Mendip Hills National Landscape

Management Plan 2025-2030

Adopted August 2026

Mendip Hills National Landscape

designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Since 22nd November 2023, all AONBs have been known as 'National Landscapes', However, relevant legislation continues to refer to 'Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) and their statutory purpose remain unchanged. The terms National Landscape and AONB are therefore used interchangeably in this document.

Contents

Map of the Mendip Hills National Landscape 4
Minister's Foreword 5
Chair's Foreward 6
1 What is a National Landscape? 7
2 Who is the Management Plan for and how should it be used? 9
2.1 Relevant authorities 11
2.2 Local authority's functions and the Plan 12
2.3 National Planning Policy Framework 13
2.4 How was the Management Plan prepared? 15
3 Drivers of Change 17
4 Benefits of the Mendip Hills National Landscape 20
4.1 Mendip Hills NL Ecosystem Services 21
5 Natural beauty 24
5.1 Natural England National Character Areas (NCA) 24
5.2 Statement of Significance – The Special Qualities of the Mendip Hills NL 25
6 The Vision 27
6.1 Place Theme 29
6.2 Place Objectives 36
6.3 Nature Theme 37
6.4 Nature Objectives 43
6.5 Climate Theme 45
6.6 Climate Objectives 53
6.7 People Theme 55
6.8 People Objectives 62
7 Delivering the Plan and Monitoring the State of the National Landscape 64
7.1 Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) 65
7.2 The Mendip Hills NL Nature Recovery Plan 69
7.3 Targets for the Mendip Hills National Landscape 71
7.4 Climate Change Adaptation Plans 72
7.5 Climate Vulnerability Assessment 73
Appendices 77
Appendix 1 - Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership and Team Structure 77
Appendix 2 - AONB designation, policy and legal framework 80
Appendix 3 - Drivers of Change (additional information) 83
Glossary 85

This page is intentionally blank

Map of the Mendip Hills National Landscape

Foreword

By Mary Creagh CBE MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Nature)

Protected Landscapes are our most iconic and inspiring places. They were created from 1949, with post-war Britain recognising everyone has a right to access the countryside – from Northumberland's dark skies to the South Downs' Seven Sisters. 75 years on, the needs are greater than ever, with nature underpinning our health, economy and climate. That's why this government will empower Protected Landscapes to become greener, wilder and more accessible.

Covering 25% of England, but half of our priority habitats, Protected Landscapes are essential to nature's recovery. This government understands that we will not achieve our Environment Act targets or commitment to protect 30% of nature by 2030 without Protected Landscapes.

Recovering this natural capital is essential to ensure sustainable economic growth. Protected Landscapes are fundamental to strengthening the nation's economic health by looking after the natural resources we depend on. Through nature's recovery, Protected Landscapes protect communities from flooding, fight climate change, enable sustainable food production and create green jobs. They also have a vital role in connecting diverse communities with nature - underpinning the nation's mental and physical health and reducing the strain on our NHS.

This incredible potential is beginning to be set out in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. However, it will only become reality through the work of Protected Landscapes teams in collaboration with local communities, land managers, public bodies and other partners.

Protected Landscape Management Plans provide the focal point for all partners to agree a local ambition and a pathway to deliver it, shaping the future of our most special places, and therefore the country. It is vital that all partners work together to develop and implement Management Plans. To support this collaboration, we have issued guidance on the Protected Landscapes duty which requires relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.

In recognising their importance to the nation, this government has committed to reinvigorating Protected Landscapes with new legislation, resources and tools. I look forward to developing this with you and other partners because it is only together that we can protect and enhance these remarkable places for generations to come.

Chair’s Foreword

By David Turner, Chair, Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership

The Mendip Hills National Landscape is one of our most treasured places, it is rich in wildlife, heritage, and inspiration. This Management Plan sets out a shared vision to secure its future. It is a plan that every relevant authority, organisation, and community should stand behind. Only by working together can we safeguard the special qualities that make the Mendip Hills so unique.

At the heart of this effort is the Mendip Hills Partnership and I have great pride in chairing this group. The strength of this Partnership lies in its collaborative spirit: farmers, land managers, council members and officers, community groups, charities, and businesses all play vital roles in shaping and caring for this living landscape. I would particularly like to thank the Team for their commitment and diligence in drawing up the Management Plan, those who assisted the earlier stages of plan preparation and our amazing volunteers who constantly remind us that putting the plan into action can be so rewarding. Partnership working is not simply an aspiration; it is the engine that makes progress possible.

But the pressures facing the Mendip Hills are increasing. Climate change is already altering habitats, water systems, and the resilience of the landscape. The growing demand for recreation and access brings wonderful opportunities for people’s health and wellbeing, yet it also requires sensitive management to protect the hills’ fragile ecosystems. Balancing these needs is a responsibility we all share.

Nature recovery is central to this Management Plan. Restoring habitats, supporting species, and rebuilding ecological networks will help the landscape respond to climate change and thrive for future generations. This plan calls for ambition - bigger, better connected, and more resilient spaces for nature. The declaration of the new Mendip 'super' National Nature Reserve underlines how important the area already is for wildlife but even this needs more attention.

The Mendip Hills have endured for millennia; our task is to ensure they continue to inspire, sustain, and enrich the lives of those who call them home and those who come to explore. I commend this plan to all who value this remarkable landscape and invite you to join us in delivering its vision.

1 What is a National Landscape?

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

1.2 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.

1.3 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)

1.4 **'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 tranquillity, 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 recognised.

1.5 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.'

1.6 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'.

1.7 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)
National Landscapes Association (www.national-landscapes.org.uk)

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

2.0.1 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.

2.0.2 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.

2.0.3 The Plan is one for the place, not just the Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership, and plays a crucial part in obtaining commitment from public bodies in particular. 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):

2.0.4 *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.*

2.0.5 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.' as follows:

2.0.6 *'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.'

[1] Paragraph 24 of the NPPF (2024) 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'.

2.0.7 Government Planning Practice Guidance explains that management plans provide evidence of the value and special qualities of National Landscapes and provide a basis for cross-organisational work to support the purposes of their designation and show how management activities contribute to their protection, enhancement and enjoyment. The thirteen Special Qualities are set out in section 5 below.

2.0.8 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 and North Somerset Council. As such, this Plan sets out the particular special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL in a 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 in achieving the Vision for the Mendip Hills NL.

2.0.9 Through engagement with the local authorities and other stakeholders, the NL Partnership seeks to deliver this Plan through a coordinated annual Delivery Plan of actions, assisted and managed by the NL Team. Implementation of the Management Plan involves positive conservation measures as well as enforcement by relevant agencies where necessary against activities which are harmful to the area's special qualities such as unauthorised development and rural crime. The Plan's 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.

2.0.10 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 screening process to determine whether Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening (SEA) and/or a Habitat Regulation Assessment is required in accordance with the European Habitats Directive; and an Equalities Impact Assessment have been undertaken [prior to the plan's adoption].

2.1 Relevant authorities

2.1.1 In exercising their statutory duties, '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.

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

2.2 Local authority's functions and the Plan

2.2.1 The Management Plan is relevant to any local authority function that may have an influence upon the natural beauty of the NL 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

2.2.2 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.

2.3 National Planning Policy Framework

2.3.1 National planning policy is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024. The NPPF applies as a whole to NLs 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 National Landscapes: paragraphs 189 and 190, see below.

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

- The scale and extent of development in National Landscapes should be limited.

- Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining a planning application are out of date, the NPPF introduces a presumption that planning permission should be granted, unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. (This is often referred to as the 'tilted balance'). However, the tilted balance may often be disapplied in respect of planning affecting the Mendip Hills National Landscape. That is because the NPPF makes clear the tilted balance is not triggered in cases where the application of its policies that '*protect areas or assets of particular importance*' (including National Landscapes) provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed.

- There is a presumption that planning permission should be refused for major development in National Landscapes other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.

- Policies for protecting National Landscapes 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).

- National Landscapes are unlikely to be suitable areas for accommodating unmet needs arising from adjoining, non-designated, areas.

2.3.3 Paragraph 189 of the NPPF states: 'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes 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.'

2.3.4 Paragraph 190 of the NPPF states: 'When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and AONBs, 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.'

2.3.5 Major development as referred to in paragraph 190 of the NPPF is not defined, but Footnote 67 of the NPPF explains: 'For the purposes of paragraphs 190 and 191, 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.'

2.4 How was the Management Plan prepared?

2.4.1 This Management Plan has been informed by a considerable amount of background evidence, consultation and engagement. This is summarised below, together with an outline of next steps.

2.4.2 In 2022, we commissioned a '*State of the AONB'* report to provide a snapshot of the condition of the area and its special qualities. The report gathers together a wide range of data structured around the themes of '*Nature, Climate, People and Place*' which have been developed by Government as a framework to guide consistent outcomes for all protected landscapes in England. The report has been instrumental in providing a context for the engagement we have carried out to date. It has also shaped the format and structure of the draft Management Plan. The report is available to view on our website alongside this consultation document.

2.4.3 In autumn 2023, the various partner organisations which make up the Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership carried out a SWOT analysis of the current Management Plan focusing particularly on the special qualities.

2.4.4 This was followed up with targeted consultation involving a review questionnaire of the current Management Plan. In March 2024, the Partnership explored the emerging themes at an ideas and issues session, before inviting comments from residents, farmers, other businesses owners, elected councillors, parish councils, stakeholders and visitors about the priorities which they thought were important to help shape the future of the area.

2.4.5 A summary of the outcome of that consultation is set out in a report prepared by a specialist organisation called '*Distinctive'* who helped us carry out effective public consultation. That report is also available to view on our website: mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/

2.4.6 Along with the '*State of the AONB*' and '*Distinctive'* reports, we commissioned independent Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) 'screening' reports from Lepus. The SEA report concluded that there are no likely significant (negative) environmental effects associated with any part of the Management Plan. Similarly, the HRA report concluded that there are not expected to be any likely significant environmental effects on any designated European sites. We consulted Natural England as the statutory nature conservation body on the HRA report, who confirmed their view that further screening is not required. We also consulted Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England on the SEA report, and again no representations were received which indicated that further assessment is needed. We have therefore determined that neither a full environmental assessment, nor a full Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Management Plan are necessary.

2.4.7 We also prepared a Equalities Impact Assessment as part of the Plan and concluded that no negative outcomes are likely to impact on protected groups. The EqIA is available to view on the website: mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/management-plan/

2.4.8 Formal public consultation on a draft Management Plan took place for a 6-week period between 10 June – 22 July 2025 in response to which a number of amendments were made by the NL Partnership. Further consultation took place with Natural England in January 2026 before the Plan was formally adopted by the three constituent local authorities between May and August 2026.

3 Drivers of Change

3.1 The Mendip Hills NL Management Plan needs to take account of the wider environment in which it operates, see Appendix 3 for additional information on drivers of change.

3.2 **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 schemes provide opportunities to improve conservation, access, and encourage public understanding. Decisions about Environmental Land Management schemes should be linked to the statutory NL Management Plan so far as possible. The 2018 Agriculture Bill and the Environment Act 2023 will further shape delivery of the NL Management Plan. More widely, there will continue to be strong drivers of change in farming resulting from a wide range of factors. These include, amongst others, an ageing farming population, pressures to diversify to supplement income, competition for farmland including a gradual shift towards fewer, larger farms, labour shortages and increasing digitisation and precision in agriculture.

3.3 **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 tranquillity. The bypass at Banwell will enable development to the north of the NL boundary. Axbridge, Cheddar and Wells on the southern boundary, are 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.

3.4 **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 and well-maintained public access to attractive countryside, particularly walking, cycling, and rock sports brings physical and mental health benefits, enabling people to enjoy a beautiful landscape, connect 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.

[2] State of the Mendip Hills AONB Report 2022

3.5 **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. These challenges all impact on the NL. Through engagement with the various committees, and through elected members, the NL Partnership aims 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.

3.6 **Climate Change**

3.6.1 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. The likely effects of climate change will mean 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.

3.6.2 These patterns will have profound consequences for habitats and the species they support. Habitat fragmentation is a particular risk, making it harder for species to migrate or adapt and changes are inevitable as warm and cold-adapted flora and fauna emerge and disappear. Disruptions to ecological relationships through mismatches in the timing of flowering v pollinator activity can also be expected. In the Mendip Hills National Landscape, particular champion species identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy which are sensitive to climate change include the greater horseshoe bat (through changes in insect availability and roosting conditions), Cheddar pink (vulnerability to habitat fragmentation), adder (threatened by habitat loss and disturbance) and water vole (at risk from altered water regimes and predation).

3.6.3 It is likely there will increasingly be longer dry periods followed by sudden periods of heavy rain causing more frequent flood events from surface runoff, increased flooding of settlements at the foot of the hills, rock fall, soil erosion, nutrient leaching 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 are likely to lead to increases in water demand for crop growth, business, and domestic use; and drying out, and erosion of soils. This has profound implications for soil health as degraded soils reduce their ability to store water, filter nutrients and pollutants and sustain diverse microbial ecosystems. Similarly, drying and decomposition of peatlands releases greenhouse gases and increases fire risks, exacerbating the causes of climate change.

3.6.4 Increased storminess, drought, and prevalence of pest and diseases (including non-native invasive species and pathogens) may also result in damage or loss of ancient woodlands and mature, ancient, and veteran trees. Ash dieback in particular has already had a significant impact on woodland habitats, species, landscape character and shading. 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.

3.6.5 Climate change poses threats to the historic environment through damage/loss to structures and remains attributable to intense rainfall, ground instability associated with more extreme soaking and drying and changes in vegetation patterns

3.6.6 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.

3.6.7 Please see the Climate Vulnerability Assessment in section 7.5

4 Benefits of the Mendip Hills National Landscape

4.0.1 **25 Year Environment Plan - A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment DEFRA (January 2018)**

The Government's 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.'.

4.0.2 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.'

4.0.3 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'.'

4.0.4 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'.

4.0.5 Taking account of all the economic and non-economic benefits society gets from ecosystem services enables decision makers to exercise judgement about the use of the 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.

4.0.6 Section 4.1 gives examples of the Mendip Hills NL Ecosystem Services. Many of these provide services at a national, regional and local level. Services of national importance reflect the special qualities of the nationally protected landscape. The natural capital and ecosystem services provided by the Mendip Hills NL are supported through objectives in this Plan.

4.1 Mendip Hills NL Ecosystem Services

4.1.1 Provisioning services

4.1.1.1 **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.

4.1.1.2 **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.

4.1.1.3 **Timber**
Foresters in the NL produce timber in extensive plantations, smaller-scale timber harvests come from farm woodlands.

4.1.1.4 **Fuel**
Woodlands, including small farm woodlands, provide fuel.

4.1.1.5 **Genetic diversity**
Local livestock breeds help maintain genetic diversity.

4.1.2 Regulating services

4.1.2.1 **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 Bristol Avon catchment for Catchment Sensitive Farming Scheme purposes.

4.1.2.2 **Disease and pest regulation**
Healthy and diverse ecosystems are less vulnerable to pests and disease and can help regulate them.

4.1.2.3 **Pollination**
Pollination of crops is important for food supply – healthy ecosystems such as lowland heath and species rich grassland support this service.

4.1.2.4 **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. Healthy soils and nature rich habitats are also valuable for carbon storage.

4.1.3 Cultural Services

4.1.3.1 **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.

4.1.3.2 **Spiritual values**

The NL's landscapes and tranquillity provide spiritual inspiration and enrichment from nature for many people.

4.1.3.3 **Aesthetic values**

Due to the height contrast between the surrounding levels, the NL is renowned for the views it provides.

4.1.3.4 **Sense of place**

The distinctive landform provides residents and visitors with a sense of place, and cultural heritage.

4.1.3.5 **Education**

The Mendip Hills have a long tradition of providing outdoor adventure and education activities by visiting groups and Duke of Edinburgh Awards groups, formally at locations like Charterhouse Centre.

4.1.3.6 **Recreation and tourism**

The Mendip Hills are accessible to the large populations of Bristol, Bath, Weston-super-Mare, and the smaller surrounding settlements. Access to the landscape is fundamental to promoting healthier lifestyles. Tourism is important to the local economy, Wookey Hole and Cheddar Gorge draw in large numbers of visitors. Examples of popular activities include walking, cycling, equestrian activities, rock-sports and wildlife watching.

4.1.4 Supporting Services

4.1.4.1 **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, as are sites for greater horseshoe bats.

4.1.4.2 **Soil**

Lowland calcareous grassland is strongly influenced by the alkaline soils found throughout the Mendip Hills AONB resulting from the limestone geology of the area. They hold proportionally less carbon but are valuable for the fauna and flora they support. Deeper, more neutral soils cover the plateau and north facing slopes containing more carbon and allowing different assemblages of flora and fauna. All soils store, filter and transform nutrients and water.

4.1.4.3 **Nutrient cycling**

Plants, animals, and micro-organisms play a crucial role in the cycling of nutrients essential for the delivery of ecosystem benefits.

5 Natural beauty

5.1 Natural England National Character Areas (NCA)

5.1.1 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.

5.1.2 The NCA profile for the Mendip Hills (141) highlights that the area is 'renowned for its tranquillity 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 states 'Safeguard inward and outward views and to the distinctive hill line and conserve and enhance the special qualities, tranquillity, sense of remoteness and naturalness of the area'.

5.1.3 The NCA profile for Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (NCA 118) states that to the south of Bristol, the land falls to the Yeo and Chew valleys, where Chew and Blagdon lakes are prominent features near the foot of the Mendip scarp. These lakes are designated as Drinking Water Protected Areas under the Water Framework Directive.

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

5.2 Rising from the Somerset Levels are the distinctive Mendip Hills, that, with the Chew Valley and Blagdon lakes, 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 listed below. Particular combinations of these special qualities, originally identified in the Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment (1998) and more recently set out in the Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan, form 11 distinctive local areas based on the character of the landscape. It is also important to note that habitats, species and biodiversity are also essential components of the natural beauty of the Mendip Hills, with a mosaic of habitats in close proximity to one another, and are to varying degrees intrinsic to each of the Special Qualities listed below.

- The dark skies, tranquillity[3], 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 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.

[3] Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) (LI and IEMA 2013) define tranquillity 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.

- 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 Second World War sites are prominent features on the plateau, as are remnants of Roman and Victorian lead mining.
- A landscape enabling people to experience the special qualities of the Mendip Hills NL through a wide range of interests and outdoor pursuits and activities.

6 The Vision

Our Vision for the Mendip Hills NL in 15 years

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

The vision, outlined in this Management Plan represents the ambition for the state of the NL in 15 years. The vision will be implemented through the four themes of Place, Nature, Climate and People.

Although there are objectives for each theme, the Plan should be taken in its entirety and the relationships between themes and ecosystem services recognised. The themes and their objectives are not in any order of priority. For ease of reference, the 'Vision' for each theme (set out immediately below) is reproduced in each of the respective themed sections in paragraphs 6.1 onwards.

6.0.1 **PLACE – landscape quality, historic environment and cultural heritage**

The vision for Place is one where the ecological, biological, cultural, and scenic value of the National Landscape continues to be conserved and enhanced, reflecting its creation over time by the interaction of people and nature. Collaborative partnerships will be working ever closer 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, will ensure all sites, structures, and landscapes are conserved and enhanced, and local communities, and visitors enjoy a rich experience of sense of place.

6.0.2 **NATURE – biodiversity, geodiversity and natural resources**

The vision for Nature is to secure resilient and coherent ecological networks, both within and beyond the NL boundaries. This will result in bigger, better and more joined up habitats, and 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.

6.0.3 CLIMATE - Land management and development

The vision for Climate, is to secure the mitigation of the causes and effects of climate change through appropriate land management. As the main land use, agriculture will 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. Integrated and sustainable land use management will restore and enhance the area's natural capital including soils, food, and water supply. As part of this, a shift away from intensive agriculture towards sustainable long term management practices will be important, with support of government, funding, communities and consumers.

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.

6.0.4 PEOPLE – Participation, recreation, access and tourism

The vision for People is improving participation, increasing awareness and understanding, particularly for 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, will be enabled through a wide range of active, and quiet pursuits that the area can sustain. The area will be accessible, regardless of individual mobility, disability, financial situation or background, including to historically under-represented groups.

People will be more closely connected to nature and landscape. Significant numbers of the local community will be accessing training and learning in the conservation and enhancement of the Mendip Hills National Landscape. This could be through direct employment in the rural economy, as custodians of the landscape, influencing decision makers or volunteering. In visibly acting for nature, climate and landscape, people will encourage and enable others to do the same.

6.1 Place Theme

Vision for Place – landscape quality, historic environment and cultural heritage

6.1.1.1 The vision for Place is one where the ecological, biological, cultural, and scenic value of the National Landscape continues to be conserved and enhanced reflecting its creation over time by the interaction of people and nature. Collaborative partnerships will be working ever closer together with a shared understanding of the purposes of the National Landscape.

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

Landscape Overview

6.1.1.3 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 by all.

6.1.1.4 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.

6.1.1.5 The Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment (Countryside Commission 1998) identified 11 distinctive character areas. Consideration of the landscape needs to take account of the 'special qualities' of these character areas.

6.1.1.6 In addition to this the 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 of change, and as working documents they draw on current evidence and knowledge of these landscapes.

Heritage Overview

6.1.1.7 National Landscape designation recognises the importance of heritage and reinforces the need to protect and manage characteristic features. The historical value of the area is incredibly rich and important. 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. 198 Listed Buildings and 173 Scheduled Monuments and 4844 entries are listed on the Historic Environment Record (HER). Interest and participation in this subject is high, leading to previously unrecorded sites and features being recorded. Often, such heritage assets are designated for more than one purpose which contribute to the special qualities of the National Landscape. For example, a Scheduled Monument may also be a listed building or lie within a Site of Special Scientific Interest. In such cases, the effects of development, land management or other actions will need to carefully consider the purposes of each of the designations.

6.1.1.8 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 19th century, the Rock of Ages service which marks the origin of the famous hymn, and the hedging and ploughing matches which promote 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. Communities are actively engaged with their heritage.

6.1.1.9 A State of Heritage report was commissioned by the NL Team from the South West Heritage Trust in 2024.In collating the current known information about the historic landscape, the report demonstrates that each period of human activity in the MHNL is represented by sites of both regional and national significance (evidenced by Scheduled Monuments), and in some cases European importance. Significantly, the NL area is a microcosm of activity, which is intrinsically associated with regional, national and European movements and developments. The main conclusions of the report identify concerns around limitations in the knowledge base, statutory protection, monitoring and public appreciation of the heritage of Mendip. As a result, a number of broad actions are recommended around 'research and community engagement', 'management and protection' and 'interpretation and wellbeing'.

6.1.2 Benefits and Opportunities

Landscape

6.1.2.1 The Mendip Hills NL provides a wide range of benefits to society. Each is derived from the attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) within the area. These benefits are known collectively as 'ecosystem services'. The predominant services are summarised below. Further information on ecosystem services provided in the Mendip Hills NL is contained in section 4.1.

6.1.2.2 **Provisioning services**:

- Food provision
- Water availability

6.1.2.3 **Regulating services**:

- Regulating soil erosion
- Regulating water quality

6.1.2.4 **Cultural services**:

- Sense of place and inspiration
- Sense of history
- Education
- Recreation
- Geodiversity

6.1.2.5 **Supporting services**;

- Biodiversity
- Soil
- Nutrient cycling

Heritage

6.1.2.6 Unless we have a strong understanding of the historic sites, features and landscape for the area we cannot hope to enhance it adequately. Raising awareness of the heritage importance of the Mendip Hills NL through all sections of society is important and should lead to greater protection.

6.1.2.7 Interpretation, engagement events and citizen science heritage-based projects have the potential to help local communities to understand, enjoy and connect with the NL's rich and varied heritage resource. Studies have also shown that these types of projects support cultural capacity and have proven health and wellbeing benefits.

6.1.3 Issues, Impacts and Barriers to Delivery

Landscape Issues

6.1.3.1 Many factors bring pressure for change the Mendip Hills National Landscape. Many of these are overarching issues which are also relevant to other themes and include:

- development
- land use and agriculture practices
- habitat decline
- increase in road traffic
- recreational demand
- dark sky loss
- landscape detail loss. Examples of loss include gruffy ground (remnants of shallow lead mining), rock outcrops, and field boundaries
- lack of protection for features e.g. dry-stone walls, historic buildings

6.1.3.2 These need to be managed within and near the NL boundary, to ensure that the essential character and its setting is conserved and enhanced.

6.1.3.3 Dry stone walls are unprotected, dependent on individual landowners to maintain and restore them. Whilst several significant walls have been repaired, the costs of wall restoration outweigh the available public agri-funding grants which has resulted in a decline in repairs.

Heritage Issues

6.1.3.4 There are currently 173 Scheduled Monuments within the MHNL. A total of eight Scheduled Monuments are recorded on the Heritage at Risk Register. The principal risks associated with these sites are arable clipping/ploughing, animal burrowing, permitted development, and scrub/tree growth.

6.1.3.5 The Post Medieval period has the greatest number of Historic Environment Records (1,788), followed by the Medieval period (1,482 records) and the Industrial/Modern period (518 records). These together comprise 73% of the total number of records, but do not fully represent the historic environment of the MHNL as it survives today. For example, a record relating to a single ditched boundary or findspot is just an indication and not an accurate nor proportional representation of the wider associated activity of a particular date or period.

6.1.3.6 Whilst the condition of individual designated heritage assets is under much needed assessment by both Historic England and the MHNL volunteers, the threats to non-designated/undesignated heritage assets (the archaeological sites not protected through scheduling), which comprise the majority of historic resource, remains a significant concern. Some of those sites may be of national importance and the NPPF makes clear that where they are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, they should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets.

6.1.3.7 Climate change poses particular threats to the historic environment. Intense rainfall causes erosion of archaeological sites including, for example sensitive remains in caves. Increased extremes of soaking and drying also heightens the risk of ground subsidence which may accelerate the decay of stonework. 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.

6.1.3.8 Heritage assets are also vulnerable to crime due to their often isolated rural nature. For example, gates protecting sensitive areas within caves may be broken, and the caves may be subject to graffiti, anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping etc. Community groups such as caving organisations can play an important role in monitoring and reporting any such damage.

Heritage Access Issues

6.1.3.9 The MHNL has been subject to detailed assessment projects during the first decade of this century. Even since this time, there have been considerable advances in survey technology; for example, Lidar resolution is continuously improving. Websites such as Google Earth are also an increasingly useful resource.

6.1.3.10 It has been established that the area has a rich and varied heritage resource, which is not always accessible or available to the public.

6.1.3.11 A review of the currently available literature relating to the MHNL (including through the State of Heritage Report) has demonstrated that there are very few recent publications concerning the study area, with the two overview publications generally intended for a more academic audience. Although other written resources such as society publications, grey literature reports and journals are available, these are also aimed at a more specialist audience.

6.1.4 Solutions and Mitigations

Landscape Solutions

6.1.4.1 The National Character Area NL 141 for the Mendip Hills contains the following Statements of Environmental Opportunity that address the key issues identified above:

6.1.4.2 SEO 1: Conserve the distinctive combination of historic field boundaries, field and settlement patterns and land uses that have shaped the landscape of the Mendip Hills. Safeguard inward and outward views of and to the distinctive hill line and conserve and enhance the special qualities, tranquillity, and sense of remoteness and naturalness of the area.

6.1.4.3 SEO 2: Safeguard the rich geological features of this renowned karst landscape, the many archaeological features associated with the upland ridge and the historical mining legacy, enabling access, continued research, interpretation, understanding and enjoyment of the extensive geological and historical resource.

6.1.4.4 SEO 3: Conserve and sustainably manage the rural agricultural landscape and enhance the network of nationally and internationally important sites and semi-natural habitats associated with the distinctive geology and topography to create a coherent and resilient ecological network, enabling ecosystems to adapt to climate change and for the benefits to biodiversity, water flow, water quality and protection of the aquifer, soil quality, regulating soil erosion, rural heritage and culture.

Heritage Solutions

6.1.4.5 More syntheses of existing survey data and further detailed surveys such as Lidar are undertaken to enhance the existing recorded archaeological data held by the Historic Environment Records (HER).

6.1.4.6 Local museums and the three HERs offer opportunities for the public to explore the heritage of the area. The annual Mendip Rocks! programme of events raises 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.

6.1.4.7 There is scope for more on-site interpretation of the most important monuments, to enhance public value and understanding.

6.1.4.8 Visual reconstructions would make the interpretation of complex sites such as that at Charterhouse more accessible, as would period visual landscape reconstructions.

6.1.4.9 A visitor centre/ heritage space would increase opportunities to facilitate historic environment outreach programmes, talks and demonstrations.

6.1.4.10 There is scope for a simple synthesis of the cultural heritage of the MHNL area, aimed at the public.

6.1.4.11 An increased heritage presence on the MHNL website and other media is also recommended

6.1.4.12 Promotion of the BANES, North Somerset and Somerset HERs.

6.1.4.13 Produce a specific research framework for the MHNL area.

6.1.4.14 Archives such as estate records offer a way of exploring the story of a landscape through aspects such as land ownership and mining.

6.1.4.15 There may also be some value in assessing undesignated heritage assets and landscapes in terms of the Landscape Character Areas.

6.1.4.16 The Historic Landscape Characterisation for the MHNL area should also be assessed, together with a review of data held by the National Trust.

6.1.4.17 Future projects may provide the opportunity for volunteer engagement and this should be encouraged where possible.

6.1.4.18 New fieldwork undertaken within the area should be incorporated into the HER in a timely manner, and where possible those designing projects should seek guidance from the appropriate Historic Environment Team to ensure that the results are of a suitable quality and can be disseminated appropriately.

6.1.4.19 The potential for future community archaeology projects that encourage local communities to better understand and value the nature of the historic environment is recommended.

6.2 Place Objectives

6.2.1 **Landscape Quality, Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage objectives:**

PL1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive landscape of the MHNL is conserved and enhanced

PL2 Provide opportunities to acquire and develop skills required to care for and promote the landscape and its special qualities.

PL3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the purposes of designation and the special qualities of the NL

PL4 Increase awareness of the benefits of supporting local products and services that help conserve and enhance the landscape.

PL5 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.

PL6 Increase awareness and communicate the significance of the high-quality historic environment of the Mendip Hills NL.

PL7 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.

6.2.2 **Targets**

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes – see section 7.1 for a full description.

Target 10

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

In 2025 eight Scheduled Monuments are recorded on the Monuments at Risk Register.

6.2.3 **Helpful resources to deliver the landscape and heritage theme objectives**

- Mendip Hills National Landscape State of Heritage Report 2025 State of Heritage Report March 2025
- Natural England National Character Area 141: The Mendip Hills NCA Profile:141. Mendip Hills - NE416
- Somerset Historic Environment Record Somerset HER
- North Somerset Historic Environment Record Historic Environment Record | North Somerset Council
- B&NES Historic Environment Record Somerset HER

6.3 Nature Theme

Vision for Nature – biodiversity, geodiversity and natural resources

6.3.1.1 The vision for Nature is to secure resilient and coherent ecological networks, both within and beyond the NL boundaries. This will result in providing bigger, better, and more joined up habitats, to assist with the restoration of characteristic species. The creation of the Mendip 'super' National Nature Reserve (Mendip NNR) 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.

Nature Overview

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

6.3.1.4 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 agricultural yields of grassland, which has had an adverse impact and led to loss, fragmentation and degradation of previously commonplace nature-rich grassland habitats. Although Mendip supports some of the most species-rich grasslands in the county, they are a rarity, especially when you consider that these diverse habitats, and the wildflowers and other species that they support, were previously an everywhere-everyday part of the farmed landscape and a feature in the lives of local communities. Today, remnant sites continue to be lost or under threat and are generally confined to sites that were historically hard to farm intensively and are under sensitive long-term management.

6.3.1.5 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 small-leaved lime.

6.3.1.6 Many sites in the Mendip Hills NL are designated for their biodiversity, including both UK and European designations. These sites are:

- 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)

6.3.1.7 There are 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designated for their national importance for biodiversity. 96% of the 2712 ha designated SSSI is in favourable, or unfavourable and recovering condition. Local Wildlife Sites, where sensitively managed, act as buffers, stepping-stones, and corridors for these nationally designated wildlife sites. The Mendip NNR, covering 1,412 hectares was declared in 2023 encompassing two existing national nature reserves and 29 other sites. Some 69% of the Mendip NNR is also designated as SSSI.

Geodiversity Overview

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

6.3.1.9 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.

6.3.1.10 The 'Netherworld' of Mendip is significant and cave exploration is ongoing; there are over 3000 entries on the Mendip Cave Register. In 2012 the largest Mendip cave, 'Frozen Deep', was discovered, which has some of the most impressive stalactites and stalagmites in the UK.

6.3.1.11 Previous mining activities 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.

6.3.1.12 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.

6.3.2 Benefits and Opportunities

6.3.2.1 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 nature. Building the resilience of ecological networks will enable the ecological network to respond to climate change. 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. Water management, both quality and availability, will benefit many ecosystem services, including soil quality, soil erosion, and biodiversity.

6.3.2.2 The Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan (see Section 7.2 below) and the two Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) for the West of England and Somerset respectively that 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.

6.3.2.3 In addition, the Nature Recovery Plan will assist the local authorities' 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'.

6.3.2.4 With respect to geodiversity, quarry companies in the Mendip area have invested in proactive relationships with the public, offering opportunities to visit, via the Somerset Earth Science Centre at Moon Hill Quarry.

6.3.3 Issues, Impacts and Barriers to Delivery

The pressing issues for biodiversity and geodiversity are loss of ecological networks and geological features, deteriorating condition and fragmentation of habitats, intensification of agriculture, new development, and less resources for management.

6.3.3.1 **Climate Change Issues**

Climate change will mean that 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.

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. There may be potential for growing different crops suited to a hotter climate, or we may see crop failure altogether.

Increasing occurrences of droughts will lead to increases in water demand for crop growth, business, and domestic use, drying out, and erosion of soils. Increased storminess, drought, and prevalence of pest and diseases, for example ash dieback, are resulting in damage or loss of woodlands, ancient, and veteran trees.

There are many pests and diseases in the UK and threatening our local wildlife. However not all non-native species are invasive, and the Mendip Hills AONB does not currently suffer as badly as some landscapes from the abundance and impact of invasive non-native species. Nevertheless, this problem, as well as diseases impacting on our native species, are likely to get worse in the future due to the increase movement of people and goods, and because of climate change.

6.3.3.2 **Water Issues**

Flooding from run-off is increasingly affecting villages along the A368 and A371. Flooding has been experienced in the Chew Valley and Cheddar, where the streams and river emerge. The Bristol Avon Catchment Flood Management Plans covers part of the NL.

Large parts of the NL are 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, where issues of nitrogen enrichment, phosphates, and sedimentation have been identified affecting the quality of Chew Valley Lake and the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site. 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.

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.

6.3.4 Solutions and Mitigations

6.3.4.1 **Implementing Plans and Strategies**
The Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan and LNRSs 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. In this context, new development can be both an opportunity and a threat. It will be important to ensure that proposed allocations in local plans and decisions on development, including quarry restoration schemes, maximise opportunities to deliver nature recovery.

6.3.4.2 There is a management group which has prepared an over-arching management framework for a collection of the 31 archipelago sites that together comprise the Mendip NNR. The NNR declaration formalises the management of them as one. It will be equally important for land adjacent and in between each of the NNR sites to be involved, for example through affiliation.

6.3.4.3 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.

6.3.4.4 **Water Solutions**

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. Similarly, the southern parts of the Mendip Hills NL lie within the catchment of the River Brue which currently contributes to excessive levels of phosphates adversely affecting the conservation status of the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site. The NPPF makes clear that sites designated under the Ramsar Convention are afforded the same protection as if they were designated under the Habitats Regulations 2017. Mitigation measures associated with wastewater arising from new development within relevant areas within the NL, and the provision of nature-based solutions to run-off associated with other sources of phosphates will be required.

6.3.4.5 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 using natural flood management techniques including 'slowing the flow' of streams, expanding and maintaining semi natural habitat particularly woodland on the steep slopes and boundary features e.g. walls, and hedgerows.

6.4 Nature Objectives

6.4.1 **Biodiversity, Geodiversity Natural Resources Objectives:**

NA1 Increase the characteristic habitats and species of the Mendip Hills.

NA2 Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and enhancement of ecological networks within and adjoining the NL.

NA3 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 and restoration of the characteristic habitats and species.

NA4 Promote a partnership approach to implementing NL Management Plan objectives, Protected Landscapes Targets & Outcomes Framework and National Character Area Statements of Opportunity.

NA5 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.

NA6 Increase awareness of the Mendip Hills geology, particularly cave systems in relation to the importance they play in water management and water supply.

NA7 Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the NL as a valuable source of ecosystem services, economic and health benefits.

NA8 Promote conservation of water resources, reduce pollution and enhance their quality, by appropriate management and use.

NA9 Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.

6.4.2 **Targets**

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) – see section 7.1 for a full description.

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 the Mendip Hills?

If the target was calculated pro rata, 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.

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.

6.4.3 **Resources helpful to nature theme objectives delivery**

- Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan Nature Recovery - Mendip Hills National Landscape
- West of England Local Nature Recovery Strategy The Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Toolkit - West of England Combined Authority
- The British Geological Survey www.bgs.ac.uk/mendips
- Mendip Cave Registry and Archive www.mcra.org.uk
- Groundwater Protection zones, Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, Flood Management Plans www.environmentagency.gov.uk
- Sensitive Farming Catchmentswww.naturalengland.gov.uk
- Chew, Blagdon and Cheddar lakeswww.bristolwater.co.uk

6.5 Climate Theme

Vision for Climate - land management and development

6.5.1.1 The vision for Climate, is to secure the mitigation of the causes and effects of climate change through appropriate land management. As the main land use, agriculture will increasingly 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. Integrated and sustainable land use management will restore and enhance the area's natural capital including soils, food, and water supply. As part of this, a shift away from intensive agriculture towards sustainable long term management practices will be important, with support of government- funding, communities and consumers.

6.5.1.2 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.

Overview

Carbon

6.5.1.3 A carbon audit carried out by Cranfield University (2022) on behalf of the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (sponsored by Natural England) provided a baseline assessment of organic carbon storage capacity of, and fluxes from, Mendip habitats

6.5.1.4 The data shows 87% of all carbon is stored in our soils; 13% in biomass/vegetation.

6.5.1.5 The most notable priority and non-priority habitats for absorbing and storing the most carbon on Mendip are:

- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh (and lowland fen / rush pasture) – due to the high tonnes per hectare for this habitat.
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (both priority and non-priority) – due to the high tonnes per hectare for this habitat and amount of this habitat found within the NL.
- Improved grassland – due to the large quantity of this habitat found within the NL.
- Arable land is shown to lose the largest amount of carbon.

6.5.1.6 The four most common habitat types - arable, deciduous woodland (priority and non-priority), and improved grassland cover 76% of the NL and account for 77% of total soil carbon stock. However suburban, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, semi-improved grassland, calcareous grassland and heathland (all lowland) only cover 11% of the total area of the NL but account for 16% of the total soil carbon stock.

6.5.1.7 Variation of soil depths across the NL is a factor to consider. Calcareous grassland is found on thinner soils and therefore able to store less carbon than, for example, the deeper soils of floodplain grazing marsh found on the Levels.

Farming

6.5.1.8 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.

6.5.1.9 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.

6.5.1.10 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.

6.5.1.11 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 across the landscape.

[4] State of the Mendip Hills AONB Report 2018

Woodland

6.5.1.12 Woodland covers 14.5% of the NL[5], 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 Statement[6] 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. There are a number of traditional and new orchards in the area, along with community managed orchards.

Development

6.5.1.13 Although the NL embraces 28 parishes lying wholly, or partly within its boundary, there are few major settlements. Most are spring-line villages with only Priddy on the plateau itself. Sensitive planning and design of development is crucial not just in retaining the character and appearance of the landscape, but also in promoting low carbon development and active travel. .

Quarrying

6.5.1.14 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.

6.5.2 Benefits and Opportunities

Farming

6.5.2.1 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.

6.5.2.2 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.

6.5.2.3 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.

[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

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

6.5.2.5 The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, financed by Defra and administered by the Mendip Hills NL team has provided approximately £300,000 per year (2012-24) in grants to farmers and land managers with demand outstripping funds available each year. The panel of specialists established to decide on the applications has proved a valuable panel for sharing knowledge.

Woodland

6.5.2.6 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.

6.5.2.7 There are woodland areas that potentially would benefit more 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 and landscape, and the sequestration and storage of atmospheric. CO2.

6.5.2.8 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.

Development

6.5.2.9 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 meeting economic and social needs, whilst retaining the character of the landscape and enhancing biodiversity. Strategies such as Green Infrastructure Plans, Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Landscape Character Assessments will assist in securing this by shaping local plans.

6.5.2.10 It is hoped that new economic development and infrastructure strategies will consider both the rural economy and the benefits of a maintaining high-quality landscapes. Emerging priorities are likely to include transport infrastructure, upgrading of digital infrastructure, green infrastructure, water supply and flood relief work.

6.5.3 Issues, Impacts and Barriers to Delivery

Carbon

6.5.3.1 There is an incomplete assessment of the carbon data supplied by Cranfield University, this is required to understand the management actions required.

Farming

6.5.3.2 The farm payment system is transitioning to the Environmental Land Management Scheme. Engagement with farmers is vital to inform, educate and inspire. A variety of farm cluster groups and engagement projects are in place but many suffer short-term funding. The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, financed by Defra and administered by the Mendip Hills NL team has no long-term secure funding.

Woodland

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

6.5.3.4 Ensuring woodland development is in keeping with the landscape character is important in a National Landscape. Consultations concerning felling applications and planting need to be shared in a way that all can understand what is intended.

6.5.3.5 Recording of all tree planting is important but many small planting schemes go unrecorded.

Development

6.5.3.6 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.

6.5.3.7 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.

6.5.3.8 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.

6.5.3.9 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.

6.5.3.10 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.

6.5.3.11 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.

6.5.3.12 Noise and activity arising from developments together with lighting, can have an adverse impact on the area's 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.

6.5.3.13 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.

6.5.3.14 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.

6.5.4 Solutions and Mitigations

Carbon

6.5.4.1 Use the supplied carbon data and other sources of information to produce a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Mendip Hills NL.

Key recommendations already in place are:

6.5.4.2 Protecting and enhancing the small amount of floodplain grazing marsh in the NL (0.6% of NL) should be a priority (as well as lowland fen / rush pasture) due to its high carbon stock and deeper soils. In addition to helping fight the ecological and climate crises, this habitat has an important role in reducing flood risk and improving water quality and wetland connectivity.

6.5.4.3 Improving the management of existing habitats and protecting soils will go a long way. 55.1% of the NL is classed as improved grassland, therefore a focus on enhancing this habitat should be a priority. For example, by adopting regenerative farming techniques. Improving grassland and soil management (whilst maintaining areas of scrub) could help improve habitat condition and productivity. In some instances, this could be enhanced to semi-improved grassland, lowland heath, or deciduous woodland where suitable.

6.5.4.4 Arable makes up 5.8% of the NL and this land is shown as an emitter of carbon. Where suitable (in terms of safeguarding current biodiversity, landscape character, and productive farmland), planting new deciduous woodland on less productive arable land could be one of the most effective ways of sequestering more carbon in the NL. Where this is not an option, arable land would benefit from new native hedgerows and allowing existing ones to grow wider with tree standards and grassy field margins.

Farming

6.5.4.5 Long term funding for engagement with farmers should be a priority including, in particular, the continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. So far as possible, the Local Assessment Panel should be used to guide Environmental Land Management Scheme payments in the National Landscape.

Woodland

6.5.4.6 The Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Plan and the two Local Nature Recovery Strategies should inform the location of woodland planting.

Development

6.5.4.7 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. The NL Partnership can play an important role by producing development guidelines to show what is appropriate in the NL and other forms of best practice.

6.5.4.8 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 winder of the gorge. Resources need to be identified to progress this work.

6.5.4.9 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.

6.6 Climate Objectives

6.6.1 **Land Management, Development and Transport Objectives:**

CL1 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 principal land use.

CL2 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.

CL3 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.

CL4 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.

CL5 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.

CL6 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.

CL7 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.

CL8 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.

CL9 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.

6.6.2 **Targets**

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes – see section 7.1 for a full description.

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 calculated pro-rata 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 0.75 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 calculated pro-rata 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 cover is 14.5% (2,869ha). **With local adjustments – an increase of 1.8% to 16.3%, total increase of 351ha, 12.5ha per year between 2022 and 2050.**

6.7 People Theme

Vision for People - recreation, access, tourism and participation

6.7.1.1 The vision for People is increasing participation, awareness and understanding, particularly for those in harder to reach communities in our cities and towns.

6.7.1.2 Provision for enjoyment by a diverse population, from both within and beyond the MHNL boundary, will be made through a wide range of active, and quiet pursuits that the area can sustain. The area will be accessible, regardless of individual mobility, disability, financial situation or background, including to historically under-represented groups.

6.7.1.3 Significant numbers of the local community will be accessing training and learning to benefit their involvement in the conservation and enhancement of the MHNL. This will be either through direct employment in the rural economy, as custodians of the landscape, influencing decision makers or volunteering. This will be supported by increased understanding of nature, the landscape, the need for change and the difference we can each make. In visibly acting for nature, climate and landscape, people will encourage and enable others to do the same.

Landscape Activities

6.7.1.4 The MHNL landscape is a resource to be enjoyed by all sectors of our diverse society for active and quieter recreational pursuits. Outdoor recreation is proven to benefit people's health and wellbeing through exercise. The MHNL provides the opportunity to connect with nature which is beneficial to mental health and well-being. Being within a 30-minute drive from Bristol, Weston-super-Mare and Bath, the MHNL is accessible to these urban populations, as well as the local rural communities.

6.7.1.5 Types of activities enjoyed by residents, day visitors and tourists (this list is not exhaustive) include:

- traditional use of the access network, which continues to be enjoyed. Rights of way, open access, woodland, nature reserves, permissive paths and trails and quiet lanes form a network across the landscape, popular (where lawful and permitted) for walkers, cyclists, equestrians, disability ATV users and off-road vehicles to explore.

- popular activities undertaken on the network and in other locations, where facilitated, include bird watching, rock climbing, caving, abseiling, bush craft and archery.

- exploring the long-distance recreational routes that cross and lead out from the National Landscape. These include National Cycle Network routes (NCN) 26 Bristol to English Channel (which includes the local Strawberry Line section), NCN 3 Bristol to Land's End West Country Way, and walking trails the Limestone Link, the Mendip Way and the Monarchs Way.

6.7.1.6 Understanding the purpose of designation, what makes this MHNL 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 MHNL, and why it is special. The MHNL Partnership plays a key role in raising awareness of the MHNL, largely through the MHNL Team. The MHNL 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.

6.7.1.7 Most visitors to the MHNL 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

6.7.1.8 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.

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

6.7.1.10 There are a significant number of walking, running, cycling and horse-riding events organised each year, some for charity fundraising.

6.7.1.11 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 help manage the MHNL. Assisting communities to influence decisions and contribute to the protection and enhancement of the MHNL through better understanding of the designation, its boundary, and special qualities is recognised.

6.7.1.12 Increasing people's awareness and involvement amongst under-represented groups requires targeted approaches. In the past the Somerset National Landscapes have had joint projects to address mental health issues through contact with nature. The MHNL 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 and built links between the MHNL and the NHS and local providers.

6.7.1.13 The MHNL 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 MHNL is part of the EUROPARC Atlantic Isles Initiative to develop a UK Young Ranger network.

6.7.1.14 Volunteering opportunities are 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.

6.7.2 Benefits and Opportunities

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

6.7.2.2 The offer of a high-quality accessible landscape could attract the development of products and packages within the MHNL to increase the average spend of visitors. Partners could be encouraged to collaborate to improve the access network. The recent Mendip Way improvement project is a good example of undertaking practical improvements along a route, then promoting it nationally to draw in overnight visitors to experience the special qualities of the area.

6.7.2.3 The development of a multi-use strategic access and enhanced biodiversity green infrastructure network presents great opportunities. Between 2020 and 2024, The Trails Trust, in partnership with Defra ELMs Test and Trials team and support from the MHNL unit, researched:

- the willingness of landowners, managers and other stakeholders to deliver a multi- user green infrastructure network along with improvement, enhancement and maintenance within existing access space.

- barriers to be overcome, incentives and the advice and guidance toolkit needed to support delivery.

- mechanisms needed to support access and biodiversity creation, improvement and maintenance in land management plans (LMP).

6.7.2.4 Organised outdoor activities are an important part of the MHNL's rural economy bringing in nearly £6 million directly to outdoor businesses, with those businesses spending £1.46 million[7] locally. There are a significant number of businesses who use the Mendip Hills for outdoor activities and events that includes for example climbing, caving, abseiling, bushcraft, archery, mountain biking and horse riding. There have been changes in the outdoor industry over recent years with some smaller companies not trading while Mendip Activity Centre has expanded.

6.7.2.5 The MHNL Team supports a number of events including for example the annual *Mendip Rocks!*, *Top of the Gorge Festival* and agricultural shows, as well as promoting research and learning that both assist in raising understanding, awareness, and encourage participation.

6.7.2.6 Growing interest in green tourism has potential to create new employment opportunities. There are opportunities within the Mendip Hills to increase the average spend of visitors and develop products and packages through having a high-quality landscape to base them in. 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 to experience the special qualities of the area.

6.7.2.7 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 MHNL and its special qualities.

Projects with multiple benefits

6.7.2.8 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 increased, habitats and an increase in people's understanding of population numbers and how the species are distributed.

6.7.2.9 The Mendip Hills Fund was established with Somerset Community Foundation by the MHNL (then AONB) Partnership in 2014. The MHNL Team manages the independent panel and fundraising, with the Somerset Community Foundation administering the grant applications. Grants are available for projects in the MHNL, 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 MHNL. Each year the fund is able to distribute around £10,000.

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

6.7.3 Issues, Impacts and Barriers to Delivery

Recreation Impacts

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

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

6.7.3.3 Alongside the maintenance of the existing rights of way network which needs more attention, the MHNL 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 schemes and other types of financial support need to be tailored towards rewarding landowners for new access and the maintenance of the existing network, especially as public sector funds are very limited at present.

6.7.3.4 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. A better understanding of the impacts of off-road events is required.

6.7.3.5 Habitat deterioration, or loss of sensitive wildlife habitats due to an increase in number of tourist visits, increased leisure use, and/or new access can and does occur without careful management. Habitat deterioration or loss occurs from trampling, and this can be exacerbated on steep slopes with extreme weather events causing increased damage. Dogs can also impact on wildlife via disturbance to ground nesting birds and other flora and fauna as well affecting water quality through fouling. Damage can also occur through fires and litter associated with barbeques and irresponsible wild camping.

6.7.3.6 While the plan's objectives include the promotion of the area to groups that haven't traditionally benefitted from the landscape, it is essential that this should be done in a way that avoids damaging habitats and sensitive locations and is not likely to significantly increase pressure. Any access improvements, for example replacing stiles with gates, will be made with careful consideration of the surrounding habitat so as not to have an adverse effect.

6.7.3.7 Recreational use of the MHNL should not be allowed to adversely affect its special qualities. For example, measures will need to be put in place to minimise and mitigate recreational pressure arising from new developments both inside and outside the NMHNL, especially where these developments are located close to sensitive locations, such as designated nature conservation sites. In line with this, the emerging Recreation Strategy will ensure that recreational pressures in the MHNL are managed in such a way as to avoid detrimental impacts to ecologically important habitats.

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

6.7.3.9 The Trails Trust research, conducted as part of a Test and Trial for Defra, showed that land managers face common issues from recreation. The impacts/barriers experienced were dog/dog owner behaviours, unintentional trespass, gates left open, littering, criminal activities (theft wildlife crime, dumping/fly-tipping, 4x4 abuse of access routes and farmland). Other barriers included concerns about occupier's liability and liability for trees and maintenance and lack of reward, specialist support and facilitation for path creation and improvement. However, land managers agreed that many impacts could be mitigated through replacing old structures and improving public engagement through signage and way marking.

6.7.3.10 There is currently a fragmented approach to use of the MHNL 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.

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

6.7.3.12 There is a need to encourage more residents to understand and support the purpose of the MHNL through their involvement in local activities including Neighbourhood Plans to conserve and enhance the MHNL

6.7.4 Solutions and Mitigations

Resolving connectivity in the National Landscape

6.7.4.1 Landscape connectivity can be delivered through a strategic multi use green infrastructure access network comprising linear routes, routes to communities and local circuits. Upgrading existing public footpaths and creating access along green lanes and margins, where access does not already exist, can provide for the aspirational routes necessary for strategic connections. A well-publicised connected network delivers multiple benefits to the public and to the rural economy. Highway exit and crossing point issues could be resolved through maintenance in land management plans, specialist help or provision in road improvement schemes.

Access provision, maintenance and monitoring

6.7.4.2 Increasing access provision for all is necessary to spread the current impact and cope with future increases in use caused by the increase in housing in the area. The new agri-schemes and other types of financial support need to be tailored towards rewarding landowners for creating and improving access and maintaining the existing network, especially as public sector funds are very limited at present.

6.7.4.3 The MHNL 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 characteristics which prevents direct comparisons between location across the entire MHNL. This data becomes richer and more valuable the longer that it is collected, allowing examination of changing visitor numbers and the impact that this has on the location over time.

6.7.4.4 The MHNL 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. 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. Licensing authorities should consult with the NL team for any events that could affect the landscape and/or rights of way network.

Participation

6.7.4.5 There are opportunities to harness people's interest in the MHNL to drive initiatives to manage, conserve and restore the landscape, enabling nature to recover and adapt to climate change. New partnerships need to be fostered with all stakeholders. These include the unitary authorities, parish councils, user groups, landowners and managers, education establishments, third sector and private investors. Stakeholders can influence decisions and contribute to the protection and enhancement of the MHNL through a better understanding of the designation, its boundary, and special qualities.

6.7.4.6 One opportunity is to develop partnerships through Public Health and Wellbeing Boards. Another is to encourage more residents to understand and support the purpose of the MHNL through their involvement in local activities including Neighbourhood Plans. Further opportunities are for educational bodies to share research and learning, because often when completed or published, research and learning stays with them, when it could promote understanding of the landscape.

6.8 People Objectives

6.8.1 **Recreation, Access, Tourism and Participation objectives:**

PE1 Maintain, improve and promote public access and quiet recreational activities, addressing anti-social activities and avoiding sensitive habitats, with measures to ensure access for all in accordance with the purposes of the National Landscape designation.

PE2 Support the development of tourism that benefits the local economy, conserves and enhances the landscape including sensitive habitats, and improves understanding of the MHNL.

PE3 Develop and deliver a safe, accessible, connected strategic network of green infrastructure routes and space that works for people and nature, avoiding particularly sensitive habitats, and promote more sustainable methods of travel to the MHNL for enjoyment and recreation.

PE4 Support healthy lifestyles by encouraging more people to enjoy the MHNL for sustainable outdoor activities; while ensuring they avoid sensitive habitats.

PE5 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 MHNL.

PE6 Encourage the involvement of local people and the wider community in the sustainable management of the MHNL.

PE7 Promote the Mendip Hills as an educational resource for all ages and encourage sharing of research and learning tools.

PE8 Improve equality, diversity and inclusivity in the management and governance of the MHNL.

6.8.2 **Targets**

Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes – see section 7.1 for a full description.

Target 9

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

6.8.3 **Resources helpful to people theme objectives delivery**

- Mendip Hills National Landscape Visit Mendip Hills National Landscape - Designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Ordnance Survey maps and apps https://explore.osmaps.com/
- Defra Magic maps MAGIC
- Somerset Public Rights of Way Public Rights of Way

- North Somerset Rights of Way Improvement Plan Rights of way improvement plan | North Somerset Council
- B&NES Right of Way Improvement Plan Rights of Way Improvement Plan | Bath and North East Somerset Council
- British Standard 5709 2018 gaps, gates and stiles Understanding BS5709 3gn
- Countryside code and advice for land managers The Countryside Code - GOV.UK
- Waymarking public rights of way: NE WAYMARKING (5622)
- Disability and equality act: https://www.oss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Authorising-structures.pdf
- Disabled Ramblers Disabled Ramblers – Enjoying the countryside
- ELMs test results http://www.thetrailstrust.org.uk

7 Delivering the Plan and Monitoring the State of the National Landscape

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

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

7.03 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.

7.0.4 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).

7.1 Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF)

7.1.1 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 their 25 year Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP).

Thriving plants and wildlife targets

7.1.2 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.

7.1.3 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.

7.1.4 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.

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

7.1.6 Targets 1, 7 and 8 are being apportioned for each Protected Landscape. See Mendip Hills NL targets in Table 2 below.

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 the Mendip Hills?

If the target was calculated pro rata, 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 78.38 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

7.1.7 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.

7.1.8 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.

7.1.9 Tree planting and peat restoration at scale will support new skills and green jobs, attract private investment and help grow the rural economy.

7.1.10 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?

7.1.11 If the target was calculated pro rata, 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 0.75ha per year between 2022 and 2050.**

7.1.12 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?

7.1.13 If the target was calculated pro rata, 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 cover is 14.5% (2,869ha). **With local adjustments – an increase of 1.8% to 16.3%, total increase of 351ha, 12.5ha per year between 2022 and 2050.**

Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment targets

7.1.14 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.

7.1.15 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.

7.1.16 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.

7.1.17 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.

7.2 The Mendip Hills NL Nature Recovery Plan

7.2.1 The National Landscapes Association committed in 2019 to developing Nature Recovery Plans (NRP), as set out in the Colchester Declaration. NRPs for each National Landscape 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.

7.2.2 The Mendip Hills NRP 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 and has helped inform the two LNRSs. It is an important document and, along with any future iterations, should be read alongside this Management Plan. In particular, it should be used by local planning authorities, developers (with or without Biodiversity Net Gain obligations), landowners/managers, local communities and other interested parties to help shape measures for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of nature.

7.2.3 The Nature Recovery Plan identifies Champion Species, Priority Habitat, statutory and non-statutory sites, condition assessments of SSSIs, local landscape character and nature recovery network mapping to produce priorities and local prescriptions that coincide with the 11 different landscape character areas.

Priority habitats present within the Mendip Hills National Landscape are:

- Arable field margins
- Calaminarian grassland
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Deciduous woodland (including ancient semi-natural and ancient replanted)
- Good quality semi-improved grassland
- Hedgerows (native)
- Inland rock outcrop and scree habitats
- Lowland beech and yew woodland
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland fen
- Lowland heathland
- Lowland meadows
- Ponds
- Purple moor grass and rush pastures
- Reedbeds
- Rivers
- Traditional orchards
- Upland mixed ashwoods
- Wet woodland
- Woodland pasture and parkland

7.3 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		
Priority habitats total by 2050 (%) [currently 12.5%]	14%		78ha
Wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites restored/created by 2042 (ha)		1568ha. (78ha per year starting 2022)	
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		

7.4 Climate Change Adaptation Plans

7.4.1 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.

7.4.2 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.

7.5 Climate Vulnerability Assessment

7.5.1 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.

7.5.2 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.

7.5.3 The RAD column refers to:
Resist: maintain ecosystem processes, structure, and composition with present-day or historical conditions.(R)
Accept: allow current-change drivers to transform ecosystems to something that is different from present-day or historical conditions.(A)
Direct: steward ecosystems to conditions that are more desirable than what would be achieved with accepting change.(D)

Special Quality*	Rain +	Temp. +	Extreme events	Reasoning	Response	RAD	Opportunities
Dark skies, tranquillity & 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 the Somerset Levels face increased 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	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*	A	Involvement of the community in monitoring and understanding their historic environment. Drought periods may expose new archaeological features.

				buildings. General archaeological sites such as earthworks and remnant field systems will be vulnerable to erosion, which may cause damage to features. Waterlogged features (e.g. relic ditches, pits) may dry out and loose preservation.	buildings (but not Grade 2 and below). Scheduled monuments should have their condition regularly assessed by Historic England for Monuments at Risk.		
The Chew Valley	M	M	H	Lowland grass areas will be subject to 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 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	Create better green infrastructure to cope, including better surfacing and drainage, more planting and appropriate 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/ D	Improved green infrastructure will increase connectivity for wildlife. A more accessible network will allow a greater diversity of people to use it.

				permissions for events when damage may be likely. **Climate change will increase change in midge-borne spread of disease in livestock and human health.**			
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 are 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 fasters 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 CO_2 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 combes	M	M	H	Healthy woodlands will be fairly resilient to high and low rainfall, but woods suffering from ash dieback will be more vulnerable to heavy rainfall-induced erosion or dry/hot conditions affecting ancient ground flora. This	Ash dieback has had a large, negative effect on the health of our woodlands 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.	A/ D	Support community tree nurseries that collect seed from the Mendip Hills. Involvement of the community in monitoring and understanding their woodland environment.

				will also be true for extreme events. Ash dieback-compromised woodlands will be more affected by high winds and lack of moisture. Extreme events can cause leaf-drying and premature drop, or storms take out veteran trees.	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.		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 and 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 5.2

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Mendip Hills National Landscape Partnership and Team Structure

A1.1 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.

A1.2 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.

A1.3 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.

A1.4 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.

A1.5 Mendip Hills NL Partnership Committee, 2026
Somerset Council
North Somerset Council
Bath and North-East Somerset Council
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
Visitor economy representatives

For further information on governance, and activity of the NL Partnership, including annual reviews, and current membership see: www.mendiphills-nl.org.uk

A1.6 **Defra's Core Functions of a National Landscape Team**

A1.6.1 Developing reviewing, preparing and publishing the NL vision and the CRoW Act NL Management Plan.

A1.6.2 Promoting the NL vision and management plan to help distinguish the NL from adjacent countryside.

A1.6.3 Advising upon, facilitating and coordinating implementation by others of the Management Plan.

A1.6.4 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.

A1.6.5 Monitoring and reporting on progress against NL Management Plan targets.

A1.6.6 Monitoring NL landscape condition.

A1.6.7 Accessing resources for management activities.

A1.6.8 Working with and contributing to the NL activities, sharing advice and best practice nationally and regionally.

A1.6.9 Providing a management role to co-ordinate NL protection through the actions of the NL Team, the NL partnership and other partners at a local and strategic level.

A1.6.10 Developing an involvement by the community in the management of the NL.

A1.6.11 Providing landscape related planning advice.

Appendix 2 - AONB designation, policy and legal framework

A2.1 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.

A2.2 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)

A2.3 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.

A2.4 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.

A2.5 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.

A2.6 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.

A2.7 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'.

A2.8 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.

A2.9 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.

A2.10 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.

A2.11 Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

A2.12 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

A2.13 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.

A2.14 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…'.

A2.15 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.

A2.16 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.

A2.17 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.

A2.18 Section 92 makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of 'flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.'

A2.19 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).'

A2.20 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.

Appendix 3 - Drivers of Change (additional information)

Defra 25 Year Environment Plan 2018 (25YEP)
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.

The environment goals
The 25YEP has 10 goals which have specific targets and commitments as follows:

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

It is intended that the 25YEP is refreshed every 5 years. The first refresh was published in February 2023: Environmental Improvement Plan 2023: Executive summary - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan/environmental-improvement-plan-2023-executive-summary)

Recent key legislation
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 compliance[1]. (www.gov.uk/government/news/world-leading-environment-act-becomes-law)

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 economy[2].
(commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2023-0124/)

Important Reports
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.

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 commitments[3]. (www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-oep-report-on-progress-in-improving-the-natural-environment-in-england/government-response-to-the-office-for-environmental-protections-report-on-progress-in-improving-the-natural-environment-in-england-from-january-2023)

Additional Notable Mentions

These documents and laws play a crucial role in shaping environmental policy and action globally:

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.

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.

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 2024 - sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans can provide for housing and other development in a sustainable manner.

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 countries 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 section 5.2)

Spring-line Settlements - occur where a ridge of permeable rock lies over impermeable rock and there will be a line of springs where the water emerges along the boundary between the two layers. It sometimes happens that a sequence of 'spring-line' settlements will arise around these water sources, 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