintain a 'thriving community life' with particular emphasis on farming and forestry, and the need to promote understanding and enjoyment of the area's special qualities by people.

These subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are those defined in the Countryside Commission statement 1991, restated in 2006. The basis for the wording of the subsidiary purposes can be found in the Countryside Act 1968 (section 37):

- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Although AONBs do not currently have the statutory second purpose of National Parks, which is 'to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities [of the area] by the public', the 1949 Act assumed that AONBs would also fulfil this function and this intent is reflected in the subsequent duty placed on AONB conservation boards by Section 87 of the CROW Act 2000 which adopts the same language.

Responsibility for conservation and enhancement of AONBs: the legal framework AONBs exist within a legal framework which has been progressively strengthened since the first AONBs came into existence after the Second World War.

- The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act made provision for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. It provided AONBs with protection, under planning law, against inappropriate development and gave local authorities permissive powers to take action for 'preserving and enhancing natural beauty'.
- The Countryside Act 1968 (Section 37) placed a responsibility on local authorities, statutory conservation bodies, and civil servants, in exercising their functions under the 1949 Act (as amended by subsequent legislation) to 'have due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of rural areas.' Within AONBs this means a responsibility to acknowledge and, where appropriate, to promote farming, forestry and the rural economic and social context wherever this can be done without compromising the primary purpose of conserving natural beauty.
- The Environment Act 1995 confirmed replacement of 'preserve and enhance' with 'conserve and enhance' in relation to the purpose of National Parks and duties of public bodies towards them.

- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, subsumed and strengthened the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act. It brought the primary purpose in line with that of National Parks, clarified the procedure for their designation, and created a firm legislative basis for their protection and management, giving responsibility for their conservation and enhancement primarily to local authorities.
- Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- Section 83 establishes the procedure for designating or revising the boundaries of an AONB, including Natural England's duty to consult with local authorities and to facilitate public engagement.
- Section 84 confirms the powers of local authorities to take 'all such action as appears to them expedient' to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an AONB and sets consultation and advice on development planning and on public access on the same basis as National Parks in the 1949 Act.
- Section 85 places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities '...in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect land [in an AONB] must seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty...'
- Sections 86 to 88 allow for the establishment in an AONB of a Conservation Board to which the AONB functions of the local authority (including development planning) can be transferred. Conservation boards have the additional but secondary function of seeking to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities. They also have an obligation to 'seek to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities' in co-operation with local authorities and other public bodies.
- Sections 89 and 90 create a statutory duty on all AONB partnerships (local authorities and Conservation Boards) to prepare a management plan 'which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it', and thereafter to review adopted and published Plans at intervals of not more than five years. Where an AONB involves more than one local authority, they are required to do this 'acting jointly'. Section 90 also sets out that the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring AONB Management Plans to contribute to the meeting of any target set under Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021, and setting out how such a plan must contribute to the meeting of such targets, and setting out how AONB Management Plans must further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
- Section 90A sets out that the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring relevant authorities to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review of AONB Management Plans, and setting out how such a relevant authority may or must do so.
- Section 92 makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of 'flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.'
- The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC):

- Section 99 formally clarifies in law that the fact that an area consists of or includes land used for agriculture or woodlands, or as a park, or 'any other area whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape' does not prevent it from being treated, for legal purposes, 'as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).'
- Schedule 7 asserts that an AONB joint committee of two or more local authorities, or a conservation board, can constitute a 'designated body' for the performance of functions allocated to Defra.

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Appendix 3 - Drivers of Change (additional information)

Defra 25 Year Environment Improvement Plan 2023

The environment plan sets out the Defra goals for improving the environment within a generation and leaving it in a better state. It details how the government will work with communities and businesses to do this.

To achieve the 25YEP it has 10 goals. The 10 goals have specific targets and commitments.

The environmental goals

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife
- Goal 2: Clean air
- Goal 3: Clean and plentiful water
- Goal 4: Managing exposure to chemicals and pesticides
- Goal 5: Maximise our resources, minimise our waste
- Goal 6: Using resources from nature sustainably
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change
- Goal 8: Reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards
- Goal 9: Enhancing biosecurity
- Goal 10: Enhanced beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment

[Environmental Improvement Plan 2023: Executive summary - GOV.UK](#)

Recent key legislation

1. Environment Act 2021 (UK):
 - This landmark legislation aims to improve air and water quality, tackle waste, and enhance biodiversity. [It includes legally binding targets for species abundance and mandates the establishment of the Office for Environmental Protection to oversee compliance¹.](#)
2. Net Zero Strategy (UK):
 - Published in October 2021, this strategy outlines the UK government's plans to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. [It includes policies for decarbonizing various sectors of the economy².](#)

Important Reports

1. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Reports:
 - These comprehensive assessments provide scientific information on climate change, its impacts, and potential adaptation and mitigation strategies. The reports are crucial for informing global climate policy.
2. Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) Reports (UK):
 - [The OEP publishes reports on the progress of environmental improvements in England, holding the government accountable for its environmental commitments³.](#)

Additional Notable Mentions

- Paris Agreement: An international treaty that aims to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, with commitments from countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (EU): A plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems across Europe.

These documents and laws play a crucial role in shaping environmental policy and action globally.

Glossary

Calaminarian grassland - is where the process of succession has been halted due to the toxicity of soils containing high levels of toxic metal ions. These habitats may be semi-natural on naturally exposed deposits, or the result of mining, or from erosion by rivers, sometimes including washed-out mine workings.

Catchment Management Plans - plans to benefit whole water catchment areas by working in partnership with individuals and organisations. Records state of water quality, habitats and species, impacts and issues to be addressed.

CRoW Act – Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 - confirmed the significance of NLs. Section 85 places a statutory (legal) duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within a National Landscape.
www.defra.gov.uk/wildlifecountryside/cl/index.htm

Ecological Network - an ecological network is a joined-up group of natural and semi-natural habitats which is managed with the objective of maintaining or restoring ecological function, in order to conserve biodiversity. Ecological networks are provided as a response to biodiversity decline and aim to provide a connected collection of refuges for wildlife. These networks are the basic natural infrastructure that will begin to enable biodiversity to recover from recent declines and help to protect socially and economically important ecosystem goods and services.

European Landscape Convention - also known as the Florence Convention, after the city where the convention was adopted - promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organises European cooperation on landscape issues. It is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all dimensions of European landscape. www.coe.int

Green Infrastructure - is a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

Gruffy ground - remains of surface mining.

Habitat Regulations Assessment - The purpose of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) is to identify any aspects of the emerging Local Plan that would have the potential to cause a likely significant effect on Natura 2000 or European sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites), (either in isolation or in combination with other plans and projects), and to identify appropriate avoidance and mitigation strategies where such effects were identified.

Karst - Landscape characterised by remarkable surface and underground forms, created as a result of the action of water on permeable limestone.

Landscape Character Assessment - a tool to identify what makes an area unique to aid planning and management of landscapes.

Lidar - a remote sensing technology that measures distance by illuminating a target with laser light and analysing the reflected light. Lidar is popularly known as a technology used to make high resolution maps.

Living Landscapes - an approach adopted by the Wildlife Trusts, recognising that nature conservation efforts must be implemented at the landscape-scale. In essence they aim to restore, recreate and reconnect habitats to enable wildlife to move through the landscape. They are large-scale conservation programmes essentially similar in character to those later defined as Nature Improvement Areas. Avon and Somerset Wildlife Trusts both operate Living Landscape schemes within the NL.

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) - 2011 the government invited local councils and businesses to set up voluntary partnerships to help strengthen local economies, set out local economic priorities. They replaced Regional Development Agencies. The West of England and Heart of the SW cover the Mendip Hills NL.

Local Nature Partnership (LNP) - partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment. Setting up LNPs was one of the commitments made in the Natural Environment White Paper 2011. The West of England and the Somerset LNPs cover the Mendip Hills NL.

National Character Area (NCA) - there are 159 NCAs – these areas share similar landscape characteristics and follow natural lines in the landscape. Natural England are producing profiles for each NCA to provide decision making frameworks for the natural environment.

NCA 141 and 118 cover the Mendip Hills NL. www.naturalengland.gov.uk

National Planning Policy Framework 2023 - sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

Natura 2000 sites - see SACs and SPAs

Nature Improvement Area (NIA) - these are large, discrete areas that, by taking a landscape-scale approach, will deliver a step change in nature conservation, where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment. The partnership will plan and deliver significant improvements for wildlife and people through the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring and creating wildlife habitats, connecting local sites and joining up local action.

National Nature Reserve (NNR) - areas where wildlife comes first – established to protect most important sites of wildlife habitat and geological formations in Britain. The majority have some form of public access.

Neighbourhood Plan - A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law this is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) - identified by locally developed criteria, are the most important places for geology and geomorphology outside statutorily protected land. RIGS are selected in a different way to Earth science SSSIs, which are chosen on a national basis. RIGS are selected on a local or regional basis using four nationally agreed criteria. Nationally important geological sites are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - the country's best wildlife and geological sites. Many SSSIs are also NNRs.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) - these are sites of regional nature conservation importance.

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) - protected sites under the European Community Habitats Directive - forming a network of high quality conservation sites.

Special Protection Area (SPA) - designated under the European Birds Directive because of their importance to birds.

Special Qualities - NLs are designated solely for their landscape qualities, for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty. Designation under the provisions of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act is to secure their permanent protection against development that would damage their special qualities. The NLs special qualities are listed in the NL Management Plan (see 1.4)

Spring-line Settlements - occur where a ridge of permeable rock lies over impermeable rock and there will be a line of springs along the boundary between the two layers. It sometimes happens that a sequence of spring line settlements will arise around these springs, becoming villages.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) - the purpose of an SEA is to ensure that land-use plans and programmes, that are likely to have significant effects on the environment are subjected to a strategic level (high and overarching) assessment of options and alternative courses of action during plan preparation in order to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects.

Swallets - also known as sinkhole, doline, swallow hole - a natural depression or hole in the earth's surface. Develop by a variety of methods - collapse, suffusion or solution. Can be 20 metres deep and 100 metres or more in diameter. www.bgs.ac.uk