

Planning, Environment & Sustainability Policy Development Group

Tuesday, 10 June 2025 at 5.30 pm
Phoenix Chambers, Phoenix House, Tiverton

Next ordinary meeting
Tuesday, 23 September 2025 at 5.30 pm

Please Note: This meeting will take place at Phoenix House and members of the public and press are able to attend via Teams. If you are intending to attend in person please contact the committee clerk in advance, in order that numbers of people can be appropriately managed in physical meeting rooms.

The meeting will be hybrid and an audio recording made and published on the website after the meeting.

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 378 475 091 458

Passcode: 3vj3dU7i

Membership

Cllr B Fish
Cllr G Cochran
Cllr C Adcock
Cllr G Czapiewski
Cllr A Glover
Cllr C Harrower
Cllr A Stirling
Cllr G Westcott
Vacancy

A G E N D A

Members are reminded of the need to make declarations of interest prior to any discussion which may take place

1 Election of Chair

To elect a Chair of the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.

- 2 **Election of Vice-Chair**
To elect a Vice-Chair of the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group for the municipal year 2025/2026.
- 3 **Start Time of Meetings**
To agree a start time of meetings for the remainder of the municipal year.
- 4 **Apologies and substitute Members**
To receive any apologies for absence and notices of appointment of substitute Members (if any).
- 5 **Public Question Time**
To receive any questions from members of the public and replies thereto.
Note: A maximum of 30 minutes is allowed for this item.
- 6 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting** *(Pages 7 - 14)*
To consider whether to approve the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 11 March 2025.
- 7 **Declarations of Interest under the Code of Conduct**
To receive any declarations of interest.
- 8 **Chair's Announcements**
To receive any announcements that the Chair may wish to make.
- 9 **Performance Dashboard Q4** *(Pages 15 - 16)*
To receive performance information for the areas falling under the remit of this Policy Development Group for Quarter 4 of 2024/2025.
- 10 **Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan** *(Pages 17 - 296)*
Mid Devon District Council together with other local authorities has previously authorised the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to undertake a review of the current Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan on their behalf, as required under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Public consultation on the reviewed management plan took place in January to March 2025, and now adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan by Mid Devon District Council and the other relevant local authorities is required before the management plan is published and is submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

- 11 **Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Update**
(Pages 297 - 304)
To receive an update from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change and the Climate Sustainability Officer.
- 12 **Planning Summary Report** (Pages 305 - 310)
To receive a Planning Summary Report from the Director of Place and Economy.
- 13 **Work Programme** (Pages 311 - 312)
To discuss the current Work Plan for the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group.
- 14 **Identification of Items for the Next Meeting**
Members are asked to note that the following items are already identified in the Work Programme for the next meeting although they may need to be confirmed nearer the time:
- Climate and Sustainability Update
 - Planning Summary Report
 - Performance Dashboard Q1
 - MDDC Draft Budget 2026-27 First Review

Guidance notes for meetings of Mid Devon District Council

From 7 May 2021, the law requires all councils to hold formal meetings in person. The Council will enable all people to continue to participate in meetings via Teams.

If the Council experience technology difficulties at a committee meeting the Chairman may make the decision to continue the meeting 'in-person' only to conclude the business on the agenda.

1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at Committee@middevon.gov.uk

They can also be accessed via the council's website [Click Here](#)

Printed agendas can also be viewed in reception at the Council offices at Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, EX16 6PP.

2. Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership.

The Code of Conduct can be [viewed here](#):

3. Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. Minutes of meetings are not verbatim.

4. Public Question Time

Residents, electors or business rate payers of the District wishing to raise a question and/or statement under public question time are asked to provide their written questions to the Democratic Services team by 5pm three clear working days before the meeting to ensure that a response can be provided at the meeting. You will be invited to ask your question and or statement at the meeting and will receive the answer prior to, or as part of, the debate on that item. Alternatively, if you are content to receive an answer after the item has been debated, you can register to speak by emailing your full name to Committee@middevon.gov.uk by no later than 4pm on the day before the meeting. You will be invited to speak at the meeting and will receive a written response within 10 clear working days following the meeting. Notification in this way will ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible.

5. Meeting Etiquette for participants

- Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.
- If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

For those joining the meeting virtually:

- Mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- Switch off your camera if you are not speaking.
- Speak clearly (if you are not using camera then please state your name)
- Switch off your camera and microphone after you have spoken.
- There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called "turn on live captions" which provides subtitles on the screen.

6. Exclusion of Press & Public

When considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act. If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed. They will be invited to return as soon as the meeting returns to open session.

7. Recording of meetings

All media, including radio and TV journalists, and members of the public may attend Council, Cabinet, PDG and Committee meetings (apart from items Media and Social Media Policy - 2023 page 22 where the public is excluded) you can view our Media and Social Media Policy [here](#). They may record, film or use social media before, during or after the meeting, so long as this does not distract from or interfere unduly with the smooth running of the meeting. Anyone proposing to film during the meeting is requested to make this known to the Chairman in advance. The Council also makes audio recordings of meetings which are published on our website [Browse Meetings, 2024 - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#).

8. Fire Drill Procedure

If you hear the fire alarm you should leave the building by the marked fire exits, follow the direction signs and assemble at the master point outside the entrance. Do not use the lifts or the main staircase. You must wait there until directed otherwise by a senior officer. If anybody present is likely to need assistance in exiting the building in the event of an emergency, please ensure you have let a member of Democratic Services know before the meeting begins and arrangements will be made should an emergency occur.

9. WIFI

An open, publicly available Wi-Fi network is normally available for meetings held in the Phoenix Chambers at Phoenix House.

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MINUTES of a MEETING of the PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 11 March 2025 at 5.30 pm

Present

Councillors

B Fish (Chair)
G Cochran (Vice-Chair), C Adcock,
C Connor, G Czapiewski, A Glover,
C Harrower, L Knight and G Westcott

Also Present

Officer(s):

Richard Marsh (Director of Place & Economy), Paul Deal (Head of Finance, Property & Climate Resilience), Jason Ball (Climate and Sustainability Specialist) and Angie Howell (Democratic Services Officer)

Councillors

Online

E Buczkowski, J Buczkowski, S Keable, J Lock and D Wulff

Officers Online

Tristan Peat (Forward Planning Team Leader)

1 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Members were reminded of the need to declare any interests where appropriate.

No interests were declared under this item.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Paul Elstone asked the following questions in relation to Agenda Item 9.

Question 1

It is noted that a Member of this Committee has raised a Scrutiny Committee proposal and linked to planning application Agricultural Land use concerning Anaerobic Digesters and Solar Farms.

A year ago, I asked questions about Anaerobic Digester (AD) and Solar Farms including questions about numbers and land usage. When I asked my questions the answers, I received very clearly indicated that Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) had no clear idea of not only land usage but also of power generation capacity and number of installations.

That MDDC were placing reliance on data from various sources but there were no definitive results. Having looked in detail at the data sources used by MDDC the data is seriously incomplete. I am being polite. I am more than happy to validate that statement.

Will this Committee revisit the requirement to have a complete data set showing land usage and power generation capacity for each AD and Solar Farm in Mid Devon?

Information that is readily available and simple to collate, this if you know where and are prepared to look. It is not time consuming to do so.

Question 2

In terms of AD land usage are this Committee aware that one AD in Mid Devon requires over 300 hectares or nearly 750 acres of agricultural land to grow what are called power crops such as maize this to produce 1 megawatt an hour of electricity for 365 days of the year.

That a solar farm with battery storage would require just 20 hectares to produce the same electrical energy over the year.

Question 3

Are this Committee aware of the extent of Greenhouse Gas emissions associated with AD's?

That AD's are nothing like as green as many wish to project. This where power crops are the major source of feedstock, unlike food waste, cow slurry or chicken litter.

Available data indicates that around 3 tonnes of CO₂ can be released for every hectare of land ploughed.

It is estimated that the tractor movements for one AD in Mid Devon to be as high as 40,000 miles per year. That typical tractor fully laden can consume around one litre of diesel per mile. Therefore, adding around 116 tonnes of CO₂ to the atmosphere. Not including CO₂ emissions for harrowing, tilling, spraying and harvesting plus spreading of digestate.

Time prevents me from listing all the greenhouse emissions related to an AD, but it should never be forgotten the amount of CO₂ produced due to the manufacture of the AD itself plus deconstruction and that for every tractor trailer and tanker associated.

Bottom line 2 of the 3 ADs in Mid Devon are very far from being as environmentally green as the operator's project.

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The Chair confirmed that a written answer would be supplied within 10 working days.

Paul Elstone confirmed that he would not expect an answer with regard to the last 2 questions.

4 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November 2024 were approved as a correct record of the meeting and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

5 **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair had no announcements to make.

6 **EXE VALLEY SHARED PATH SUPPORTERS GROUP**

The Group received a presentation by Richard Sommerwill from the Exe Valley Shared Path Supporters Group (EVSPSG).

A summary of the information provided was as follows:-

- The Exe Valley Shared Path Supporters Group had developed over the past few years as the Tiverton to Exeter railway line had been used for years and had massive potential.
- Support had been received from Bickleigh Parish Council and Tiverton Town Council as well as support on social media.
- In the late 1990's Devon County Council (DCC) had looked at this route although buying land from farmers was found to be difficult.
- In June 2020 DCC were asked to support the scheme but unfortunately it was not a current strategy.
- The Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan which was published in 2024 did not feature the railway line.
- The EVSPSG wished to propose development of the route in stages.
- There would be huge benefits to the scheme in terms of reducing cyclists on the roads, improving the health and wellbeing of the populations, reducing car journeys and carbon emissions and a huge boost to tourism.
- There was hope to raise funding through sponsorship and crowdfunding.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- How Mid Devon District Council could help to support the scheme. It was explained that support from District Councillors would be required to help take the scheme forward to DCC.

The PDG thanked Mr Somerwill for his presentation.

7 PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD QUARTER 3

The Group were presented with, and **NOTED**, a *slide showing the Performance Dashboard for Quarter 3 2024/2025. The following was highlighted within the report:-

- The overall performance was presented in a pie chart and combined RAG (red, amber, green) ratings from both performance and finance measures to indicate overall performance.
- Building Control Income was slightly below budget due to the depressed housing market.
- Two indicators related to capital projects were shown as red
- There had been an underspend due to a slippage on installation of additional EV charging over and above the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) scheme run by Devon County Council.

Note: * Performance Dashboard previously circulated.

8 WILLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Group had before it a report * from the Director of Place and Economy considering the Willand Neighbourhood Plan.

The report was presented by the Forward Planning Team Leader and the following was highlighted within the report:-

- The outcome of the recent Local Referendum held for the Willand Neighbourhood Plan on 27 February 2025.
- There was a requirement for Mid Devon District Council to make a decision regarding the adoption of the Plan.
Those eligible to vote were asked the following question “Do you want Mid Devon District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Willand to help it to decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area”?
- The results of the Referendum were published on the Council’s website and were as follows:-
 - (i) The number of votes cast in favour of a yes was 269.
 - (ii) The number of votes cast in favour of a no was 29.
 - (iii) There was one spoilt ballot paper.
 - (iv) The total number of votes cast was 299.
- The outcome of the vote was that 90% of voters were in favour of the Willand Neighbourhood Plan which meant it had obtained the same legal status as a Local Plan.
- As a result of that, the Neighbourhood Plan had become part of the Statutory Development Plan for the area.
- This meant that applications for planning permission must now be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, including the Willand Neighbourhood Plan, unless material considerations indicated otherwise.
- The Council must now formally adopt the Plan as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than 8 weeks from when the Referendum was held.

- The Council may refuse the Plan if it considered that making it would be a breach or would otherwise be incompatible with any remaining EU obligations or any human rights obligations.
- Mid Devon District Council officers held the view that the making of the Plan would not breach those obligations.

RECOMMENDED to the Cabinet that:-

1. The Willand Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 1) is 'made' (adopted) and brought into force as part of the statutory development plan for the Willand area;
(Proposed by Cllr L Knight and seconded by Cllr B Fish)
2. The Willand Neighbourhood Plan Adoption Decision Statement (Appendix 2) is published to meet the publicity requirements in the Regulations.
(Proposed by the Chair)

Note:-

- (i) Cllr C Harrower and Cllr G Westcott abstained from voting as they were not present for the duration of this item

Reason for the decision

As set out in the report.

Note *Report previously circulated.

9 **CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE**

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report* from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change which was presented by the Climate and Sustainability Specialist Officer.

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- Mid Devon District Council had recently recruited a Project Manager who would be helping to deliver on the green projects.
- A total of 1810 trees had been planted this season which was three times above the Council's target.
- Green Business Grants were about to be launched and would be publicised.
- The Council were building on community engagement in relation to the Climate Change Strategy.
- Efforts were underway to consider how to support or enhance the status of the Grand Western Canal.

Discussion took place regarding:-

- The various designations which may help to enhance and protect the Grand Western Canal.
- The planting of trees and that free trees could be obtained from the Devon Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.
- The protection of trees once they had been planted.
- The Sustainable Tiverton Share Shop and how this could be better accessed.
- Free parking in the town centre for volunteer workers or the ability to pay “by the hour”. It was explained that parking meters had set time frames.

It was **AGREED** that the Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience would investigate parking charges further with the Council’s Parking Services Team and report back to this PDG.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

10 PLANNING SUMMARY REPORT

The Group had before it, and **NOTED** a report* from the Director of Place and Economy summarising activity undertaken in relation to planning matters. The following was highlighted within the report:-

The report summarised the actions from the proceeding months in relation to planning matters. The following updates were included within the report:-

- (i) New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- (ii) New Local Plan
- (iii) Development Management Policies
- (iv) Development Management
- (v) S106
- (vi) Conservation
- (vii) Building Control
- (viii) Planning Enforcement

The following was highlighted within the report:-

- The various proposed changes to the planning system such as the housing delivery targets.
- The Planning and Infrastructure Bill had been presented by Government today and it appeared that this would propose or introduce significant changes to the way the planning systems worked in the UK and how development would come forward in the future.
- Local fee setting would be delegated to Local Planning Authorities to allow costs to be covered.
- Nationally, planning application volumes were down by approximately 2%.
- An advertisement for a Planning Enforcement Officer was now live on the Council’s website with a closing date of 28 March 2025.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

11 CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

The Group had before it and **NOTED** the * Chair's Annual Report for 2024/2025.

The Chair stated that the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group would bring life to the ideas of elected Members with the support of officers, input from local constituents and local organisations to continue to build, enhance and preserve the beautiful Devon landscape against the effects of climate change.

There were a huge number of routes to be pursued to make the most impact and to leave a lasting legacy. Steps taken would make a real difference to the community in the years ahead.

This report along with all other Chair's reports for 2024/2025 would be presented at full Council on 23rd April 2025.

Note: * Report previously circulated.

(The meeting ended at 18:59)

CHAIR

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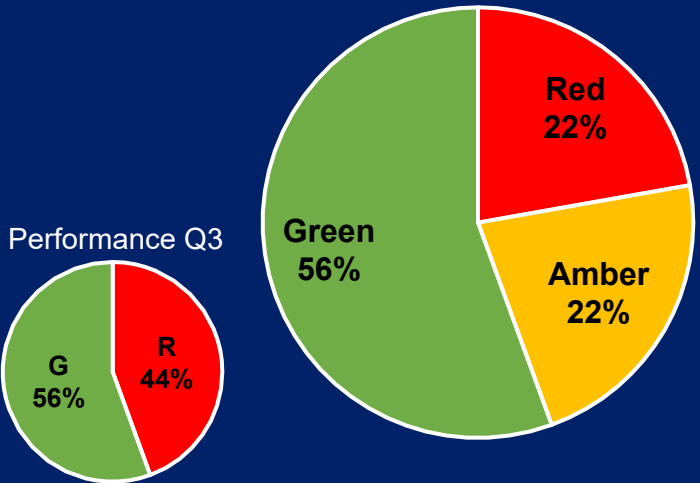
Planning, Environment & Sustainability PDG Performance Dashboard – Quarter 4 2024/25

| Performance Measures | Performance | Annual Target | RAG |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------|-----|
| Own fleet CO2e avoided (YTD) | 21.3 t CO ₂ e | 10 t CO ₂ e | G |
| Solar panel performance – corporate estate (YTD) | 114 t CO ₂ e | 50 t CO ₂ e | G |
| Electric car charger points installed across MDDC sites (YTD) | 6 | 4 | G |
| Householder planning applications determined within 8 weeks (Past 12 months) | 100 % | 70% | G |
| Minor applications overturned at appeal (Past 12 months) | 0.2 % | 10% | G |

| Finance Measures | Performance | Annual Target | RAG |
|---|-------------|---------------|-----|
| PE&S PDG – Outturn | £1,443k | £1,403k | A |
| PE&S PDG – Capital Outturn | £0 | £80k | R |
| PE&S PDG – Capital Slippage % of projects (Current) | 100% | 0% | R |
| Building Control Income – Projected Outturn | (£211k) | (£221k) | A |

| Corporate Risk | Risk Rating (Trajectory) |
|--|--------------------------|
| Failure to meet Climate Change Commitments by 2030 | 15 (No Change) |

Overall Performance Q4



In Focus

In 2024/25 six electric car rapid charger points were commissioned and installed, two at William Street, Tiverton, two at Forge Way, Cullompton, and two at Market Street, Crediton. The Council has exceeded its target of four new charging points in 2024/25, and now hosts 22 charge points on its sites.

In 2024/25 there were 5,230 uses of EV charging points on Council facilities, with 1,416 uses in Q4.

Data on the Council’s carbon footprint for 2024/25 will be available in July/ August.

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Report for: Planning Environment and Sustainability PDG

Date of Meeting: 10th June 2025

Subject: Adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan

Cabinet Member: Councillor Steve Keable, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

Responsible Officer: Richard Marsh, Director of Place

Exempt: None

Wards Affected: Upper Culm, Cullompton Outer (part)

Enclosures: Appendix 1 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 (adoption draft)

Appendix 2 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 Part B: Appendices (adoption draft)

Appendix 3 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 Part C: Delivery Plan (adoption draft)

Appendix 4 - Strategic Environmental Assessment screening report

Appendix 5 - Habitats Regulations Assessment screening report

Appendix 6 – Equalities Impact Screening Assessment

Appendix 7 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030 Engagement and Consultation Report

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

Mid Devon District Council together with other local authorities has previously authorised the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to undertake a review of the current Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan on their behalf, as required under Section IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Public consultation on the reviewed management plan took place in January to March 2025, and now adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan by Mid Devon District Council and the other relevant local authorities is required before the management plan is published and is submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Recommendation(s):

The Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG recommends to Cabinet:

- 1. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan (Appendices 1, 2 and 3) is adopted.**
- 2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to approve any editorial changes made to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan.**

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, Mid Devon District Council, together with other local authorities, namely Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and Somerset Council, is required to produce a Management Plan for the designated Blackdown Hills AONB (now known as National Landscape) and review it at intervals of not more than five years (exceptionally, Defra authorised a 12-month-plus extension to the review of the current Plan). Along with the other relevant local authorities, Mid Devon District Council has authorised the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to perform this duty on its behalf; the review and preparation of the new Management Plan is co-ordinated by the National Landscape team, who are hosted by Devon County Council, and has been previously reported to the Planning Policy Advisory Group on 22nd July 2024 and the Cabinet on 15th October 2024 (Minute 70).
- 1.2** The CRoW Act (and as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) and guidance from Natural England provides advice on the scale,

nature and content of Management Plans. A Management Plan should serve to highlight a shared long term vision for the National Landscape and contain ambitions, targets and actions that seek to further the statutory purpose, i.e. to conserve and enhance the designated AONB. The delivery of the Plan will be subject to funding availability from Defra, the local authorities, and other parties.

- 1.3 The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership has taken the opportunity to undertake a more thorough review than in the previous review cycle to ensure that the Management Plan remains fit for purpose and forward looking. The Management Plan is expected to contribute to Government's Environmental Improvement Plan (including protected landscapes targets) and key drivers include addressing the significant issues of the climate emergency and nature recovery, taking account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Plans and local authority climate action plans.
- 1.4 The review process has been a participatory one, with members of the Partnership Management Group, local authority officers and other stakeholders involved in agreeing the approach and identifying key matters for consideration, in advance of a wider public consultation on the draft management plan (held January to March 2025).
- 1.5 The Management Plan was also screened under both Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment regulations to determine whether policies in the Management Plan could have significant environmental effects, concluding that further detailed assessment was not required in either case.

2.0 About the Plan

Purpose

- 2.1 The Management Plan blends national and local priorities and seeks to address them in a way that is right for the Blackdown Hills – the landscape, environment, and communities – to make sure the very special character of the area is conserved and enhanced for future generations.
- 2.2 The statutory Management Plan is the single most important policy document for the National Landscape. It sets out the ambition, strategy, and guidance for the conservation and enhancement of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape for the next five years. It is a revised and updated version of the previous *Management Plan 2019-2024*.
- 2.3 Its purpose is to:
 - Highlight the special qualities and significance of the National Landscape.

- Present a vision for the future of the National Landscape and set the direction of travel
- Set out objectives and policies to secure the vision.
- Define the pace and scale of action required to achieve our vision.
- State the condition of the National Landscape and establish measures of success and targets upon which progress can be measured and evaluated.

2.4 Working together with others to achieve success underscores all National Landscape Partnership work. As the principal strategic guidance for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, the plan, therefore, provides the basis to:

- Inform and influence decisions.
- Stimulate and prioritise action.
- Promote collaboration.
- Help coordinate and prioritise resources.

Content

2.5 The Management Plan includes:

- A longer-term Vision - in summary; thanks to collaboration and positive change, by 2050 the Blackdown Hills will be a vibrant, thriving landscape where diverse communities flourish with a strong sense of place and wellbeing, deeply connected to the land and local culture. Sustainable living and working practices will underpin a prosperous local economy, while the distinctive patchwork of villages, fields, woodlands, and hedges will be maintained and enhanced. Farming and land use will be in balance with nature, building resilience and ensuring the sustainable provision of essential ecosystem services. Wildlife will thrive in a well-connected landscape, and the area's heritage will be celebrated and preserved. The natural beauty and wellbeing benefits of the area will be accessible to all.
- Four main themes;
 - Place:** Focuses on sustainable land use, farming, forestry, planning, and infrastructure to conserve the area's natural capital, landscape character, and historic environment.
 - People:** Aims to nurture thriving communities, support the local economy, improve accessibility, and promote inclusivity and engagement with the landscape.
 - Nature:** Prioritises habitat restoration, connectivity, and species conservation to create resilient ecological networks and contribute to national biodiversity targets.
 - Climate:** Addresses climate change mitigation and adaptation through nature-based solutions, carbon sequestration, and sustainable practices.
- Objectives, guiding principles, policies, targets and priority actions for each theme, and;

- A five year strategic delivery plan

Land use planning

- 2.6 The NPPF makes clear that National Landscapes (and National Parks) have the highest status of protection in the planning process and great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing their landscape and scenic beauty. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 has amended the CROW Act in respect of protected landscapes to require relevant authorities in England to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the National Landscape. The Management Plan is relevant to the land use planning process, in relation to the preparation of local plans, neighbourhood plans and minerals and waste plans and the implementation of their policies, and in the determination of planning applications.

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 A draft Management Plan was subject to an 8 week public consultation from 21 January to 19 March 2025. The consultation was promoted on the Blackdown Hills website and e-newsletter, and directly to partnership organisations, parish councils, surrounding town councils and all councillors (district and county) covering the Blackdown Hills geographic area. 25 representations were received, with six of those from parish councils and six from local residents. Respondents were generally supportive of the Plan's vision, and made helpful comments or sought the inclusion of additional information rather than raise significant concerns. The Engagement and Consultation report (see **Appendix 7** to this report) describes how the draft plan has subsequently been amended in response.
- 3.2 Following public consultation the draft Management Plan has been revised, and the final version of the Management Plan is required to undergo formal consultation with the statutory consultee, Natural England, before local authority adoption. At the time of writing the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership is awaiting formal approval for the Management Plan from Natural England, confirming that the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan meets the legislative requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Having received informal comments during the consultation period no issues are anticipated, and it is expected that this confirmation will be in place prior to the meeting of the Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG and Cabinet meetings.

4.0 Next steps

- 4.1 The Management Plan is expected to be adopted by all of the partner local authorities by mid-July. Following that, the finalised Management Plan, which

will be fully designed, and illustrated webpages will be published on the Blackdown Hills National Landscape website and formally submitted to Defra.

- 4.2 Implementation and delivery of the Management Plan will be monitored by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership, which in time will help to inform the next 5-year review. The Partnership will also undertake promotional work and engage with local communities and partner organisations to improve awareness and understanding of the National Landscape and the Management Plan's purposes and objectives.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications from the public consultation and the adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan. The Council makes a grant funding contribution each year to the host authority, Devon County Council, to support the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership.

Legal Implications

The production of a management plan for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and keeping it under review is required under Part IV of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000.

Risk Assessment

No operational or strategic risks associated with the matters covered in this report have been identified.

Impact on Climate Change

The review of the Management Plan is underpinned by a strong commitment to act in response to the climate emergency, with one of the four key themes being Climate, and one of the fundamental aims of the plan being to help facilitate and deliver meaningful actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Government's climate National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) requires all protected landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) to have Climate Change Adaptation Management Plans produced, embedded in or linked with their Management Plans by 2028, and in all future plans. The Management Plan is also expected to address national targets to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions to net zero and restore approximately 130,000 hectares of peat (carbon storage) in Protected Landscapes.

Equality Impact Assessment

The Landscapes (Glover) Review published in 2019 included proposals to increase the inclusivity and diversity of all the work of AONBs (and National Parks), from governance through to engagement and delivery. The review of the Management Plan embraces this proposal and is based on some guiding principles including that

the valued Blackdown Hills landscape and environment provides an asset to benefit people's wellbeing and therefore everyone should feel welcome and be able to access and enjoy the National Landscape. Further guiding principles recognise that local communities play an integral role in the evolution of the Blackdown Hills landscape, and the need to respond to the needs of people living and working within the area and in nearby towns. An equalities impact assessment of the Management Plan has been undertaken by Devon County Council and this is included in **Appendix 6** to this report.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan can help the following aims of the Council's Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028:

- **Planning, Environment & Sustainability:** The Management Plan includes a vision that sets a strategic direction for nature recovery, species, habitat and wildlife management, and also to reduce greenhouse gases, for carbon storage and a pathway to net zero and adaptation. The management plan includes a Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (TOF) to achieve a number of targets, including: Goal 1 Thriving plants and wildlife; Goal 7 Mitigating and adapting to climate change and Goal 10 Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.
- **Economy & Assets:** The Management Plan's vision sets a strategic direction for economy and transport.
- **Community, People and Equalities:** The Management Plan's vision sets a strategic direction for community, access, and inclusion.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 27.5.25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

Date: 27.5.25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 27.5.25

Performance and risk: Steve Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 21/05/2025

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. (Yes/No)

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. (Yes/No)

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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Background Papers :

Appendix 1 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30
(adoption draft)

Appendix 2 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 Part
B: Appendices (adoption draft)

Appendix 3 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 Part
C: Delivery Plan (adoption draft)

Appendix 4 - Strategic Environmental Assessment screening report

Appendix 5 - Habitats Regulations Assessment screening report

Appendix 6 – Equalities Impact Screening Assessment

Appendix 7 - Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030
Engagement and Consultation Report

Links:

Cabinet meeting 15th October 2024

[Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 15th October, 2024, 5.15 pm - MIDDEVON.GOV.UK](#)

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**Blackdown
Hills**
National
Landscape

Blackdown Hills National Landscape: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2025-2030

**Adoption Draft
April 2025**

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How to use and navigate this Management Plan

This version of the *Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030* is a text only document for the purpose of adoption. Ultimately the *Management Plan* will be published as pages on the Blackdown Hills National Landscape website and available to download in pdf format (or alternative format on request). Maps, images and full design will be included.

The *Management Plan* has the following structure:

Introduction: Sets the context, explains the purpose and role of the *Management Plan*, describes some of the main policy linkages and forces for change.

Special qualities: Describes why the Blackdown Hills is special and the reasons for designation, and what we need to conserve and enhance it.

Vision to 2050: Sets out where we need to get to and the direction of travel.

There are then four sections which cover the themes of **Place, People, Nature, Climate**. The contents of each of these sections is organised in the same way under the following headings:

- **Objective(s):** What we want to achieve.
- **Guiding principles:** High-level statements of intent and ambition needed to realise our vision, meet or exceed national targets and deliver what's needed for the Blackdown Hills.
- **Targets:** These targets relate to the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) which sets out national milestones for Protected Landscapes. The targets in this section set out what this management plan aims to achieve towards these national milestones (our apportionment), by 2030.
- **At a glance:** Headline findings from the [State of the Blackdown Hills 2023 report](#) (a compendium of data for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, from Natural England, Defra, 2021 Census and other sources. It presents data collated in the autumn of 2023 to provide a snapshot of the area to help with the management plan review. Other nationally provided data is included where it adds to the picture)
- **Priorities for action:** Setting out what we intend to prioritise and how our actions will contribute to our targets. Together, these will form our five-year *Strategic Delivery Plan (2025-2030)*.
- **Policies:** These help to guide management, by setting out what needs to be done and how to achieve our objectives. Each one has a unique reference: Place have the

format **PL1,2,3**, etc, People policies are **PE1, 2, 3**, etc, Nature are referenced **N1, 2, 3**, etc, and Climate are **C1, 2, 3**, etc.

- **Context:** Describes the significance of each theme to the Blackdown Hills, with key issues, opportunities and challenges.

Delivery and monitoring: This includes information on how the plan will be implemented and progress measured and the role of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership in that.

Appendices: Presented in a separate document (*Part B*) for now but an essential part of the management plan, these set out more detailed information and data relating to:

- **Special qualities**, including an overview of associated natural capital and ecosystem services
- **Planning**, including general principles for development proposals, and major development
- **Climate**, including climate change adaptation plans, greenhouse gas emissions and soil carbon storage
- [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) indicators and data
- **Strategic Delivery Plan**, which outlines the strategic priorities and high-level actions over the five-year period required to deliver the *Management Plan's* ambitions, based on our priorities for action, included as a separate appendix (*Part C*) to enable it to be updated more readily through the plan period.

Chairman's Foreword

To be added

Bob Nelson – Chairman, Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership

National Landscape Partnership Commendation:

To be added

Chapter 1: Introduction

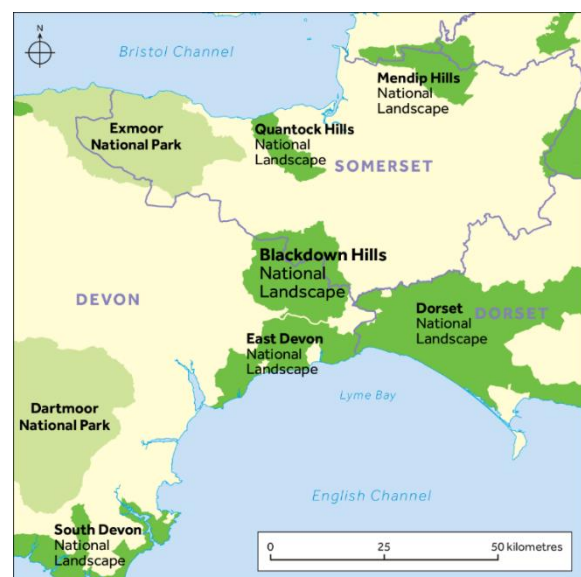
1.1 Purpose and role of the Management Plan

Context

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are nationally important protected landscapes, known as National Landscapes since 2023. The 46 National Landscapes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover just under 20% of the UK. Their distinctive character and natural beauty make them some of the most special and cherished places in which to live and to visit.

Together with National Parks, National Landscapes represent our most outstanding landscapes; unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character and natural beauty that they are recognised internationally as a Category V Protected Landscape by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), part of the global Protected Areas family to be managed in the interest of everyone – local residents, businesses, visitors, and the wider public - and protected for future generations.

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape is a distinctive, diverse rural landscape stretching from the prominent scarp above the M5 in the north to Honiton and Axminster in the south, and from Chard in the east to Culmstock in the west. Ranging from around 50 to 310 metres above sea level, the area is characterised by a sense of relative remoteness and tranquillity and was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1991.



Source GIS data obtained from OS Open data and www.data.gov.uk October 2023

To the south, between Honiton and Axminster, the Blackdown Hills National Landscape shares a boundary with the East Devon National Landscape, and not far to the east is Dorset National Landscape. Looking northward, there is a strong visual relationship across the Vale of Taunton with the Quantock Hills National Landscape and Exmoor National Park. A population of around 150,000 live in the nearby towns.

What is the Management Plan for?

The *Management Plan* blends national and local priorities and seeks to address them in a way that is right for the Blackdown Hills – the landscape, environment, and communities – to make sure the very special character of the area is conserved and enhanced for future generations.

The statutory *Management Plan* is the single most important policy document for the National Landscape. It sets out the ambition, strategy, and guidance for the conservation and enhancement of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape for the next five years. It is a revised and updated version of the previous *Management Plan 2019-2024*.

Its purpose is to:

- Highlight the special qualities and significance of the National Landscape.
- Present a vision for the future of the National Landscape and set the direction of travel
- Set out objectives and policies to secure the vision.
- Define the pace and scale of action required to achieve our vision.
- State the condition of the National Landscape and establish measures of success and targets upon which progress can be measured and evaluated.

Working together with others to achieve success underscores all National Landscape Partnership work. As the principal strategic guidance for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, the plan, therefore, provides the basis to:

- Inform and influence decisions.
- Stimulate and prioritise action.
- Promote collaboration.
- Help coordinate and prioritise resources.

Who is the Management Plan for?

This *Management Plan* has been prepared by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership on behalf of the relevant local authorities. However, it is a plan for the geographic

area of the National Landscape (and beyond), not a plan for the organisation. It provides a framework to help guide all activities affecting the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape.

Everyone who has an active interest and role in the management of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and in supporting the communities that live and work within it, has a role in implementing the *Management Plan*, through individual action as well as partnership working.

Its audiences include:

- **Local authorities:** The relevant authority organisations that are required to jointly prepare, adopt and review the *Management Plan*, and who carry out key functions, such as planning, that affect the National Landscape. The *Management Plan*, in its entirety, establishes the management policy of the responsible authorities.
- **Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership organisations:** [These organisations](#) will have a key role in delivering and championing the *Management Plan* and it provides a focus for their partnership and collaboration.
- **Relevant authorities:** All public bodies and statutory undertakers (including local authorities, government and governmental organisations, parish councils, utility providers, and the National Landscape Partnership) have a *duty to seek to further the purpose* of the National Landscape; this *Management Plan* will guide them in fulfilling their statutory duties.
- **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 Blackdown 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.

This plan is ultimately about partnership working to make the vision a reality and identifying actions to encourage greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. This will lead to sustained investment, prosperity for our rural communities, protection and enhancement of biodiversity and climate resilience.

1.2 Guiding principles for partnership and management

- The *Management Plan* will be used to direct strategic leadership in the delivery of meaningful benefits to the landscape, communities and economy of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, while relevant authorities will seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty in the conduct of their functions and decision making.
- Collaboration, coordination and partnership is to be encouraged amongst the wide range of national, regional and local agencies and organisations to secure appropriate funding and support for the care and enhancement of the Blackdown Hills.
- The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership is the central vehicle to promote the roles and activities of all those involved in conserving and enhancing the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and to showcase innovation and best practice.
- The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership will monitor and report on the state of the National Landscape utilising tools such as the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework and local measures so that management interventions can be kept under review.

1.3 Policy context

Although now known as a National Landscape, 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) remains the legal term for the designation and so is the terminology used in this section.

Legislation

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are designated under the **National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949**. The purposes of the AONB designation were updated and confirmed by the Countryside Commission in 1991:

"The primary purpose of the 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 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."

The [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000](#) confirmed the significance of AONBs and created improved arrangements for their management. There are two key sections of the Act for AONBs:

- [Section 85](#) placed a statutory duty on all 'relevant authorities' to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when exercising or performing any function affecting land in AONBs.
- [Section 89](#) placed a statutory duty on local authorities to prepare and review a *Management Plan* for each AONB in their administrative area.

The [Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 \(LURA\)](#) strengthens the duty on partners such as local authorities and public bodies (known as relevant authorities) in relation to conserving and enhancing Protected Landscapes. It amends the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, placing a revised duty on relevant authorities:

"In exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in any [Protected Landscape] in England, a relevant authority must seek to further the specified purposes".

This duty to "seek to further" replaces the existing duty to "have regard to" the specified purposes. The duty does not prevent relevant authorities from undertaking their statutory

functions and discharging their legal duties and other responsibilities, but is intended to complement these requirements by ensuring that the purposes for which Protected Landscapes are designated for are recognised in reaching decisions and undertaking activities that impact these areas, and is considered to be an 'active' duty rather than a passive one.

Defra have produced [guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes](#).

Amendments brought about by LURA also grant powers to the Secretary of State to make regulations to:

- Direct a relevant authority in the discharging of the duty.
- Require a protected landscape management plan to contribute to meeting any national environmental target set under the Environment Act 2021.
- Set out how a management plan must further the purposes of the designation.
- Require and set out how a relevant authority must contribute to the preparation, implementation and review of a management plan.

Defra and Natural England policy

Under the umbrella of the [UK Government's 25 Year Environment Plan \(2018\)](#) the work and priorities of the National Landscape, as set out in the Management Plan, are required to contribute to Defra's [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) (EIP23).

This sets the UK goals for enhancing the natural environment, including:

- The target to protect 30% of our land and sea for nature, through the Nature Recovery Network, by 2030 (the so-called '30 by 30' commitment which arises from the UK's commitments at the COP15 Biodiversity summit).
- The target to restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2042.

It also seeks to halt the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030, increasing it to above 2022 levels by 2042.

The ambition is to achieve high quality, accessible, natural spaces with increased biodiversity close to where people live and work, with a focus around the equal distribution of environmental benefits and resources to all.

Specifically, the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework sets the ambition for how Protected Landscapes are expected to achieve three outcomes from the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23) which relate to these goals:

- Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife.
- Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change.
- Goal 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The Protected Landscape targets are non-statutory and create a shared ambition for all 44 of England's Protected Landscapes. The targets are for the Protected Landscapes as places (the geographic area covered by the designation). These targets should be seen as a minimum contribution rather than a limit on a Protected Landscape's ambition. Each individual Protected Landscape body, working with relevant local partners, will set their own individual contribution, which will be embedded in their management plan. Action will be coordinated by Protected Landscape bodies, and it will be the responsibility of all stakeholders, partners and land managers in the area to support their delivery.

Most of these changes follow recommendations made within the [Landscapes Review 2019](#), an independent review of Designated Landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) in England, commissioned by the Government and led by Julian Glover.

"The Review aims not to diminish the character or independence of our designated landscapes, or to impose new burdens on them and the people who live and work in the areas they cover. Instead, its purpose is to ask what might be done better, what changes could assist them, and whether definitions and systems which, in many cases date back to their original creation, are still sufficient."

The Landscapes Review produced 27 proposals across five themes of Landscapes Alive for Nature and Beauty, Landscapes for Everyone, Living in Landscapes, More Special Places and New Ways of Working. Some of the more strategic ones pertinent to management planning, include:

- *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes.*
- *The state of nature and natural capital in our national landscapes should be regularly and robustly assessed, informing the priorities for action.*
- *Strengthened management plans should set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery including, but not limited to, wilder areas and the response to climate change, (notably tree planting and peatland restoration). Their implementation must be backed up by stronger status in law.*

- *A renewed mission to recover and enhance nature and a stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes.*

Other key policy influences

International context

This management plan is both underpinned by and contributes towards delivery of the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals](#) set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and which address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

The *Management Plan* needs to account for [Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) and [Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#), which are both currently under development.

As responsible authorities, Devon County Council and Somerset Council are preparing these Local Nature Recovery Strategies as part of a statutory duty, enshrined in the Environment Act 2021, to work with stakeholders across the public, private and voluntary sectors to agree priorities for nature recovery, map the most valuable existing areas for nature, and established shared proposals for action to be taken to recover nature.

Climate action planning

The *Management Plan* will be informed and influenced by [Somerset's Climate Emergency Strategy](#) and the equivalent [Devon Carbon Plan](#), plus the [Climate Adaptation Strategy for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly](#). In addition, partner local authorities have developed and updated climate strategies and action plans, including [Mid Devon](#) and [East Devon](#).

Local Plans

Planning policy and decisions that affect the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and character of the National Landscape are the responsibility of local authorities. This does not mean that there should be no development but that any development should complement the character of the landscape, be sustainable, and be of an appropriate scale and nature.

Any development proposal must be in accordance with the relevant local authority's Development Plan, including core strategies, local plans, neighbourhood plans and any supplementary planning documents adopted by the authority. This includes adopted local plans in the former Somerset districts of [Somerset West and Taunton](#) and [South Somerset, East Devon District Council](#) and [Mid Devon District Council](#).

Agri-environment funding

A major vehicle for the delivery of actions advocated in the *Management Plan*, with respect to land management, is the suite of payment schemes which are either already available, or under development by Defra to replace the agri-environment schemes which used to be part of the UK's farm support under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Broadly falling under the heading of Environmental Land Management, the key payment schemes of relevance for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape are the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Countryside Stewardship, Farming in Protected Landscapes (operated by the National Landscape locally) and Landscape Recovery.

Integrating the management of the natural and historic environment

Other major players in supporting actions around conserving and enhancing natural beauty include Natural England, Historic England, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. A recent [Joint Statement](#) between the three organisations mirrors the aims of this management plan and highlights;

'We recognise that nature comprises habitats, species, geology, landscape, historic features, cultural connections, and the opportunities we have to connect with the environment. We acknowledge the complex interplay of these factors and the crucial role that heritage management practices can play in nature's recovery.'

1.4 Summary of forces for change: key issues, challenges and opportunities

The revised Management Plan needs to anticipate, understand and respond positively to a wide range of pressures and forces for change that may affect the area's natural beauty and special qualities and their management over the coming years. Some of the key ones are brought together and summarised here;

Climate emergency: The impacts of climate change are evident now and will impact all aspects of the Blackdown Hills and beyond so there needs to be greater focus on adapting to a changing climate and increasing resilience. The area can also play its part in reducing carbon emissions and other contributions to climate change mitigation.

Nature recovery: Urgent action is required to restore nature across the Blackdown Hills at scale, making nature more ecologically connected and resilient to climate change and other impacts through more, bigger, better and joined up places for wildlife. Statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategies are being prepared alongside this Plan, so we need to capitalise on this opportunity.

Environmental quality: Clean air, clean and plentiful water, and healthy soils are fundamental to nature recovery, as well as being the foundation for the ecosystem services that benefit those living in and around the National Landscape, and those visiting or working in it. The quality of these environmental resources is under pressure from a range of factors including development, road traffic, and land management practices. There is now more widespread understanding and acceptance of catchment-scale approaches to water management including natural flood risk management schemes which offer potential to restore natural ecosystems, improve water quality and reduce risk of flooding downstream.

Farming and land management: Agricultural transition and the move to environmental land management schemes is ongoing but still holds much uncertainty over the details of how this will be implemented and the funding that will be available.

Natural and cultural capital: The next few years are likely to see a growing trade in natural capital assets such as biodiversity, clean water, reduced flood risk, and stored carbon. These potentially provide new sources of income for landowners and managers in the Blackdown Hills who can provide a supply of these assets but there is uncertainty over the long-term value and credibility of some of these schemes.

Growth and development: The National Landscape designation means that the Blackdown Hills has not seen the same level of development as in other areas, but the area is not immune from development pressure. The demand for small-scale new build, conversion, renovation of existing structures and other minor development within the designated area

can incrementally and cumulatively change the character of the landscape and negatively impact on landscape quality, biodiversity, heritage and tranquillity. Significant new areas of housing and employment continue to be built close to the National Landscape, and further areas are being allocated in Local Plans.

Health and wellbeing: The health and well-being benefits of connecting with nature and the outdoors are now widely recognised and provide an opportunity for increased engagement with the National Landscape for both local communities and those in the surrounding areas. Yet the people that may benefit the most from better connection to the natural environment of the Blackdown Hills are often those that find it hardest to do so for a range of reasons.

Equality, diversity and inclusion: National Landscapes and National Parks are protected for the nation and should be available for everyone to enjoy. However, there are many people who face barriers that prevent them from visiting or engaging with the National Landscape and a proactive approach is needed to reach out to them and work with people within those communities to provide greater opportunities and awareness.

Policy, finance and delivery: Action to address these strategic challenges will require resources and partnership working, at a time of severe budgetary challenges, further local government transformation and continued political and policy uncertainty. It is likely that new sources of investment and funding will need to be found, including from the private sector.

Legacy and evolution: This Management Plan and the issues it seeks to address are not new. Management planning and collaboration have been at the heart of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership, in all its guises, for more than 25 years. Significant projects and initiatives from the recent past underpin much of today's work. For instance, the European Leader-funded *Local Products Strategy* and *Making it Local* programmes greatly affected the direction of land-based businesses, community groups, local food, the arts and other aspects of community life which this plan is seeking to influence going forward. Projects like the *Neroche Landscape Partnership* and *Blackdown Hills Natural Futures* paved the way for much which has followed.

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Chapter 2: Special qualities

PICTURES TO BE ADDED

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape has a suite of special qualities that together make it unique and outstanding, underpinning its designation as a nationally important protected landscape. Special qualities may be considered as specific components of 'natural beauty', distilling out the key attributes that combine in particular ways to form the natural beauty of the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). These are the special qualities, individually and in combination, that we need to conserve and enhance for the future, and they should be considered in all decisions affecting the National Landscape.

From the dramatic, steep, wooded north-facing scarp, the area dips gently southwards as a flat-topped plateau deeply dissected by valleys. This is the northern part of the East Devon Plateau – one of the finest, most extensive in Britain. The tops are open and windswept; in the valleys villages and hamlets nestle among ancient patterns of small, enclosed fields and a maze of winding lanes lined with high hedgebanks. The steep valleys support a patchwork of woodland and heath, nationally and regionally important habitats which support a wealth of important, charismatic species and interesting plant communities.

Key to the Blackdown Hills designation as an AONB is the subtle combination of four outstanding aspects of the landscape, as described in *The Blackdown Hills landscape: A landscape assessment*. Countryside Commission, 1989 and set out below:

It is an area notable for its **unspoilt rural character**, which remains relatively undisturbed by modern development and so ancient landscape features, special habitats, historical and archaeological remains have survived intact. In the winding lanes, the hidden valleys and traditional villages there is a sense of stepping back in time; of the connections between nature and humanity. The countryside remains largely unchanged and there is an identifiable and characteristic vernacular, pastoral landscape.

There is a **unique geology**. The composition of the underlying Upper Greensand geology of the Blackdown Hills and the adjoining East Devon National Landscape is unique in Britain and is one of the area's strongest unifying features. It has given rise to the distinct topography of flat-topped plateau, sharp ridges and spring-lined valleys. The springs in turn have created the characteristic pattern of rough grassland, mire and wet woodland vegetation on the valley sides. The nature of the Greensand rock has meant that these plant communities are particularly diverse. Moreover, the geology has provided a local building material, chert, which is uncommon elsewhere.

There is a **diversity of landscape patterns and pictures**. The visual quality of the landscape is high and is derived from the complex patterns and mosaics of landscapes. Although the scenery is immensely varied, particular features are repeated. There are long views over field-

patterned landscapes. Ancient, species-rich hedgerows delineate the fields and define the character of the landscape, enclosing narrow twisting lanes. The open plateau is dissected by steep valleys, the slopes supporting a patchwork of ancient woodland. The history of medieval and parliamentary enclosures has resulted in a contrasting landscape of small fields in the valleys and larger fields with straight hedges on the plateau. There are patches of heath and common, bog and mire and there are fine avenues of beech along the ridge. At a more detailed level there is a variety of visual and ecological interest; heathland birdlife, ground flora of woodland and mire, and colourful wildflowers on hedgebanks.

It is a ***landscape with architectural appeal***. The landscape pattern is punctuated by a wealth of small villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads of architectural value and distinctive character. Devon and Somerset are recognised nationally for their fine rural architecture, but the Blackdown Hills contain a special concentration of such buildings and where the vernacular character is particularly well preserved. Predominant materials are chert and cob with thatch, over time often replaced by corrugated iron, or clay-tiled roofs. The appeal lies in the way in which the buildings fit so naturally into their surroundings.

This summary is supplemented by more detail and further information about the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills included in the [appendices](#), which should be referred to for a thorough understanding of the distinctive characteristics and valued qualities that make up the Blackdown Hills special sense of place.

Chapter 3: Vision

Our vision is that in 2050, as a result of collaboration and positive change, the Blackdown Hills will be a rich and vibrant landscape, resilient to the effects of climate change, where:

- Thriving, diverse communities, with a strong sense of place and wellbeing, are sustained by a connection to the land, natural environment and a rich local cultural heritage. Living and working sustainably in and around the area, they underpin the prospering local economy and can access the services they need.
- Sense of place is maintained and strengthened, characterised by small villages and hamlets set within a distinctive panorama of wide plateaux bisected by deep valleys, containing an intimate patchwork of fields, woodlands and extensive hedges, all shaped by the unique geology.
- Farming and land uses work successfully within the natural tolerances of the land to create a resilient place, providing food, energy, timber, clean water and other wider benefits needed by society, nurturing the area's rich resources for future generations.
- Wildlife is thriving and habitats are in good condition, restored and expanded, diverse and abundant, with species moving freely through a connected and healthy landscape.
- Our historic environment and rich historical legacy are better understood, conserved and celebrated. Our cultural heritage is widely recognised and valued and is continually evolving and growing.
- Everyone seeking inspiration and enjoyment of its landscape and natural benefits is welcomed and can readily access and experience this special place.

Delivering the vision

Over the next 25 years, the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is facing a number of drivers of change which have the capacity to impact significantly on its core character, and which need to be addressed in this plan period, not least the interconnected threats of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. Collectively we can mitigate these and other threats if concerted and urgent action is taken now. The challenge will be to make the most of the Blackdown Hills' ability to restore nature, grow healthy food and reduce carbon emissions while supporting vibrant and diverse rural communities: and fundamentally, making sure that conserving and enhancing the evolving landscape and special character of the Blackdown Hills is at the heart of all we do and the decisions we make.

Chapter 4: Place

It is the diverse landscapes, the distinctive villages, the historic and natural environment, that give the Blackdown Hills its special sense of place. This section of the management plan focuses on sustainable, regenerative and resilient land use and land management that is central to conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area. It covers landscape, natural resources and natural capital, farming, forestry and land management, historic environment and geology, planning, development and infrastructure.

4.1 Objectives – Place

- To restore, conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services it provides.
- To support sustainable farming, forestry and land management practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and deliver a range of ecosystem services.
- To strengthen the Blackdown Hills special sense of place, with a diversity of landscape patterns and pictures, unique geology, archaeology, and buildings of architectural appeal, through sound custodianship.

4.2 Guiding principles – Place

- The distinctive character and special qualities of the Blackdown Hills need to be recognised, understood and valued if natural beauty is to be conserved, enhanced and restored.
- Our historic environment and cultural heritage, from its archaeological sites and historic buildings through to the unique arts and crafts produced today, is recognised as an intrinsic part of the landscape and special qualities of the Blackdown Hills.
- We need to ensure that any development and infrastructure affecting the National Landscape is of the highest quality; sensitive to landscape setting and historic character, conserving and enhancing wildlife and other special qualities.
- All those whose actions affect the landscape work together to allow nature and natural processes to thrive, as a foundation of a productive, healthy rural economy.
- Soil health is restored and nurtured; rivers and streams flow clean and other ecosystem services are provided to society as a result of regenerative land management.

- When contributing to meeting national targets, we will be mindful of primarily seeking to maximise outcomes relevant to the opportunities and needs of the Blackdown Hills.

4.3 Targets – Place

These are the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) targets that we will contribute to:

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”.

Target 8

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

Applying the 3% target to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape would be an increase of 1,108 hectares (2738 acres). Therefore, 39.6 hectares (97.8 acres) per year between 2022 and 2050, bringing the total amount of woodland to 9,302.93 hectares (22,988 acres).

Target 10

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

4.4 At a glance – Place

Headlines from [State of the National Landscape report 2023](#):

- Satellite images suggest that there is very little light pollution in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. There has been a noticeable increase of light spillage from Chard and Taunton areas, and increasing spillage from some communities within the area, noticeably Dunkeswell, Hemyock and around Yarcombe.
- National noise mapping suggests that the extent of traffic noise from major roads is limited in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. The most recent data is for 2017.
- Particulate matter (PM2-5) levels low in the area but with a hotspot around Hemyock.
- Sulphur dioxide (SO2) levels are low in the area but with hotspots at Hemyock, Dunkeswell and near to Axminster.
- Surface water flood risk is low for most of the area.
- There are 770 Listed Buildings and 26 Scheduled Monuments. Of these, seven assets are at risk (2022); this is a minor improvement since 2019.
- There are ten Conservation Areas within the National Landscape. None are deemed as at risk.
- 78% of the National Landscape is under agriculture (2021).
- During the ten years to 2021 the number of farm holdings has remained at around 625.
- 42% of farms are less than 20 hectares in size and 44% are between 20-100 hectares in size.
- 48% of farms are recorded as lowland livestock grazing.
- Livestock numbers include; Poultry (1,006,928 animals), a 7% increase since 2016; Sheep (22,573 breeding ewes), a 6% decline since 2016; and Cattle (17,965 animals), with a 5% decline since 2016.
- Land in agri-environment schemes has decreased from 11,793 ha in 2017 (27% of the National Landscape) to 8,246 ha in 2021 (22.8% of the National Landscape).
- The total annual value of agri-environment agreements was £2,113,434 in 2021; up from £1,017,856 in 2017.
- There are eight made (adopted) neighbourhood plans - all in East Devon.
- Approval given for one affordable housing scheme since 2017.

Additional data from Defra:

- The total length of river waterbodies within each status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) is; 122 km moderate status (19 waterbody catchments); 24km poor status (9 waterbody catchments); 0.8km bad status (2 waterbody catchments)
- There are 4 groundwater bodies with high status under the Water Framework Directive and 3 in poor status.

4.5 Priorities for action – Place

This section sets out what we intend to prioritise and how these actions will contribute to each of our targets (see above).

Priorities for Target 5

- Increase the uptake of appropriate agri-environment scheme (AES) options, aiming for 75%+ uptake of Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), to underpin Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery additional take-up (the three components of Environmental Land Management- ELM).

PLTOF stat 12 indicates that the current uptake of agri-environment schemes is relatively low in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape at 18% (6,800 hectares). However, information from the local Natural England team (April 2025) indicates that the area under Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship (excluding capital grants) is approximately 11,821 hectares, 32% of the National Landscape. The total area under the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) component of ELM is slightly higher at 13,884 hectares, 37.5 % across 291 agreements. The total number of agri-environment agreements (all schemes) is therefore 691 (excluding capital grants), covering 27,025 hectares. Total area under an agri-environment scheme can therefore be stated as up to 70% of the National Landscape (excludes capital grants). Although this level of take-up is encouraging, to maintain, add value to and increase this will require significant promotion and close working with the land management community, via trusted local advisers.

- Support and add value to schemes such as the Luppitt Landscape Recovery project ([Landscape Recovery round 2](#)) and the potential expansion of the Upper Axe Landscape Recovery project (round 1), as well as rolling out successful Landscape Recovery type management (large scale, long term environmental land management) to other areas in the Blackdown Hills.

Priorities for Target 8

- Undertake significant new tree planting, including orchards, restore undermanaged woodlands (to promote regeneration), and restore/reestablish 'trees outside woods' habitats, including hedgerows and hedgerow trees, seeking an additional 1108.76 hectares of tree canopy and woodland cover by 2050.
- Make significant Environmental Land Management (ELM) investment and provide woodland advisory support for willing landowners (including relevant authorities), while applying the 'right place right tree' principles. The Somerset and Devon Tree Strategies will help guide and support this.

Priorities for Target 10

- Review the reasons why the assets are still at risk. As a result of positive management, only three Scheduled Monuments from 26 are considered at risk, compared to eight in 2013, and there is also one Listed Building at risk. This is a very small percentage of the designated heritage assets, however moving towards removing all of them from being at risk should be the goal.

Other priorities

- Step up the action needed to tackle Water Framework Directive (WFD) failures (now referred to as the Water Environment Regulations (WER), linked to drinking water quality and supply (including drought), surface quality and downstream coastal waters. This will involve working with land managers, water industry and other delivery partners. Working with the Regulators and Catchment Sensitive Farming officers, to focus attention on crops grown in 'high risk' locations and ensuring compliance with the Farming Rules for Water is important, to tackle the systemic failures of many of the waterbodies in the Blackdown Hills (as elsewhere in the south west).
- Continue to promote, deliver and advocate for 'mainstreaming' natural-based solutions as a mechanism to provide resilience to property and infrastructure, both within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape but also, importantly, downstream where major critical infrastructure is at risk from flooding and where building resilience is only possible through upstream interventions. Nature-based solution interventions rely on land managers to collaborate at scale. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership will play a key role here, to help support, incentivise and deliver. More detail on climate mitigation and adaptation can be found in the Climate section.

- Continue to support the farming and land management community through agricultural transition, via farm facilitation support programmes and by responding to ever-changing agricultural policy and the need/incentives to provide ecosystem services for society, including green finance opportunities such as nutrient credits and Biodiversity Net Gain. The National Landscape Partnership play a key convening, supporting and delivery role here.
- Undertake a desk-based appraisal of the historic environment in the protected landscape area, characterising and quantifying the resource and examining the extent of detailed investigation that has taken place to date. Use the results to identify where the most significant gaps in understanding are and how they can be addressed. The potential opportunities for community heritage and citizen science projects to help fill those gaps will also be identified. The last comprehensive desk top survey of the historic environment of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape area was in 1996, since when there have been very significant changes and new information which have helped to identify the significant extent of historic environment features in the area. An up-to-date study is an essential tool for strategic decision making concerning the historic environment.
- Continue to inform and influence planning policy, decisions and implementation through development of additional planning guidance and other tools and mechanisms, working with local planning authorities. Develop a shared understanding of the potential opportunities and effects of measures such as carbon offsetting, nutrient credits and biodiversity net gain in relation to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

4.6 Policies – Place

Landscape, natural resources and natural capital

PL1 Approach the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape according to landscape-led principles, based on landscape character, underpinned by a sound understanding of the area’s rich stock of natural and cultural capital assets and its value to society in terms of the flow of goods and services.

PL2 The special qualities, distinctive character and key features of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape will be conserved and enhanced, and opportunities will be sought to strengthen or restore landscape character where landscape features are in poor condition, missing or fragmented.

PL3 Promote a catchment-scale, multiple-benefit, collaborative-based approach to soil conservation and restoration, water quality improvements, reducing flood risk, and improving resilience, based on the Otter, Axe, Culm and Parrett/Tone catchments.

PL4 Approaches to flood risk management and erosion control which work with natural processes, conserve the natural environment and improve biodiversity will be advocated and supported.

Farming, Forestry and Land Management

PL5 A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming, forestry and land management sector providing a range of public goods and services will be fostered as one of the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the National Landscape.

PL6 Promote, encourage and support widespread take-up of Environmental Land Management schemes that help conserve and enhance natural beauty and deliver a range of environmental outcomes through sustainable farming and forestry practices.

PL7 Encourage the production and marketing of local food, timber and other agricultural and wood products where these are compatible with the National Landscape and purpose of designation.

PL8 Encourage sensitive management of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, woodlands, orchards and ponds, protect ancient woodland and veteran trees, and restore the original broadleaved character of plantations on ancient woodland sites.

PL9 Encourage well managed woodland creation and expansion that considers both the ecological value and landscape character of a site and surroundings and opportunities for maximising ecosystem services including natural flood management.

PL10 Monitor, manage and mitigate damaging diseases such as ash dieback that have potential to impact negatively on landscape and biodiversity.

PL11 Wider community engagement with the farming and land management sector will be encouraged to enable a deeper understanding and appreciation of the important role played by land managers in maintaining the National Landscape's special qualities.

Historic environment and geology

PL12 Conserve and enhance the historic built environment and rural heritage assets, support training in traditional heritage skills, and promote the use of Historic Environment Record

(HER), historic landscape characterisation and other tools to inform projects, policymaking and management activities.

PL13 Monitor the extent and condition of historic sites, features and landscapes across the Blackdown Hills and seek to address sites and features in poor and declining condition.

PL14 Promote awareness and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of the Blackdown Hills and secure effective management of important features and sites.

Planning, development and infrastructure

PL15 All relevant strategic, local and neighbourhood plan documents and planning decision-making will:

- Seek to further the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape.
- Utilise the Management Plan and consider other Blackdown Hills statements and guidance.
- Ensure that conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty is given great weight.

PL16 All development affecting the Blackdown Hills National Landscape should conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by:

- Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment.
- Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale.
- Reinforcing local distinctiveness.
- Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity.

PL17 Promote and protect tranquillity and dark skies by minimising intrusive noise and development and light pollution that may undermine the intrinsic character of the National Landscape.

PL18 The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the National Landscape will be protected and enhanced.

PL19 The deeply rural character of much of the land adjoining the National Landscape boundary forms an essential setting for the Blackdown Hills and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character.

PL20 Community-led planning tools, such as neighbourhood plans, and initiatives such as Community Land Trusts will be supported as the principal means of identifying need and

securing local community assets such as affordable housing. Any development should conserve and enhance natural beauty.

PL21 Road and transport schemes (including design, maintenance, signage, landscaping and safety measures) affecting the National Landscape will be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to landscape character and special qualities, seeking to further the purpose of designation. The landscape, biodiversity and cultural features of the area's road network such as hedge banks, flower-rich verges, and locally distinctive historic highway furniture, will be protected, conserved and enhanced.

4.7 Context – Place

4.7.1 Natural Capital and ecosystem goods and services

Restoring a good quality and condition of the natural and cultural capital stock (including land, soils, air and water) is the key to the outstanding environment of the Blackdown Hills, as well as delivering a range of multiple benefits and ecosystem services for society (further details are included in the Special Qualities [appendix](#)). For example, some of the rivers that rise in the Blackdown Hills provide domestic drinking water for both Devon and Somerset. The River Otter flows across the top of a large ground water aquifer and is a priority for tackling pollution and improving water quality for drinking water through initiatives such as South West Water and partners' [Upstream Thinking](#) project. There are a considerable number of properties in the Blackdown Hills that are not connected to mains water, and therefore rely on water from springs, boreholes and wells. These can be particularly sensitive to rainfall and drought, over abstraction by other users, water quality and contamination risks, which all require consideration.

Water resources

The Blackdown Hills forms part of the headwaters of the rivers Culm, Yarty (running to the River Axe), Otter and Tone/Parrett. People well outside the National Landscape are therefore affected by how land is managed for flood risk and water quality. The rivers that originate in the National Landscape flow downstream through larger towns and villages outside of the National Landscape which are more prone to flooding. As such, land management in the upper river valleys can play a key role in helping to reduce flood risk downstream. A prime example of this is the effect that the river Culm has on the peak flows running through Exeter, as the timing of the river Culm and river Exe peak flows can align, leading to overtopping and flooding of settlements, the M5 motorway and the main railway line. [Connecting the Culm](#) is a long term, multi-agency approach to tackling some of the issues in the river corridor and focusing on nature-based solutions to address them. Natural flood management works with natural processes to 'slow the flow' of flood waters. This helps to reduce the maximum water height of a flood (the 'flood peak') and/or delay the arrival of the flood peak downstream, increasing the time available to prepare for floods. Managing the natural resources of the Blackdown Hills (including mires that act as natural sponges and woodland planting in appropriate locations), sustainable drainage systems, and ecological river restoration projects are important components of natural flood management.

Water quality

Water quality is an essential driver of a thriving and resilient natural landscape full of nature, but it is widely accepted that some wastewater and land management practices in water

catchments are increasing nutrient loadings, storm water runoff rates, siltation and pollution incidents that are impacting downstream. The knock-on consequences can have much wider implications, as exemplified by the requirement for new development not to cause increased nutrient pollution to certain protected sites (locally the river Axe SAC and Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site), which has caused significant delays to development proposals in the last few years. Diffuse and point pollution and nutrient enrichment are factors affecting water quality in the National Landscape and beyond. Indeed, pollution from rural areas is a significant factor in causing poor water quality in every catchment in the Southwest river basin district: phosphorus in rivers and sediment from agriculture are particular issues in the East Devon Catchment. The *Water Framework Directive (WFD) Regulations* are an important mechanism for assessing and managing the water environment in the UK, and has the core aim of protecting the water environments by preventing their deterioration and improving their quality. It does this by setting ecological targets ('good' status for all water bodies) and environmental objectives.

Addressing these issues and improving the water quality in the rivers and waterbodies of the Blackdown Hills is key. There are continuing and new initiatives that offer practical solutions and targeted support such as the [Catchment Sensitive Farming](#) programme operate across all the catchments. There is significant community interest in local water quality and initiatives to address the health of our rivers, see [Making Rivers Better](#) for example, and the [Rivers Run Through Us](#) project.

Parts of the eastern and western fringes of the National Landscape are within Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, where there are controls on some farming activities, particularly relating to manure and fertilisers, to tackle nitrate loss from agriculture. Northern parts of the National Landscape are within a Drinking Water Safeguard Zone (Surface Water), where actions may be required to avoid deterioration in quality of drinking water supplies.

Air quality

The State of the National Landscape report indicates some relative hotspots for different forms of air pollutants, the reasons for which need further appraisal. However, it is the case that agriculture is a significant source of ammonia, mainly arising from dairy, pig and poultry units, which are found throughout the Blackdown Hills. Ammonia can drift onto protected sites (SSSIs, etc) and sensitive habitats and add to nitrogen-based nutrient loads. Some Lichen species present in woodlands of the Blackdown Hills are especially sensitive to air pollution. Catchment Sensitive Farming is the main action to deliver reduction in ammonia emissions in agriculture.

4.7.2 Landscape

It is the diverse landscape, the distinctive villages, the historic environment and the tranquil rural setting that combine to give the Blackdown Hills its special sense of place.

Landscape character

Our landscapes have evolved over time, and they will continue to evolve – change is a constant, but outcomes vary. The management of change is essential to ensure that we achieve sustainable outcomes – social, environmental and economic – without losing the inherent valued character. Decision makers need to understand the baseline and the implications of their decisions for that baseline. The process of Landscape Character Assessment has an important role to play in managing and guiding change.

Landscape character describes the qualities and features that make a place distinctive. It can represent an area larger than the National Landscape or focus on a very specific location. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape displays a variety of landscape character within a relatively small, distinct area. These local variations in character within the National Landscape are articulated through the Devon-wide [Landscape Character Assessment](#) (LCA), which describes the variations in character between different areas and types of landscape in the county and covers the entire National Landscape. There are Devon Character Areas, named to an area sharing a unique and distinct identity recognisable on a county scale and Landscape Character Types (LCTs), each sharing similar characteristics. Hidden characteristics and past land uses are identified in county-based Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC).

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER MAPS

These assessments should be used in planning and land management to understand and describe the landscape and manage pressures for change and are central to a landscape-led approach in planning and design. Under this approach plans, policies and proposals are strongly informed by understanding the essential character of the site and its landscape context and creates development which is locally distinctive, responds to local character and fits well into its environment; it needs to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and create sustainable and successful places for people.

Further information about the assessments that cover the National Landscape, descriptive information about the character areas and character types relevant to the Blackdown Hills and links to associated documents can be found in the [annex](#).

One of the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is its visual relationship with other landscapes and in particular the view of the steep escarpment of the Blackdown Hills rising out of the Vale of Taunton. The wooded edge to the plateau provides a relatively wild, uninhabited backdrop to the flatter, low-lying farmed and settled Vale. The juxtaposition

of these contrasting characters means that one enhances the other. The Wellington Monument provides a single focus to the scene and enriches the cultural history of this landscape. This scenery can be appreciated from much of the Vale but makes for dramatic views from southern slopes of the Quantock Hills National Landscape and the eastern fringes of Exmoor National Park. There are expansive and far-reaching views from the Blackdown Hills across much of Devon and Somerset, including views to Dartmoor from Culmstock Beacon and the Jurassic coast from Hembury Hillfort.

The distinctiveness of the Blackdown Hills includes the area's relative remoteness, timelessness, and tranquillity. Its very character relies on retaining a natural feeling without being over managed. Although hard to quantify it is all too easily lost through, for example, increasing standardisation and suburbanisation, changing agricultural practices and loss of distinctive elements of the natural and historic environment. Each individual case may not have a significant impact, but cumulatively they can erode the area's distinctive character.

Dark, expansive starry skies are one of the sights which make the Blackdown Hills so special. Night-time darkness is a key characteristic of the area's sense of tranquillity and relative remoteness. The Blackdown Hills is the fifth darkest National Landscape in England, with very low levels of night-time brightness; 95% of the area is in the two very darkest categories as evidenced by 2016 research by CPRE.

Setting

The setting of a National Landscape is the surroundings in which the influence of the area is experienced. Put another way, it is the area within which development and land management proposals (by virtue of their nature, size, scale, siting, materials or design) may have an impact, either positive or negative, on the natural beauty and special qualities of the protected landscape. If the quality of the setting declines, then the appreciation and enjoyment of the National Landscape diminishes. Large scale development, the construction of high or expansive structures, or a change generating movement, noise, intrusion from artificial lighting, or other disturbance will adversely affect the setting. Views are one element of setting, associated with the visual experience and aesthetic appreciation. Views are particularly important to the Blackdown Hills. This is because of the juxtaposition of high and low ground and the fact that recreational users value them. Without husbandry and management, views within, across, from and to the National Landscape may be lost or degraded.

4.7.3 Heritage and geology

In the Blackdown Hills National Landscape there is a very strong link between geology, archaeology and the modern landscape. The area retains a strong sense of continuity with the past and the landscape has great time depth, from prehistoric through to modern. Centuries

of human activity have created the intricate patterns of woods, heaths and fields, lanes and trackways, and hamlets and villages that contribute greatly to the National Landscape's unique historic character. More information can be found in the Special Qualities [appendix](#).

Designated heritage assets include 770 Listed Buildings (13 Grade I, 47 Grade II* and 710 Grade II), which is up from 762 in 2013. As a result of positive management, only three Scheduled Monuments from 26 are considered at risk, compared to eight in 2013, and there is also one Listed Building at risk. Understanding and addressing the reasons for these assets being at risk is key to meeting the relevant target in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework.

The designated heritage resource is only a tiny fraction of the overall heritage assets that combine to form the essential character of the landscape. Over 8,000 sites and buildings of archaeological and historic interest are recorded within the National Landscape on the Devon and Somerset Historic Environment Records (HERs). No information is currently available about the condition of this vast majority of the heritage resource and there has been no thorough assessment of the character of this resource and the level of understanding of it. There is therefore no firm basis upon which to formulate a historic environment research agenda for the area.

The geology of the Blackdown Hills is dominated by one of the finest and most extensive plateaux in Britain – the East Devon Plateau – dissected by the long, deep valleys of the rivers Culm, Otter, Yarty, and their tributaries.

Below the surface are near horizontal beds of soft rocks deposited one on top of the other, the youngest at the top. The lower layer, exposed in the river valleys, is marl (red Mercia Mudstone), replaced with Lias in the east. A 30-metre layer of Upper Greensand rests upon this, outcropping as an abrupt rim to the valleys and capping the conspicuous northern scarp slope. Water percolating through the Upper Greensand meets the impervious underlying clay then bleeds out to form springline mires, so characteristic of the Blackdown Hills, that in turn give rise to the headwaters of several river catchments. The composition of Upper Greensand layer, which underlies much of the East Devon plateau, is unique in Britain. This is covered by a superficial deposit of Clay-with-flints-and-cherts.

At the junction of the greensand and clay iron ores were found, and iron production is thought to have started in the Iron Age, through the Roman period and continuing to Medieval time. There is evidence for a Roman clay industry and the chert-tempered local clay supported a medieval pottery industry around the Membury/Axminster area and later in Hemyock, while the almost indestructible chert is used extensively for buildings and walls. On the western edge of the Blackdown Hills the Upper Greensand produced well-preserved fossils, and the area around Kentisbeare and Broadhembury was famed for its whetstone industry in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape has two

geological SSSIs covering 3.5ha – Furley Chalk Pit and Reed’s Farm Pit, which are both in unfavourable condition.

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape is significant for its geology and geomorphology with some features unique to the area. The geology influences the landscape, soils and biodiversity and has played a significant role in the area’s industry and heritage. It is vital that this geological resource is protected, conserved, enhanced, promoted, and better understood. Exploration and research into the geology of the National Landscape should be continued to improve understanding of the landscape, and of the geological resource and its importance to inform the conservation and management of geological sites.

GEOLOGY MAP

4.7.4 Farming and land management

Farmers and land managers are the main stewards of the landscape, and their actions which help maintain natural beauty and the special qualities of the National Landscape should be supported. The farmed area reflects centuries of land management practices and traditions which remain at the heart of our rural communities, producing high quality food, maintaining and shaping the landscape. Farming has a key role to play in protecting the environment by keeping air and rivers clean, improving soils and providing wildlife habitats.

The agricultural sector is in a period of major change especially funding and market uncertainties while arrangements for post Brexit environmental land management system is still developing. Broadly, existing government direct payments to farmers are being phased out and a new system will recognise and value broader societal benefits with payments being based on the provision of public goods, including carbon storage and nature recovery.

Farmers are under increasing pressure to respond to many factors that are influencing the way they use and manage land. Key challenges and changes in agriculture have implications for conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

The number of small family farms are declining and there is an on-going trend towards the amalgamation of farm units and the separation of farmhouse from the land. Thus, farming is being concentrated on fewer, larger, sometimes dispersed units, while many farms are becoming essentially residential, for keeping horses or as small holdings. This risks not only reducing the opportunity for younger people to enter farming but also can lead to the countryside taking on a more suburban appearance. On the other hand, new land managers can bring new opportunities, resources, and ideas that conserve and enhance the natural beauty. Contract labour is used more, often using larger vehicles and machinery and travelling between properties, which can have a wider landscape impact as these vehicles can easily damage the verges and banks of narrow Blackdown Hills lanes and lead to pressure to widen field gateways. The pattern of land management may also change as farmers seek new, profitable activities and markets, including green finance opportunities. To boost profitability especially for dairy farms, there is a shift towards robotic milking, large livestock sheds and zero grazing (animals kept indoors all year). Forage crops that provide high protein/ high volume (such as maize) can be favoured that can result in more compacted soils, risk of runoff from bare soils on slopes and removal of permanent grassland. New crops for energy generation (such as anaerobic digestion) are also a driver for change, while use for recreation or tourism activities is sought on other land.

Soils

Soils are one of the most valuable natural resources we have. Healthy soil supports a range of environmental, economic, and societal benefits. These include food production, climate

change mitigation and increased biodiversity. Poor soil management or inappropriate land use can cause soil degradation, which reduces the ability of soil to perform these vital functions. Soil health also underpins the unique character and distinct form of the area's landscape and biodiversity.

Regenerative agriculture is a suite of practices that put soil health front and centre, allowing farming to be more in tune with nature. As a result, it is seen as a more climate resilient approach to farming whilst also supporting nature recovery. Regenerative agriculture starts with building healthy soil by focusing on rebuilding organic matter and the natural living biodiversity in the soil. This improves the ground's ability to:

- fix carbon from the air and store it in the soil matrix
- retain and clean water, and reduce flood risk
- Promote soil biology and support wildlife more widely
- recycle nutrients

Regenerative agriculture also delivers on climate change via minimally disturbing soils, which improves soil carbon storage and sequestration, and aids nature recovery from the ground up.

4.7.5 Trees and woodland

There are many reasons why new tree planting is important, at a local and global level, not least in society's response to climate change, both in terms of increasing offsetting of carbon, and to mitigate the impact of climate change. For example, new planting in strategic locations can reduce the risks of flooding, while planting a diverse range of species can create resilient ecosystems that can cope with changing weather patterns such as prolonged periods of dry weather.

However, careful principles of woodland creation and design objectives are required to maximise the potential benefits and ensure that the woodlands have a strong chance of developing and thriving into the long term. Furthermore, any new planting also has the potential to bring a range of benefits locally and that opportunity should be understood. For example, consideration needs to be given to the suitability of the land to support different woodland types; the surrounding habitats that the new planting could connect with; and the opportunities to work with the local landscape and cultural heritage to deliver multiple benefits, whether nature recovery or public access. As a principle, all new woodland creation and planting schemes should consider the scheme's impact on landscape, biodiversity and heritage from the outset, following the UK Forestry Standard ([UKFS](#)), and utilising landscape character assessment and Devon's [Right Place Right Tree Guidance](#) (both cover all the National Landscape). The UKFS, and its supplementary guides, are the basis for sustainable woodland creation and management in the UK.

Both ancient woodlands and veteran trees represent a historic part of the landscape and past land use given they have been undisturbed by development and human activity. Furthermore, they are known to host a diverse array of plants, fungi, birds and insects due to their undisturbed soil and decaying wood, providing optimum growth conditions. They are also a significant carbon store as they have been sequestering atmospheric carbon for centuries. Their support for conservation and climate change mitigation, as well as their status as iconic monuments of our landscape, means ancient woods and veteran trees are widely valued as an irreplaceable resource. Many woodlands were once managed but recent times have seen the reduction in coppice cutting, the cessation of timber harvesting resulting in a permanently closed canopy, or the planting of ancient woodland with conifer. All of these result in a decline in biodiversity which can be rectified by the application of sensitive management.

Tree diseases pose an increasing and significant pressure on the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills, for example ash dieback especially where ash is a dominant tree in and outside woods and/or hedgerow component.

Effective woodland management is essential for growing timber of high value and other wood products such as wood fuel, but it also supports delivery of ecosystem services. Thinning out trees increases their capacity to sequester carbon and enhances their habitat quality as more light is let through. This form of low-intensity management is particularly supportive of good-quality and young-medium age trees which are most efficient at sequestering carbon. Well-managed woodlands also lead to thriving habitats that support wider ecosystems.

In the Blackdown Hills, commercial sustainable timber production, including conifer crops where appropriate to the landscape, has a role to play in sustaining economically viable landholdings that can continue to provide a wide range of ecosystem services. Alternatively, community woodland management schemes, such as Neroche Woodlanders, are encouraging new ways of working woods, as well as bringing a wide range of other benefits from wood fuel to health and wellbeing.

Hedges are an integral, unifying landscape feature of the Blackdown Hills, of historical importance, defining the farmed landscape, and supporting wildlife, while also helping to control soil erosion and reduce flooding. The well-established [Blackdown Hills Hedge Association](#) continues to promote the traditional hedge-laying management of hedgerows through training courses, competitions and other events.

4.7.6 Planning and development

Villages, hamlets, farmsteads, individual buildings and their settings form a vital element of the character of the Blackdown Hills. The planning and design of any development, large and small, both within the National Landscape and around it, is of key importance in maintaining the landscape and scenic beauty of the area.

Planning policy

Planning decision-making in the National Landscape is the responsibility of the local authorities within the context of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) and local development plans, including Neighbourhood Plans. All local authorities and parish councils also have a duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty in all their actions affecting a National Landscape.

The NPPF provides specific planning guidance for plan-makers and decision-takers in relation to National Landscapes. The latest version was published in December 2024 and confirms that:

- National Landscapes [and National Parks] have the highest status of protection in the planning process.
- great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing their landscape and scenic beauty.
- the scale and extent of development should be limited.
- development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.
- when considering applications for development 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 (see below and in the appendices).

The NPPF also references the importance of high standards of design and materials that reflect the identity of the local built and natural environment. The avoidance and reduction of noise and light pollution are addressed with references to protecting tranquil areas and intrinsically dark landscapes - special qualities of the Blackdown Hills.

Sustainable construction methods offer the potential to reduce the wider environmental impacts; this includes advocating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), a natural approach to managing drainage in and around development. In the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, where possible, new developments should incorporate sustainable technology, renewable energy sources, and energy and water efficiency as standard; and the use of locally sourced materials, including sustainably grown timber and wood products, should be encouraged.

(Also see the [Climate](#) section, including [policies](#)). However, these need to be balanced with retaining a locally distinctive built environment with a strong local vernacular - special qualities of the area. There may also be implications related to sourcing local materials to be managed, for example extracting building stone.

As evidenced in neighbourhood plans and similar, meeting local housing needs should be the priority for new housing developments in the Blackdown Hills. The availability of a range of affordable housing (as defined in the NPPF), and other more affordable options, is a high priority for many local communities due to the limited choice of accommodation available and lack of affordability. Some have established Community Land Trusts to address provision. Whether on an exceptions site or part of a larger site, great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty.

Major development

The NPPF does not define the meaning of the phrase ‘major development’ in respect of protected landscapes and there is no single threshold or factor that determines whether a proposal is major development for the purposes of paragraph 190. However, a footnote confirms that 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. In the context of the relevant NPPF paragraphs, the potential for harm to the National Landscape should be foremost to the determination of whether development is major or not. This requires consideration of a range of site and development specific factors that include (but are not limited to) location, setting, the quantum of development, duration, permanence or reversibility of effects. Harm to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is any impact which causes loss, damage or detriment to its natural beauty, its special qualities or its distinctive characteristics or to the perception of natural beauty. There is further information on the consideration of ‘major development’ in the appendices.

Role of the management plan

The *Management Plan* aims to promote consistency and co-operation between local planning authorities, both in setting policy and dealing with planning applications within the National Landscape, to conserve and enhance natural beauty across the area. Government planning policy guidance explains that management plans help to set out the strategic context for development and provide evidence of the value and special qualities of the area. It goes on to highlight that they may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications.

The *Management Plan* provides supporting evidence and complementary policy guidance for local plans and can be referenced to inform development proposals and decisions. The plan is

supplemented by topic-specific guidance, such as the *Blackdown Hills [Design guide for houses](#)* and *[Good lighting guide](#)*. It is expected that these will be reviewed and updated, and further design/planning guidance will be prepared during the life of this plan to reflect new agendas and priorities.

Considering natural beauty in planning proposals

It is important that impacts on the Blackdown Hills National Landscape are properly recognised and accounted for in decision making. In an area like the Blackdown Hills where timelessness and escape from the modern world are written into the core qualities underpinning the designation, some degree of harm will inevitably occur as a result of development and needs to be explicitly recognised and assessed. The *Management Plan* and supporting documents should help planning authorities, developers and land/homeowners understand the landscape's capacity for change and assess impact. Mitigation is a response to harm, a way of ameliorating but not eliminating impact, and should not be a justification for allowing inappropriate development. A clear understanding of the National Landscape's special qualities and distinctive characteristics will help to develop proposals which avoid or minimise harm.

The special qualities and defining characteristics of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape predominantly relate to the distinctive nature of the farmed landscape; the mosaic of land use types and hedges, and the isolated, dispersed type of development much of it driven by the topography of the area, which in turn is a product of the unique geology. Much of the appeal of the area stems from the relatively low level of 'modern' development. Essentially what we are considering in the Blackdown Hills are large tracts of an intact historic/cultural farmed landscape. The challenge, therefore, is to seek a sustainable approach to development that respects this inherent character and landscape assets whilst also fostering the social and economic wellbeing of local communities.

The layout, form and density of all new developments need to reflect the historic rural grain of the National Landscape. It is important that all new development, especially housing development, is of a scale and layout that conserves and enhances the distinctive pattern of built form found across the Blackdown Hills, specifically a low density, dispersed pattern of development. Location and context are important considerations and development should:

- Respect the importance of the setting of the National Landscape,
- Respect the importance of the setting of individual settlements, hamlets and historic farmsteads,
- Maintain the existing pattern of fields and lanes,
- Maintain the integrity of the hedgerows and irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland, and ancient and veteran trees, as well as open agricultural vistas, and

- Enhance the sense of place.

Development proposals in or affecting the Blackdown Hills should avoid sensitive locations that will impact on the special qualities of the National Landscape – notably views – including prominent locations on the northern scarp slope, on skylines and hilltops, the open plateaux and ridgelines, and undeveloped valley slopes. Attention should be given to noise and activity arising from developments together with lighting to avoid having an adverse impact on the area’s tranquillity and dark skies. This may apply to development some distance from the National Landscape as well as within.

The sense of place is easily lost; suburbanisation and the cumulative effect of ‘permitted development’ break down local distinctiveness; replacing small-scale, locally distinct features with ones of a standard design erodes local character – for example the choice and style of gate, fence, wall or hedge around a house, or pavements, kerbs and driveways in new development.

A major challenge in more rural areas of the Blackdown Hills, agricultural buildings and development are significant issues and can be detrimental to natural beauty if not handled sensitively. As some agricultural practices continue to intensify and with an increasing awareness of animal welfare requirements, the demand for modern large-scale agricultural buildings, which are increasingly taller and larger, at odds with an inherently small-scale landscape, is continuing. To comply with environmental regulations comes large-scale slurry storage facilities often in isolated and elevated locations with associated landscape and visual impacts, and the enclosure of open yards, often infilling the gaps between existing structures resulting in the visual massing of buildings.

4.7.7 Roads and traffic

Inevitably most people in rural areas need a vehicle to access employment, services and other opportunities. Nevertheless, reduction of unnecessary car use will contribute to reducing carbon emissions, quality of life and conservation of the area’s natural beauty. In terms of supporting that shift, the availability of electric vehicle charging points is expanding but is still very limited.

Much of the road network is made up of rural roads and lanes, not built or maintained for the volume, traffic size and use which they now must sustain. The design and management of the rural road network should reinforce the local character and distinctiveness of the Blackdown Hills. The distinctive character of minor roads contributes to the character of the wider landscape, and they are an important means for people to experience the area. Insensitive, overengineered changes to these roads can have a detrimental impact. The increasing use of larger heavy goods vehicles and farm vehicles is having damaging impacts.

Road improvement schemes within and outside the National Landscape should not increase noise pollution or emissions from traffic. Approaches such as speed management schemes may, for example, be more appropriate than road widening. Potential impacts within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape of proposed road improvement schemes beyond the boundary should be considered. Road management and improvement schemes should minimise landscape impact and avoid urbanisation of rural roads – for instance through sensitive and appropriate design and use of materials, and avoiding unnecessary signage clutter, road markings and coloured road surfaces. Wildflower-rich verges should be managed appropriately and traditional features such as fingerposts and milestones should be retained.

Highways England looks after the M5 and A35 trunk road, both which partly bound the Blackdown Hills, and the A303/A30 which passes through the middle of the Blackdown Hills. Other major roads on the periphery are the A373 and A358, which are not part of the national strategic network, and are looked after by the respective county council.

Alterations or improvements to any of the above routes could have an impact on the special qualities and setting of the National Landscape and adversely affect local communities. Full consideration of the environmental and landscape impacts would be required as part of the feasibility and scheme development. Highway authorities and Highways England have a duty to seek to further National Landscape purposes in carrying out their functions.

Meanwhile, national rail services can be accessed at Honiton and Axminster, as well as Taunton and Tiverton Parkway. There are proposals for a new station at Wellington too.

Chapter 5: People

The Blackdown Hills is a living and working landscape, and we want it to stay that way. Shaped by the stewardship and innovation of generations, with collaboration and community spirit at heart, this is what needs to be harnessed to ensure resilience for the future. We also know that the special landscape and environment has much to offer residents and visitors alike. Positive action will help to ensure everyone can enjoy the benefits of living in and visiting the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and contribute to the area's conservation and enhancement.

5.1 Objectives – People

- To nurture flourishing communities, where the population is both cohesive and diverse, where there is easy access to a range of services and facilities, and where the commitment of local people helps to conserve and enhance the environment, heritage and landscape of the Blackdown Hills.
- To foster a thriving and diverse Blackdown Hills economy that provides jobs for local people, makes wise use of local resources and benefits local communities, while conserving and enhancing the outstanding landscape and distinctive character of the countryside and villages.
- To ensure that appropriate opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and its special qualities that are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty are available to all and that everyone feels welcome.
- To commit to eliminate discrimination, provide equal opportunities, and challenge prejudice and foster good relationships between diverse groups in and around the Blackdown Hills.

5.2 Guiding principles – People

- Local communities play an integral role in the evolution of the Blackdown Hills – The landscape has been shaped by many generations of people working with the land and nature to develop industries, heritage and culture, and it will continue to change and develop into the future.
- Our landscape is a shared resource, providing opportunities for learning and contact with nature, opportunities to experience calmness and tranquillity, a place to inspire and comfort, and to provide the time and space to benefit health and wellbeing.
- We must respond to the needs of people living and working within the Blackdown Hills, in nearby towns, and nationally, and everyone should feel supported and

welcome to access, cherish and enjoy the natural environment and the heritage of the Blackdown Hills.

- We should support a thriving rural economy that plays a positive role in conserving and enhancing natural beauty and sustains local communities and the farming economy alongside nature recovery.
- This is a place where local communities are actively engaged in celebrating, exploring and conserving the area's cultural heritage, helping to keep skills and traditions alive and sensitively shaping its future.

5.3 Target – People

This is the [Protected Landscape Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) target that we will contribute to:

Target 9

“Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using metrics based on those in the Defra Access for All programme”.

5.4 At a glance – People

Headlines from [State of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape report 2023](#):

- 2% of the area is defined by Natural England as publicly accessible.
- 436.5 kilometres of public rights of way: 340 km footpaths, 86 km bridleways, 9 km restricted byways and 1 km byway open to all traffic.
- 2021 Population: 14,130
- 68% of population is of working age (20-74 years old) – down from 71% in 2011.
- 56% are employed – down 11% from 2011, 2% are seeking work and 42% are not seeking works – up 12% from 2011.
- There has been a 7% decline in land-based employment since 2011 and a 1% decline in distribution, hotel and restaurants.

- Between 2011 and 2021 employment in manufacturing and construction has increased by 6% and professional and public sector employment has increased by 3%. Employment in transport and communication has remained the same.
- Between 2011 and 2021, there has been a 5% growth in managerial and professional jobs, and a 5% decline in the skilled trades, administrative and caring/leisure occupations. All other sectors remain the same.
- 83% have good or very good health while 4% have bad or very bad health (no changes since 2011).
- 75% with no long-term physical or mental health conditions, 17% considered themselves as disabled under the Equality Act and a further 8% with long-term physical or mental health conditions.

5.5 Priorities for action – People

This section sets out what we intend to prioritise and how these actions will contribute to each of our targets (see above).

Priorities for Target 9

- Capitalise on opportunities to secure physical works to improve accessibility, such as accessible trails, parking and facilities.
- Ensure that projects have opportunities for volunteering and engagement with schools built in.
- The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to take positive action to increase diversity within the management group and the voices reflected in decision making.
- Promote activities, including organised activities, which support the physical, mental and social health of residents and visitors.

Other priorities

- Collect data so that we have a clear definition and better understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion issues relevant to the Blackdown Hills. This includes undertaking further work to deepen our knowledge of the population within the Blackdown Hills and the surrounding area and responding accordingly.
- Build relationships among local community organisations and agencies to collaborate on inclusion.

- Undertake an audit of the current ways in which the qualities of the landscape and historic environment are presented to the local population and the visiting public. Use the results to identify the opportunities for methods and locations for improvement in the presentation of information and explore ways that the local community could be actively involved.
- Collaboration among partners to champion and find solutions to practical issues widely affecting communities, such as high-speed broadband connectivity and highway maintenance.

5.6 Policies – People

A landscape for all

PE1 Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of sensitive and sustainable opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area.

Access and recreation

PE2 Take a coordinated, strategic approach to the management of public rights of way and publicly accessible land to achieve an accessible, well-connected network that conserves and enhances the special qualities of the National Landscape, improves access and connectivity with surrounding areas, avoids impact on sensitive sites and minimises conflict between different interests.

PE3 Opportunities to use the natural and historic environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors which are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access.

Local economy and communities

PE4 Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce and celebrate local cultural traditions, and engagement in cultural and natural heritage initiatives. Support initiatives that help to provide, retain or enhance community facilities and services where they are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

PE5 Support the principle of local markets and sustainable local products where it adds value to the local economy without compromising the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

PE6 Economic capacity, employment and skills in the area will be supported through training opportunities, community enterprise, business networking and cooperation especially where these assist businesses to conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape and contribute to employment and prosperity.

PE7 Tourism and recreation provision will be supported where it contributes to the local economy without harm or detriment to the Blackdown Hills landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity, and respecting special qualities.

PE8 Support efforts to secure and improve fast and reliable broadband and mobile phone coverage without adversely affecting special qualities.

Transport

PE9 Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the impact of large and heavy vehicles on the most minor roads and help to provide a safer environment for walking, cycling and horse riding, where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

PE10 Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the Blackdown Hills where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character.

5.7 Context – People

5.7.1 A landscape for all

The [Landscapes \(Glover\) Review](#) published in 2019 included proposals to increase the inclusivity and diversity of all the work of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (and National Parks), from governance through to engagement and delivery. It noted that they want our nation's most cherished landscapes to fulfil their original mission for people, providing unrivalled opportunities for enjoyment, spiritual refreshment and in turn supporting the nation's health and wellbeing. Proposals included a stronger mission to connect all people with our national landscapes; new long-term programmes to increase the ethnic diversity of visitors; and landscapes that cater for and improve the nation's health and wellbeing.

We are deeply connected to the natural world, and it is now well understood that exposure to nature and natural environments, especially those of good quality, provides many benefits to both physical and mental health to all - at every age, socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. Meanwhile, a deeper understanding of biodiversity and the natural world affects our connection to it and how we interact with it. Understanding how the rural environment is managed increases environmental awareness and supports appreciation of countryside.

We are fortunate to have several organisations, groups and social enterprises throughout the Blackdown Hills who are passionate about making those connections and supporting people to engage with nature to benefit their health and wellbeing, such as the well-established [Neroche Woodlanders](#). The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership has experience of [partnership projects](#) with other Somerset protected landscapes and [Somerset Wildlife Trust](#) over many years supporting individuals and groups to understand and enjoy the benefits nature connection can have for their physical and mental health.

People's opportunity to experience the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills relies on fair access – for example, to experience the tranquillity of woodlands, to be able to afford to live, farm or work land, or to use the extensive network of public rights of way. However, for a variety of reasons not everyone has equitable access to the natural environment. Barriers are varied and often multi-faceted and may include disabilities which prevent access or limit interpretation and enjoyment; lack of transport, supporting facilities and infrastructure; societal ones such as lack of information, experience or confidence to explore the countryside; and financial barriers.

Being in a position of privilege, because of age, gender, ability, or access, can make it hard to see how it for those who are not, partly because of the structures and systems that privilege gives us access to.

Improving equity, inclusivity and diversity of access for people to enjoy the natural and historic environment of the Blackdown Hills is a key driver for this plan and we need to find

innovative local solutions and collaborative partnerships to facilitate and support more people, especially those who would benefit most, to explore and enjoy the area.

One of the key issues identified locally is a limited understanding of who lives in the Blackdown Hills and the surrounding towns. Without this understanding, it isn't possible to understand who the National Landscape is serving and who is under-served.

Some research for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership in 2021 relating to earlier socio-economic data (based on 2011 Census data) offered a population insight that forms a useful baseline and starts to highlight some key issues:

- Generally, there is high proportion of over 65s in the area. The parishes with the highest proportion of people over 65 were Chardstock, Combe St Nicholas, Membury, Dalwood, Kilmington, Combe Raleigh and Shute (35% to 40%). The parishes with the highest proportion of young people were Monkton, Sheldon, Uffculme, Hemyock, Kentisbeare and Clayhidon (20% to 22%).
- Disability and health. Three Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) show over 10% of the population having their day-to-day activities limited a lot by disability or ill health. The percentage of people reporting they have bad or very bad health ranged from 2.6% to 6.1% across the Blackdown Hills. Rates of provision of unpaid care range from 9% to 15%.
- Ethnicity. The numbers of people within the National Landscape whose ethnicity is other than White British is low (0 to 2.4% in the Devon parishes). There are small populations in the market towns in Devon particularly of people who are Asian/Asian British and of mixed ethnic origin. In Somerset there are areas of Taunton and Wellington with higher-than-average numbers of White Gypsy/Irish Travellers; and Asian people. Areas of Taunton and Chard have higher than average numbers of people of 'white: other' residents.
- Official figures show there is limited deprivation within the Blackdown Hills, with 4 LSOAs in the 5th Decile and the remainder higher (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, measure of relative deprivation, 1 is most deprived, 10 is least deprived). There is, however, high deprivation for access to services and the living environment. Average figures can hide individual households living in poverty. In the surrounding towns, there are areas of deprivation within Chard, Wellington and Taunton, and to a lesser extent in Tiverton and Honiton. Fuel poverty and lack of access to services and poor broadband coverage are all identified as issues across the area.
- Income and Food insecurity. Wages are low across the wider area, and housing prices high. Mid Devon is in the top 10 nationally (7th) of local authorities with the highest

share of children with very low food security (above 20%). The former Somerset West and Taunton district also has high food insecurity levels.

Further work needs to be undertaken to deepen our knowledge of the population within the Hills and in the surrounding area and be able to respond accordingly.

5.7.2 Recreation and access

Opportunities and promotion aimed at both visitors and the local community should encourage people to experience the Blackdown Hills more fully in more sustainable and less potentially damaging or disruptive ways. There is a balance to be struck in providing for recreational activities in a way that is consistent with conserving natural beauty and without damaging the environment and tranquillity people come to enjoy, while also recognising that this is a working environment with most of the land in agriculture and in private ownership. However, near several market towns and within easy of larger centres such as Exeter and Taunton, the Blackdown Hills offer a range of opportunities for recreation and outdoor activities. Walking, cycling and horse riding are popular, but people also come to the area for activities as diverse as skydiving, gliding, motorsports and bushcraft. There is scope to better engage with some of these sectors to reach a broader audience and to engender a greater awareness and appreciation of the significance of the area.

The public rights of way (PRoW) network in the National Landscape is extensive (436 km) but fragmented, with limited off-road routes for horse riders and cyclists. The local road network provides other opportunities but the twisting, narrow lanes raise safety concerns for walkers, cyclists and horse riders and the terrain can be challenging for casual cyclists. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership has a history of producing some circular walks and rides guides, including on-road cycle routes, however there is further scope for collaboration to develop safer routes for walkers, horse riders and cyclists, multi-user routes and all-ability access, for example, short routes around villages, and to signpost suitable routes between surrounding settlements and the Blackdown Hills.

This would have numerous benefits; it would help move towards creating places less dominated by motor vehicles and more welcoming for people - environmental benefits include cleaner air, less greenhouse gas emissions and reduced congestion, social benefits include better physical and mental health and more equitable access to the National Landscape for visitors whether or not they are car-owners. One way of delivering this could be green infrastructure provision which offers an opportunity to create physical links with surrounding towns (including Culm Garden Village) via footpaths or multi-user routes, opening up new recreation and tourism opportunities. There is also potential to improve linkages with nearby long-distance recreational routes such as the Stop Line Way (part of the National Cycle Network).

Opportunities for access to 'open countryside' on foot is relatively limited in the area, although the Public Forest Estate adds to the extent of open access land, which totals 641 ha. The majority of the open access sites are registered commons, in some cases also SSSIs or local wildlife sites, and so responsible access is priority as part of comprehensive site management. Other sites with public access include National Trust land such as Dumpdon Hill and at Wellington Monument and several Wildlife Trust reserves.

Devon County Council and Somerset Council are responsible for the PRow network across the National Landscape, supported by actions by parish councils and volunteers, such as through the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups in Devon. Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) for their networks set out objectives and priorities that aim to reflect the modern patterns of demand and land use. They identify how the PRow network will be managed to meet the needs of all users. Each county also has committed and active Countryside/Local Access Forums that bring together representatives of many fields of interest including users such as horse riders, landowners, tourism, health, and education which are pertinent to improving access to the countryside to provide independent advice on 'the improvement of public access to land in the area for the purposes of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area'.

5.7.3 Traffic and transport

Traffic speed and volume are a real concern for many communities. Routes across the Blackdown Hills are frequently used as short cuts by through traffic, affecting both tranquillity and the environment as well as raising highway safety concerns. Although necessary, lorries and other large vehicles travelling to and from farms and small businesses along narrow lanes cause noise, a risk to other users and damage to the roads, verges and characteristic hedgebanks. Highways and transport are a focus topic for the Blackdown Hills Parish Network, who have been trying to secure cross-boundary co-operation on managing HGV traffic, the 60mph national speed limits outside villages and public transport.

The availability of public transport is limited in the Blackdown Hills and has seen reductions in services over recent years, which can leave those without access to a car at a serious disadvantage. Where there are bus services they can be very infrequent and do not operate at weekends or evenings, but nevertheless, certain routes that cross the area and connect with surrounding towns do have great potential to offer opportunities for tourism and recreation. Rail services can be accessed at the nearby towns of Taunton, Tiverton, Honiton and Axminster.

5.7.4 Local economy and communities

The high-quality landscape has an integral part to play in sustaining economic growth, generating income, local jobs and products. The key is for these aspirations to be consistent with the area's unique qualities.

The area is typically characterised by very high numbers of small and micro enterprises and of self-employment, with 95% of registered businesses having 0-9 employees. Many of those who have established small businesses were attracted to the area by the high quality of life provided by the Blackdown Hills environment. There is however still a strong agricultural sector; accounting for around 40% of businesses.

The Blackdown Hills are not a self-contained economic area being heavily influenced by the surrounding market towns and larger settlements of Exeter and Taunton. These towns are inextricably connected with their rural hinterlands, both culturally and economically, providing opportunities and potential markets that can benefit the many small businesses within the area.

A key aim is to nurture a diverse and resilient local economy that is not over reliant on one specific sector, particularly one that could be heavily affected by external factors, such as agriculture and tourism for example. One of the implications of this, therefore, is a need to identify and support the training and development of new skills required to meet the needs of local employers and take advantage of new economic opportunities. It is important that rural areas such as the Blackdown Hills are not overlooked compared to businesses in local towns, and that support is accessible. As part of economic development support on offer from local authorities, [Heart of the South West Growth Hub](#) offers free business advice and support services for established businesses and those looking to start-up, linking to business support programmes and organisations.

Tourism in the Blackdown Hills is largely characterised by high-quality accommodation and quiet countryside pursuits. There is a balance to be struck between realising the economic benefits of tourism and conserving the environmental wealth that is the attraction to visitors – in other words, focusing on local products and services that do not compromise the landscape and environment. This can bring benefits by encouraging visitors to explore the local area, increasing their understanding and enjoyment, lengthening their stay, and increasing the income for local businesses from both day and staying visitors. There is potential to improve the connections between attractions, events and places, and to establish links with other more recognised tourist areas, for example, the East Devon coast. There is also scope to explore the opportunities for a more direct economic relationship between tourism spending and resources to manage the landscape that people come to enjoy.

The landscape has in the past been an inspiration to artists and writers, and the present day Blackdown Hills artists and makers keep this tradition alive, contributing to the local economy

and communities, strengthening the cultural associations with the landscape and providing creative opportunities to engage with new and varied audiences.

Rapidly evolving communications technology can attract and enable new economic opportunities and ways of working that have a minimal environmental impact, enable rural businesses to link up for promotion and co-operation, offer new ways of accessing health, services and education, and provide a lifeline for those who are not able to access shops for whatever reason. Over the last 10 years the government has regularly stressed the importance of rolling out superfast and then full-fibre broadband, backing this with a number of dedicated funding schemes. However, throughout the Blackdown Hills plenty of residents and businesses still receive very slow speeds. Ensuring the wide availability of high-speed broadband and mobile connectivity is a central part of the government's National Infrastructure Strategy and levelling up agenda. The government has a target that gigabit broadband and 'standalone' 5G will be available nationwide by 2030. Therefore, it is important to ensure that businesses and communities across the Blackdown Hills can readily access fast and reliable digital connectivity. However, broadband and mobile infrastructure needs to be sensitively sited and located to avoid harm to the area's natural beauty.

Communities within the Blackdown Hills have a strong sense of identity and readily describe themselves as living in the Blackdown Hills rather than acknowledging administrative boundaries. Although sparsely populated with small settlements, most are active communities with a spirit of self-sufficiency and host many social and interest groups and events, centred around parish halls, churches, schools and pubs. Over the years many villages having produced parish plans and village design statements to inform planning and other decisions, and several parishes in the East Devon part of the Blackdown Hills now have adopted neighbourhood plans to influence decisions. Many communities have also produced village guides, walks leaflets and organised heritage and environmental projects.

There is a particularly strong collaborative spirit among like-minded people in the area. The Blackdown Hills Hedge Association, Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers, and Blackdown Hills Transition are well established networks covering a range of interests. Parish councils in the National Landscape form a collective voice through the Blackdown Hills Parish Network, which seeks to identify, address and promote issues of common concern and seek cohesion among the local authorities and other bodies responsible for the area.

Access to services and facilities such as health, libraries, education, childcare and shopping varies considerably but is generally limited, as might be expected in a rural area. While village shops and post offices are invaluable community assets, maintaining their long-term viability remains a real issue whether commercially- or community-run. In common with the rest of Devon and Somerset, the population age profile is older than the national average; the combination of an ageing population, sparse numbers and limited local facilities brings challenges to ensuring ongoing wellbeing. Meanwhile, for younger residents, secondary

schools are in surrounding towns, or larger villages in the case of Uffculme, around the periphery, resulting in protracted journeys to and from school, and then a need to travel or leave the area for further and higher education. Loss of young people from communities is a major issue across rural areas and, without employment opportunities and affordable housing, this trend will only continue.

Chapter 6: Nature

The biodiversity of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is intrinsic to the area's character and aesthetic appeal and is diverse, as a result of the area's varied geology and landforms. Its mosaic of priority habitat includes springline mire, heathland, woodland and species-rich grassland, all connected via hedges and banks, supports a wide variety of species. However, this very mosaic means that some habitats are fragmented, and condition of some are fragile. Measures to restore and connect habitats will benefit wildlife and deliver other ecosystem services.

6.1 Objective – Nature

To ensure the effective conservation, enhancement, expansion and connectivity of habitats to form coherent and resilient ecological networks across the Blackdown Hills and beyond, facilitating the movement of species of conservation concern across the landscape.

6.2 Guiding principles – Nature

The guiding principles we adopt locally reflect the principles that National Landscapes across the country are adopting, while also recognising requirements specific to the Blackdown Hills.

- People need nature, wherever they are and whatever their ability or knowledge.
- Soil, air and water are the foundations of a healthy natural environment.
- When meeting our targets, we must not miss the point. (For example, it would be possible to deliver [30 by 30](#) with isolated sites that will not allow species to spread.)
- The natural landscape of the Blackdown Hills should be seen as a functioning whole.
- The Lawton [Making Space for Nature](#) principles of 'better, bigger more and joined' ensure that habitat networks are fit for purpose for nature to thrive in and adapt to climate change.
- What happens in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is contributing to something much bigger. The Blackdown Hills is not an island – it links to the surrounding countryside.
- More wildlife habitat in the Blackdown Hills will deliver many wider benefits.
- Beyond Lawton, the mantra of 'right tree, right place' should be extended to 'right habitat/species, right place', allowing nature to flow. This should ensure that scarce and irreplaceable habitats are protected and that the development of one habitat does not damage the network of another.

- Some of the habitats and species in the Blackdown Hills are more threatened than others. We will therefore prioritise habitats and species of conservation concern, guided by the [Blackdown Hills National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan](#).
- We will contribute to delivering the [Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) and [Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#).
- We will embrace and promote the latest conservation practice where appropriate.

6.3 Targets – Nature

These are the [Protected Landscape Targets and Outcomes Framework](#) targets that we will contribute to:

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)”.

Farmers will also be supported to create or restore 30,000 miles of hedgerows a year by 2037, eventually returning England’s hedgerows to 10% above their 1984 peak of 360,000 miles.

The apportioned target for Blackdown Hills National Landscape is to restore or create more than 2,919 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats by 2042, equivalent to 145.96 hectares per year between 2022 and 2042.

During the lifetime of this *Management Plan* (2025-30) this equates to 730 hectares.

1.7% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This means that there is significant potential to deliver against Target 1 outside of these nature conservation designated sites.

Target 2

“Bring 80% of Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042”.

Target 3

“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”.

30 by 30

The international obligation that the government has signed up to of 30% of land and sea managed for nature by 2030 is a current major policy driver. National Landscapes (15% of England) include 31% of England’s SSSIs, 22% of England’s broadleaved woodland and 18% of England’s deep peat. Blackdown Hills National Landscape should make a significant contribution to [30 by 30](#).

6.4 At a glance - Nature

Headlines from the [State of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape report 2023](#):

- There are 16 designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, occupying 640 ha (1.73%) of its area.
- 94% of the Blackdown Hills’ SSSIs are in a ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable recovering’ condition. This is an improvement from 2017. Then, only 90% of its SSSIs met the target. (However, this masks that only 19% are in ‘favourable’ condition).
- There are 4,724.43 ha of priority habitats covering 12.8% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (note that priority habitat data is incomplete in places and more work is needed on verification).
- There are 5,380 ha of woodland covering 14.5% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.
- There are 867 ha of ancient woodland covering 2.3% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.
- 45% of woodland is in active management.
- The overall ecological quality of the majority of rivers in the National Landscape is moderate, none are in good or high status.
- Non-statutory designated sites for nature cover around 8.5% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

- Otterhead Lakes Local Nature Reserve covers 0.1% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

A focus on nature recovery

We know that [delivering nature recovery in England with the current resources is failing](#).

In 2021, the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership held three workshops with a mix of landowners, conservation organisations, neighbouring National Landscapes, community interest groups and other stakeholders. The aim was to engage partners and inspire and inform positive action to conserve existing wildlife and habitats and reinstate what's been lost.

As a result of these workshops, a collective view was formed about what the priority measures for nature recovery (and delivery of other public goods and services) should be:

- Measures to slow the flow of flood water off the land, through nature-based solutions including tree planting, natural regeneration, leaky dams, additional water storage, hedgerow restoration, and improvement of soil infiltration.
- Measures to conserve soil, enhance soil quality, and prevent the loss of sediment and phosphates to watercourses, by reducing soil compaction, preventing soil erosion, and increasing soil organic carbon.
- Conservation of existing springline mire, wet and dry heath, species-rich grassland, and the prevention of loss of these habitats to scrub invasion, drainage, cultivation, inorganic fertiliser or herbicide application.
- Retention of long-standing permanent pasture, because of its high soil carbon content, undisturbed soil profiles, and botanical, fungal and invertebrate communities.
- Restoration or creation of new wildlife habitats such as ponds and wetlands, mires, species-rich grassland, hedgerows and broadleaved woodland.
- Measures to improve public understanding of farming and the environment in the Blackdown Hills, and community involvement in countryside management.

Following these workshops, a [Nature Recovery Delivery Plan](#) was produced (a map showing the Nature Recovery Areas can be found in the plan).

The 14 'Nature Recovery Areas' (NRAs) identified in the delivery plan deliberately cover the entire National Landscape. This all-encompassing approach has been taken to create a holistic agenda for nature recovery, recognising the importance of measures which can be taken across the farmed and forested landscape.

All 14 Nature Recovery Areas include land where priority actions can and should be pursued to enable the recovery of habitats, species and ecosystem functions across the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. 13 are based on river catchment and sub-catchment boundaries, excluding most of the flat plateau lands. These Nature Recovery Areas generally represent ancient countryside on the valley sides and floodplains, with thick hedges and relatively small field sizes.

The 14th Nature Recovery Area covers the remaining high plateau land, together with some of the lower peripheral land around the boundaries of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. These areas are largely agriculturally improved, with larger, late-enclosure field patterns. The nature recovery actions identified for these Nature Recovery Areas vary in their emphasis, from a focus on conserving and expanding existing habitat for biodiversity, to a consideration of opportunities for regenerative farming practices for soil conservation and hydrological management.

See also:

[Blackdown Hills State of Nature report 2021](#)

[Blackdown Hills Nature Recovery Plan visualisations](#)

6.5 Priorities for action – Nature

This section sets out what we intend to prioritise and how these actions will contribute to each of our targets (see above).

As guided by the Lawton hierarchy, Target 4 is considered the top priority for Nature followed by Targets 2 and 3, then Target 1. This is because it is vital to make the existing priority habitat ‘better’ before considering creating new habitat, although potentially both could be done concurrently, so long as resources are focussed on restoration and not creation.

Priorities for Target 4

- Restore all priority habitat to a favourable condition.
- Enhance the data baseline, particularly for areas outside designated sites, including refresh / ground-truthing priority habitat maps to improve their accuracy and coverage. Note that the priority habitat inventory (PHI) is not considered definitive and underestimates the true extent of priority habitat. Other habitat inventories also underestimate the extent of habitat within mosaics.
- Conserve the characteristic ‘patchwork’ landscapes and habitat features for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, particularly springline mires. Integrated natural capital benefits from nature recovery include carbon budgets, catchment-scale

improvements to fluvial management, well-being benefits from access and recreation, and cultural and heritage enhancements.

Priorities for Targets 2 and 3

- Undertake significant work to move sites from ‘unfavourable recovering’ to ‘favourable’. This will require more condition surveying by Natural England and more incentives through Environmental Land Management (ELM) and other schemes, backed up by trusted local advisers. The current status of SSSI condition in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is that only 16.3% is in favourable condition. 94% is in a favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. There is one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, currently failing to meet its conservation targets (marsh fritillary butterfly).
- Utilise this *Management Plan* to ensure appropriate and consistent delivery of the statutory duties arising from the [Environment Act \(2021\)](#) including Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS),
- Ensure that activities for nature are consistent with actions arising from the Local Nature Recovery Strategies in Devon and Somerset.

Priorities for Target 1

- Focus on habitat creation in the highest priority areas, as per the Lawton hierarchy. [\[See habitat network opportunity/targeting map\]](#)

Actions to restore or create wildlife-rich habitat outside SSSIs and undertaken through established or future schemes, such as agri-environment schemes or government grants, will count towards Target 1.

This is because they are ‘reasonably expected to lead’ to the creation/restoration of wildlife-rich habitat that is of sufficient quality for the purpose of measuring progress towards Target 1.

Note that in the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework datasets, the new categories of ‘Grass moorland’, ‘Fragmented Heath’ and ‘Good quality semi-improved grassland’ are not actually considered to be priority habitats (by Defra and Natural England) and would therefore count towards Target 1 (not target 4).

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape will have an important role to play in the additional element of Target 1 that relates to hedges: “create and restore 30,000 miles of hedgerows each year by 2037”. The Blackdown Hills has a well-connected and dense lattice of hedgerows (one of its special qualities), with 4,440 km of hedges across the landscape.

30 by 30

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape is one of six national pilots developed by the Protected Landscapes Partnership, in conjunction with the National Landscapes Association. The outputs from this work are summarised as:

The current 'potential' of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape to achieve 30 by 30 is 20% of the total area (i.e. restore **all** extant priority habitat)

Of this, the current 'actual' (meeting 30 by 30) is 10% of the total Blackdown Hills National Landscape area (3,700ha), with the majority of this in Somerset.

Therefore, to reach 30 by 30, 10% more priority habitat would need to be re-created in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape i.e. c3,600ha. Although this figure is higher than the PLTOF target 1 figure, it should be the ambition via this Management Plan to achieve it.

Champion species

Following a process agreed nationally within the National Landscapes network, a suite of champion species of conservation concern has been identified and discussed with partners and national species champion organisations.

We are also working collaboratively with other National Landscapes to take local, regional and national actions for species that are linked to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape's special qualities (such as springline mires) or that indicate the health of a well-connected landscape.

The champion species for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape are:

- Greater and lesser horseshoe bat; Bechstein's bat.
- Hazel dormouse.
- White clawed crayfish.
- Brown hairstreak butterfly.
- Springline mire mosaic invertebrates including marsh fritillary, small pearl-bordered fritillary, double line moth, narrow bordered bee hawkmoth.
- Beaver.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be identifying priority species where conservation measures are required over and above broad habitat management and restoration. It is anticipated that the champion species (listed above) will align with the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, but this needs to be an iterative process and so a review maybe needed part way through the Management Plan cycle, to ensure alignment.

6.6 Policies - Nature

N1 Use the Lawton [*making space for nature*](#) principles of 'better, bigger, more and joined' to create networks that are fit for purpose for nature to thrive in and adapt to climate change.

N2 The mantra of 'right tree, right place' should be extended to 'right habitat/species, right place'. This should ensure that scarce and irreplaceable habitats are protected and that the development of one habitat does not damage the network of another.

N3 Species of conservation concern will be conserved. Targeted action will be taken to support the recovery of champion/priority/indicator species.

N4 All public bodies within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape must have regard to Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). There should be alignment between the National Landscape and LNRS needs, and LNRS opportunities need to be reflected in partnership delivery on the ground.

N5 A strategic approach to the control, or eradication where feasible, of invasive non-native species will be taken where they threaten or damage local habitats and species and where action is practicable.

N6 Increased recreational pressure will be resisted at locations where unacceptable damage or disturbance to vulnerable habitats or species is likely to arise.

6.7 Context – Nature

6.7.1 Designated sites

Some areas of the highest conservation value are nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), covering 639ha of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

In the Blackdown Hills, 2020 figures show that only 19% (122ha) are deemed to be in 'favourable' condition, with 75% 'unfavourable recovering' (477ha). There are some specific technical reasons for so few sites being favourable (often because parts of sites do not fully meet the 'standard' site/habitat expectations), but the large percentage of sites in a recovering condition is positive. This category has seen a significant increase since 2008 when 40% (254ha) were classed as unfavourable recovering, and over the same period the area considered unfavourable declining has moved from 118ha to none.

In addition to the 16 SSSIs in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, there is one [Special Area of Conservation](#) (SAC) of European importance for nature conservation. This is located at Quants in the north of the Blackdown Hills, selected for its population of marsh fritillary butterflies, which occur on springline mire habitat mosaics. However, this species is now locally extinct at this site. Maintaining a viable population for this species requires a landscape-scale approach to connect fragmented populations further south in the Bolham Valley.

Just beyond the Blackdown Hills National Landscape boundary to the southeast is the River Axe SAC. The River Yarty, a major tributary of the Axe, rises and flows through the Blackdown Hills for most of its length. The Axe is designated as a watercourse with a chalk influence with the presence of water crowfoot species. The priority for the SAC is to reduce diffuse pollution (mainly phosphates and sediment largely from agriculture) to improve water quality.

The Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area (SPA)/ Ramsar is located several kilometres to the north, fed in part by the tributaries of the Tone and Parrett that flow down from the north scarp of the Blackdown Hills.

6.7.2 The ecosystem approach

Soils provide a strong link between the physical environment and the wildlife, land use and cultural landscape. For example, the dark-topped, organic and peaty soils found on the plateau give an indication of the former extent of heathland vegetation, small remnants of which persist at Dunkeswell Turbary and North Hill. The freely draining land on the scarp with its dry, acid grasslands and woods, contrasts sharply with the perennially wet ground on the springlines. This supports wet woodlands, acid Rhôs pastures (purple moor grass and rush pasture community) and other wet grasslands, with mire and bog communities in more restricted sites such as Hense Moor.

It is essential that we understand and nurture our soils, to allow wildlife to thrive and farming to continue to take a sustainable harvest from our land. And the interaction of water with soil is critical to future climate resilience, so we must manage the journey of water through our landscape more effectively – from infiltration of rain into soils, slowing flow down slopes, holding water in mires and wetlands, maintaining moisture in times of drought, and allowing rivers to function naturally in their floodplains.

Wildlife habitats and species are part of a whole ecosystem, which includes our soils, water cycle, landform, rivers, and our human settlements. To pursue the health of any part of the nature of the Blackdown Hills, we need to understand how the whole ecosystem works, and where its functioning is being compromised. Outside of habitats like woodland, wetland and flower-rich grassland, good agricultural practices and a regenerative approach to soils, pasture and crops have huge implications for wildlife and healthy ecosystem function.

Smaller, more isolated patches of wildlife habitat are more vulnerable than larger, more connected networks. Populations of species like butterflies in isolated habitat patches cannot migrate to new patches. We will not retain our wildlife unless habitat becomes more extensive and connected. Connections could include more hedges, more rough vegetation around and between habitats, extended woodlands, and species-rich grassland or wetland to join up blocks of existing habitat.

Some of the habitats and species in the Blackdown Hills only occur in certain parts of the landscape – for example springline mire, around the springs between greensand and clay layers in the ground; and raft spiders, which only live on mires. Other habitats have a wider tolerance. To look after the diversity and specialness of Blackdown Hills' wild places, we need to ensure our most characteristic and unique features are retained. Also, some of our wildlife, like the dormouse, is relatively common on the Blackdown Hills but rare nationally, so we have a particular responsibility to sustain what we have.

While some aspects of modern farming and forestry, and the economic pressures which drive them, have had a negative impact on wildlife in the last fifty years, the very character of our habitats is a consequence of farming, forestry and nature working in harmony. Without farming, we would not have flower-rich pastures, meadows or heaths. We need to enable the positive effects of sustainable farming to continue to produce a wildlife-rich landscape, while diminishing the negative effects.

Wildlife in the Blackdown Hills, just like human society, is at risk from the effects of climate breakdown – flood, drought, high winds and high temperatures. Some habitats and species are more vulnerable than others, because of their location, exposure, or relationship to landscape features which are particularly impacted by severe weather events. We need to consider these differences in trying to build greater resilience into the landscape to enable nature to tolerate and adapt to a changing, unstable, extreme climate.

Wherever they occur, wildlife habitats and species can and should benefit people. Nature is good for our mental and physical health and wellbeing, helps us work better together, provides enjoyment and tranquillity, provides settings and resources for business, and underpins everything that provides quality to our lives.

Wildlife habitats and the issues they face extend beyond the National Landscape boundary. The wildlife we protect and restore in the Blackdown Hills will contribute towards a national effort to restore a thriving, functioning natural environment across the UK. The UK has an international commitment to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030, and with organisations and land managers working together we can deliver a significant slice of that target.

6.7.3 Right habitat, right place

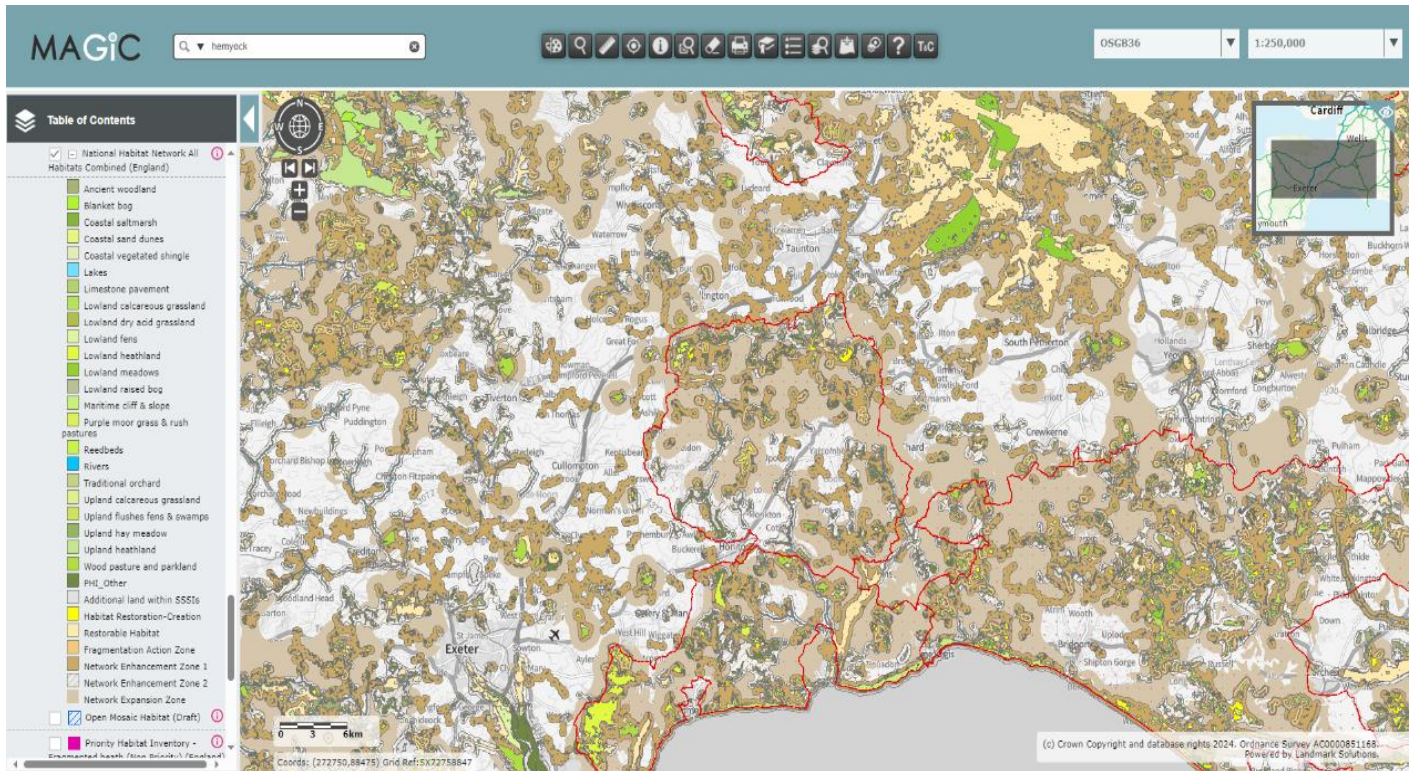
Existing wildlife habitats, like wetlands, mires, hedges, copses and ponds, help us in many ways; they slow the flow and hold water back during floods, they retain moisture during droughts, they provide shelter for livestock, and they catch sediment before it reaches rivers. New wildlife habitat, if sited thoughtfully, can help us address the wider environmental pressures we face.

Sometimes, creating a new habitat can destroy a rarer existing habitat, for example by planting woodland on flower-rich pasture on a slope. Furthermore, new habitat will be most valuable for wildlife if it is sited close to existing good quality habitat of a similar kind. And unless the soil type and hydrology are right for a given habitat, it won't thrive. Where we can, we should let nature take the lead in determining what habitat develops where, rather than trying to be too directive. Often the ecologically richest places are in the 'edge zone' between habitats – we help nature to flourish where we allow it to relax and flow.

Habitat network enhancement

In the map below, the shaded areas show the optimal locations for making the habitat network 'better, bigger, more and joined'. The higher the density of coloured shading the greater the opportunity. The red lines show the borders of four National Landscapes: Blackdown Hills, Quantock Hills, East Devon and Dorset.

[note that the image below is an illustrative placeholder for now]



Chapter 7: Climate

Coping with climate change is likely to be one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century as global warming makes its impact. The latest climate change projections for the south-west indicate there are likely to be warmer wetter winters, hotter summers, more extreme weather events such as heat waves, torrential downpours of rain, extreme wind and storm events and rising sea levels.

These changes in climate are likely to create significant impacts which will affect all aspects of the south-west's economy, society, infrastructure and the natural environment. As such, climate is very much a cross-cutting theme throughout this plan, however this part provides a focus for key objectives and principles.

7.1 Objectives – Climate

- To safeguard the carbon stores in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, reduce emissions from land and increase carbon sequestration, in ways which are compatible with nature.
- To promote and deliver nature-based solutions to climate change.
- To play an active role in addressing the climate emergency by delivering meaningful actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, ensuring the actions are aligned with existing national, regional and local plans.

7.2 Guiding principles – Climate

- The climate and nature crises are intrinsically linked.
- We need to work urgently to mitigate climate change, including storing a much more carbon in our landscape, especially in soils and trees.
- We need to ensure that climate change mitigation and the pathway to net zero is appropriate to the character of the Blackdown Hills, is consistent with the purposes of the National Landscape designation and protects the landscape's special qualities.
- Fossil fuels must be phased out as an energy source, and energy consumption must be minimised wherever possible.
- We need to take measures to help our communities adapt to climate change.

- The climate change transition process must be democratic, fair and involve all communities, ensuring that no communities are unduly impacted.
- We need to move beyond growth being the only measure of economic progress.

7.3 Targets – Climate

We will contribute to the following targets set out in the [Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework \(PLTOF\)](#):

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”.

The national target is to restore 130,000 hectares of peat in Protected Landscapes by 2050. There is no deep peat in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (as defined by Defra) and therefore we will not be directly contributing to the national target. However, we can still play an important part in peat restoration and carbon capture given that *“soils with peaty pockets (scattered pockets)”* cover an area of 10,017 hectares (24,752.5 acres) which is 27% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

Note that Target 8 - *“Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline)”* is included as a target for mitigating and adapting to climate change in PLTOF. However, we have included it in the [Place](#) theme as trees, woodland and hedgerows are an essential element of the character of the Blackdown Hills landscape, providing many ecosystem services.

7.4 At a glance – Climate

Headlines from the [State of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Report 2023](#):

- A 10% reduction in total greenhouse gas emissions across the local authority areas between 2017 and 2021.
- Three operating renewable energy generation sites in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

- A 5% increase in carbon accumulating in the soils and vegetation between 2017 and 2021.
- 9-millimetre increase in annual rainfall and a rise of 0.3°C in annual temperature over the last 30 years (this masks the increasing occurrence of extreme events).

Additional data from Department for Energy Security and Net Zero 2024: Greenhouse gas emissions data

See [appendices](#) for full data. The greenhouse gases covered by these statistics are carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide.

Between 2005 and 2022, the estimated total greenhouse gas emissions in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape saw a decrease from 276.4 to 204.8 ktCO₂e. The figures are shown in 'kilo tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent' – ktCO₂e. Levels dropped for the following sectors:

- **Industry:** 5.2 to 3.0 ktCO₂e.
- **Commercial:** 7.3 to 2.7 ktCO₂e
- **Public sector:** 0.9 to 0.3 ktCO₂e.
- **Domestic:** 41 to 19.7 ktCO₂e.
- **Agriculture:** 199.8 to 166.6 ktCO₂e.
- **Waste:** 11.2 to 3.9 ktCO₂e.
- The estimated total greenhouse gas emissions for **Transport** *increased* over the same time period from 57.3 to 58.3 ktCO₂e.
- **Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF)** activities are both a source and sink for carbon dioxide and a source of methane and nitrous oxide. Generally, emissions are produced from conversion of land to cropland and settlements and are removed through forest growth and conversion of cropland to grassland. Emissions to the atmosphere are given as positive values; the removals from the atmosphere are given as negative values. LULUCF activities in the Blackdown Hills have consistently been a sink between 2005 and 2022, with a figure between -46.3 and -50.6 ktCO₂e per annum.

During the same period:

- **Per capita emissions** dropped from 21.70 to 14.40 tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent).
- **Emissions per km²** dropped from 0.7 to 0.6 tCO₂e.

7.5 Priorities for action – Climate

Actions to address the climate emergency are cross cutting, and it is imperative that they should be an integral aspect of all plans, projects and programmes operating across the Blackdown Hills.

Actions for climate change mitigation

Produce a comprehensive **pathway to net zero** for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape following these steps agreed among the National Landscapes family:

- Using the greenhouse gas emission data from government (and other data sources) to identify key areas of emissions, such as industry, commercial, public sector, domestic, transport, waste management, agriculture, and [Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry](#) (LULUCF).
- Assess which areas the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and key partners can impact directly, and address emissions that are outside the jurisdiction of the National Landscape by engaging with local authorities, businesses, or other relevant stakeholders.
- Quantify the depth and date range of the remaining peat deposits and the total carbon they contain.
- Prioritise areas for immediate impact and plan how to engage stakeholders to reduce emissions or promote land use changes for carbon sequestration.
- Coordinate with existing plans and integrate climate action plans with nature recovery strategies to create a cohesive approach to climate action.
- Evaluate the feasibility and interdependencies of different actions and identify potential barriers to implementation.
- Develop planned actions for the short, medium, and long term to meet Net Zero targets.

Carrying out a carbon assessment of emissions will create a carbon footprint for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. This alone will not produce a pathway to net zero, but it will allow us to understand the key areas of emissions and begin targeting areas for emissions reduction, whilst quantifying the amount of carbon sequestration required to meet net zero.

Actions for Climate Change Adaptation

Produce a [climate change adaptation management plan](#) for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, linked with this management plan by 2028, and all future plans. See [appendices](#) for further information.

Refine the [climate adaptation risk assessment matrix](#) already drafted, which identifies the climate risks in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and use the information to develop the required climate adaptation plan for the area, for example:

- In the natural environment, risks identified include reduced and changed biodiversity – loss of trees, loss of pollinators, loss of water, flooding, loss of soil.
- Actions to address this include mainstreaming soil health and regenerative farming and forestry techniques, in order to build resilience of soils, that will in turn help with infiltration of water and storage of carbon, and well-connected habitats which allow species to move to new climate spaces (e.g. different aspects, slopes, feeding and breeding opportunities, shade/ sun) and avoid local extinctions.
- For Built Environment, Community and Economy, risk includes increased flooding and pressure on infrastructure, especially medical. Pressure on sewerage and loss of drinking water.
- Actions to address this include nature based solutions that build resilience for communities and critical infrastructure, as well as provide a range of co-benefits including for biodiversity, carbon and water quality- e.g. by reducing flooding in the built environment, providing ‘natural sponge’ type functions to store and slowly release water in times of drought and ‘natural filter’ to help improve water quality. Also, tree and shrub canopies which provide shade and significant cooling benefits for communities and much more tree planting to field boundaries as well as single trees in fields gives protection to livestock and wildlife alike.
- Actively consider areas where renewable energy installations maybe considered appropriate, where impacts can be minimised and more easily mitigated. Take care in relation to anaerobic digester (AD) plants, which may distort cropping patterns in an area dominated by permanent grassland, which could lead to ploughing up of grassland and the planting of crops such as maize.

Work collaboratively to address the risks and actions identified in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape climate change adaptation plan, seeking to highlight where actions from Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Adaptation Plan and Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy to build resilience and allow communities and the natural world to adapt, can be most effective.

7.6 Policies – Climate

For completeness, this set of policies should also be cross-referenced to the other thematic sections of this plan.

Education and behaviour change

C1 To transition to net zero, support communities, businesses and individuals to collectively make changes to their behaviour, such as energy use, eating habits, travel choices, waste disposal and climate adaptation planning more, in addition to using technological solutions.

Energy supply

C2 Use less energy to reduce the amount of new energy infrastructure required to meet net zero.

C3 Transition to renewables; energy used within the area needs to rise to near 100% renewable by 2050. The transition to low carbon and renewable energy should be undertaken in a way that seeks to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and is compatible with its special qualities, landscape character and heritage value.

Land and food: Nature based solutions

C4 Reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions through encouraging sustainable farming practices and maximise carbon storage in the environment by encouraging interventions such as tree planting and peaty soil restoration.

C5 Develop demand for sustainably produced food.

Develop a resilient local economy and use of resources

C6 Avoid waste and create a circular economy through redesigning products to reduce their environmental impacts and improve their reusability and recyclability, buying second hand and recycling.

C7 Reduce emissions from unavoidable biodegradable waste and wastewater treatment.

Built environment: buildings retrofit and energy efficiency

C8 Develop and encourage measures which reduce energy usage in existing buildings and improve energy efficiency for all buildings using low carbon technology in all refurbishment,

regeneration and improvement schemes. As part of the transition, new buildings need to be net zero as soon as possible.

Sustainable transport

C9 Reduce the need to travel and support the development of sustainable low carbon transport and active travel options, while working to avoid leaving any community isolated.

7.7 Context – Climate

7.7.1 Responding to climate change

Our planet's climate is changing and warming at an accelerating rate. Recent years have seen the UK's hottest ever recorded temperatures and the warmest winter temperature. The increased levels of greenhouse gases (GHG) from human activities mean we are trapping more heat and causing our planet to warm at an unprecedented rate. The science is clear: we are in a climate emergency and need to act now to reduce carbon emissions to limit global temperature rise to below 1.5°C.

Climate change is, in part, driven by human land use. In turn, a changing climate is exacerbating loss of biodiversity across the Blackdown Hills as elsewhere. However, actions that help reverse biodiversity loss will also contribute to increasing carbon sequestration and help make the landscape more resilient to climate instability. Nature-based solutions have an important role to play in tackling climate change in the Blackdown Hills, for example by reducing flood risk in the river catchments while also improving conditions and habitats for wildlife.

Meanwhile regenerative approaches to farmland management improve the resilience of soils and crops to climate extremes. Some habitats in the Blackdown Hills, like mires, heaths and woodlands, already have high carbon stocks. Therefore, carbon content should be borne in mind when prioritising habitat creation or restoration, and trade-offs between habitats need to take account of carbon implications. Restoring habitats like springline mire and wetland and creating new woodlands in the right locations across the Blackdown Hills, will increase carbon sequestration as well as helping wildlife. And across the whole Blackdown Hills farmed landscape, modest changes in land management practices could have a large cumulative effect on carbon storage.

There is a role for everyone working in the Blackdown Hills to promote and implement lower carbon lifestyles, through organisations' own activities to minimise their carbon footprint, for example by promoting local food, choosing venues accessible by public transport, and holding online meetings.

Moving away from the fossil-fuel-based economy is essential for the whole of society, though it is harder in some respects to make that transition in a rural landscape like the Blackdown Hills.

We need to do whatever we can to make it easier for businesses and residents in the Blackdown Hills to reduce their dependency on fossil fuels, for example through renewable energy, reduced energy use, and more opportunities to share transport. Our collective response to the climate crisis is unlikely to succeed if we expect to simply switch to renewable

sources while maintaining current demand. We need to encourage a less profligate approach to energy use, seeking greater efficiency and reducing waste.

There is a massive societal shift required to respond to the climate crisis. That transition must be fair and equitable with the burden shared appropriately by all of us, according to our abilities and means. We must not allow the climate crisis to create new kinds of inequality. Given the need for all parts of our communities to be part of the change and given that climate change – and the transition to avoid it – affects us all, the decision making to enable change must include everyone. We need to recognise, as local communities and as a wider society, that our climate emergency is deepened by our continuing focus on economic growth as a measure of societal progress. A shift towards more progressive measures of a sustainable and circular economy, based less on resource depletion and more on regenerative principles, would make the fight against climate change more winnable.

Some climate change mitigation and adaptation measures have the potential to adversely affect the natural beauty of the National Landscape, but with careful design and implementation, many of these measures can not only conserve but also enhance natural beauty. The challenge is to develop a pathway to net zero which also conserves and enhances natural beauty. Notably, large-scale renewable energy developments can have a negative impact on landscape and scenic beauty, presenting potential conflicts between the need to tackle climate change and the statutory purposes of the National Landscape. Small-scale individual or community-based renewable energy schemes may be suitable provided there is no significant detrimental effect on the environment. A useful resource to inform consideration of the impact of renewable energy developments is Devon Landscape Policy Group Advice Note 2. *Accommodating wind and solar pv [developments in Devon's landscape](#)* (2025), which covers all of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

7.7.2 Climate change mitigation

Climate change mitigation involves actions to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.

Mitigation efforts include transitioning to renewable energy sources, enhancing energy efficiency, adopting regenerative agricultural practices and protecting and restoring forests and critical ecosystems that act as carbon sinks.

If we can slow down the rise in greenhouse gases, we can slow down the pace of climate change and avoid its worst consequences.

Globally, nationally, and locally, reducing greenhouse gases can be achieved by:

- **Shifting away from fossil fuels:** Fossil fuels are the biggest source of greenhouse gases, so transitioning to modern renewable energy sources like solar, wind and geothermal power, and advancing sustainable modes of transportation, is crucial.

- **Improving energy efficiency:** Using less energy overall – in buildings, industries, public and private spaces, energy generation and transmission, and transportation – helps reduce emissions. This can be achieved by using thermal comfort standards, better insulation and energy efficient appliances, and by improving building design, energy transmission systems and vehicles.
- **Changing agricultural practices:** Certain farming methods release high amounts of methane and nitrous oxide, which are potent greenhouse gases. Regenerative agricultural practices – including enhancing soil health, reducing livestock-related emissions, direct seeding techniques and using cover crops – support mitigation, improve resilience and decrease the cost burden on farmers.
- **The sustainable management and conservation of forests:** Forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing the overall concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Measures to reduce deforestation and forest degradation are key for climate mitigation and generate multiple additional benefits such as biodiversity conservation and improved water cycles.
- **Restoring and conserving critical ecosystems:** In addition to forests, ecosystems such as wetlands, peatlands, and grasslands also contribute significantly to carbon sequestration, while supporting biodiversity and enhancing climate resilience.
- **Creating a supportive environment:** Investments, policies and regulations that encourage emission reductions, such as incentives, carbon pricing and limits on emissions from key sectors are crucial to driving climate change mitigation.

7.7.3 Climate change adaptation

Warmer wetter winters, increased severity of storms, and hotter, drier summers are symptoms of a changing climate. These impacts are already being felt and will increasingly affect the special qualities and ecosystem services of our landscape.

Climate change adaptation refers to actions taken to adjust to a warming world and reduce the risks associated with it. National Landscapes can play a vital role in adapting to climate change and building resilient landscapes for future generations.

Climate adaptation reporting provides an opportunity to identify relevant climate risks, incorporate them into management processes, and encourage early engagement with stakeholders to address climate challenges.

Climate change adaptation management plans

The Government's 2023 Climate Adaptation Strategy under the [Third National Adaptation Programme \(NAP3\)](#) requires all Protected Landscapes to produce climate change adaptation

management plans, embedded in or linked with their management plans by 2028, and in all future plans.

National Landscapes climate adaptation risk assessments

A template has been created with the National Landscapes family, to provide a common approach for conducting climate adaptation risk assessments. While this approach will not directly produce a climate adaptation plan, it will identify the climate risks in each National Landscape and provide the information needed to create such a plan by 2028.

This risk assessment processes seeks to provide a general format to identify risks to key assets and features of each National Landscape, identify policy responses and relevant local stakeholders, and set out planned actions for the short, medium and long term. The template provides the flexibility for the risk assessment process to be carried out according to the needs of each individual National Landscape.

To produce a climate adaptation plan, National Landscapes can utilise the risk assessment process following these principles:

- Identify the key assets and features of the landscape.
- Assess the vulnerability of these assets and features to the impacts of climate change.
- Consider sectoral impacts for principal land uses such as farming and forestry, as well as the natural, built and historic environment.
- Assess the impacts based upon current climate change projections.
- Score these risks and opportunities based on their likelihood, impact and risk, over the short, medium and long term.

7.7.4 Carbon stores and stocks

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.

In 2022, the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now the National Landscapes Association) commissioned Cranfield University to undertake a carbon audit and metric (land management) assessment. [Zawadzka, J.E., Keay, C., Hannam, J., Burgess, P.J, Corstanje, R. (2022). *National Landscapes Carbon Audit and Metric (land management)*, Bedfordshire: Cranfield University.]

The overarching goal of the project was to provide a baseline assessment of organic carbon storage capacity of and fluxes from habitats (that is the overall capacity of a habitat to remove

or release carbon from or to the atmosphere) present within all 34 National Landscapes in England, with an emphasis on priority habitats. The carbon audit focussed on carbon stocks and stores in the soils and biomass of priority and non-priority habitats within the National Landscapes. Along with a few additional sources, the audit was based on two main data sources:

- The NATMAP (the National Soil Map of England and Wales) carbon dataset which maps soil carbon stocks (at 1:250,000 scale).
- Available literature summarised within the 2021 Natural England Research Report 094) titled [Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitat: A Review of the Evidence](#) (NERR094).

It found that soil carbon *stocks*, (expressed as tonnes of carbon per hectare), were generally *higher* in priority habitats than non-priority habitats. However, the absolute amounts of carbon *stored* within habitats, (expressed as tonnes per habitat area), was higher in *non-priority* habitats, which can be explained by their large geographic extent.

This assessment highlighted that both priority and non-priority habitats within the National Landscapes are valuable carbon stores with a good potential for carbon sequestration (especially associated with woodland).

Therefore, the main recommendation from this research is to preserve current high levels of carbon storage where they exist as well as to increase the level of soil and biomass carbon on non-peaty soils, with a caveat that any land cover conversions should be preceded with thorough impact assessments on biodiversity, other ecosystem services, livelihoods, and net emissions of greenhouse gases.

Fieldwork was also undertaken as part of the carbon audit, comparing soil organic carbon contents represented by the NATMAP carbon dataset to soil samples dug within three different National Landscapes: Blackdown Hills, Shropshire Hills and High Weald. This showed that when local samples of soil carbon taken from fields were compared against the national NATMAP data there was a strong correlation, which therefore gives us confidence in the NATMAP data and using it for decision making, such as where to focus land management advisory effort. Further detail is included in the [appendices](#).

Outputs for the Blackdown Hills:

Total soil carbon stored (0-150cm depth of soil, medium value): **7,740,695 tonnes/ carbon-** based on NATMAP data

Of this, the amount stored in *non-priority* habitats is 6,257,900 tonnes/ carbon and the amount stored in *priority* habitats is 1,482,795 tonnes/ carbon

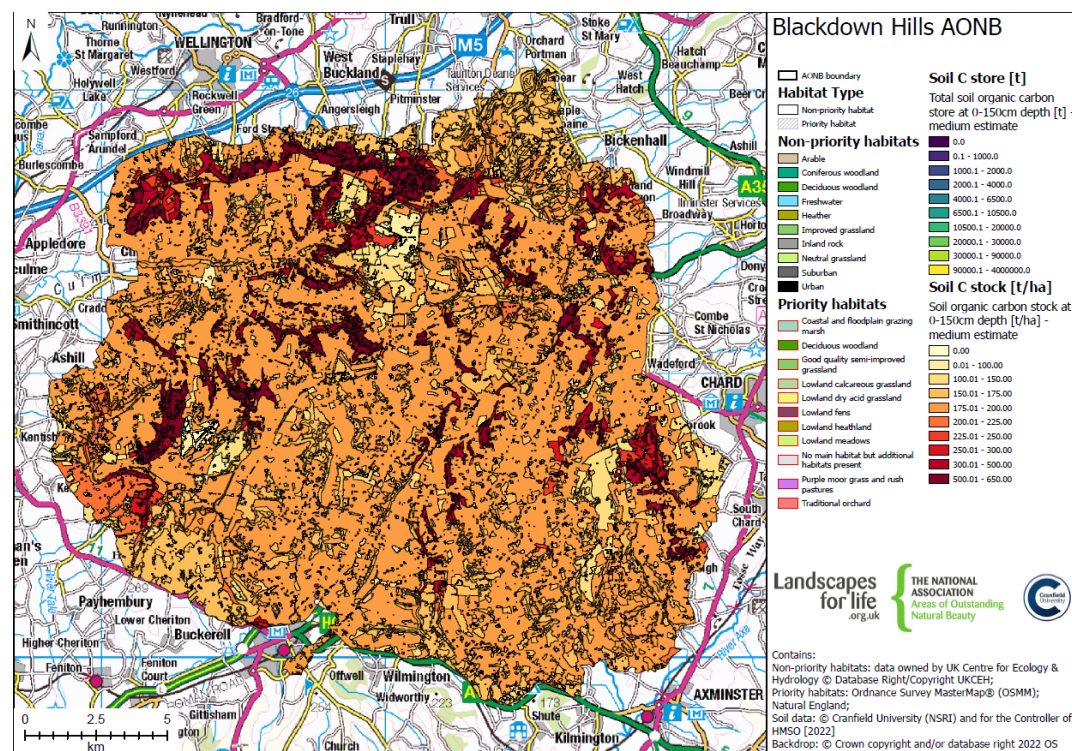
Based on literature, biomass carbon (stored above ground in vegetation) = 851,731 tonnes/
carbon (medium estimate for t/ C)

Based on literature, carbon flux = 571.10 **loss** of CO₂e [CO₂e gains (-)/losses (+) per habitat
area]

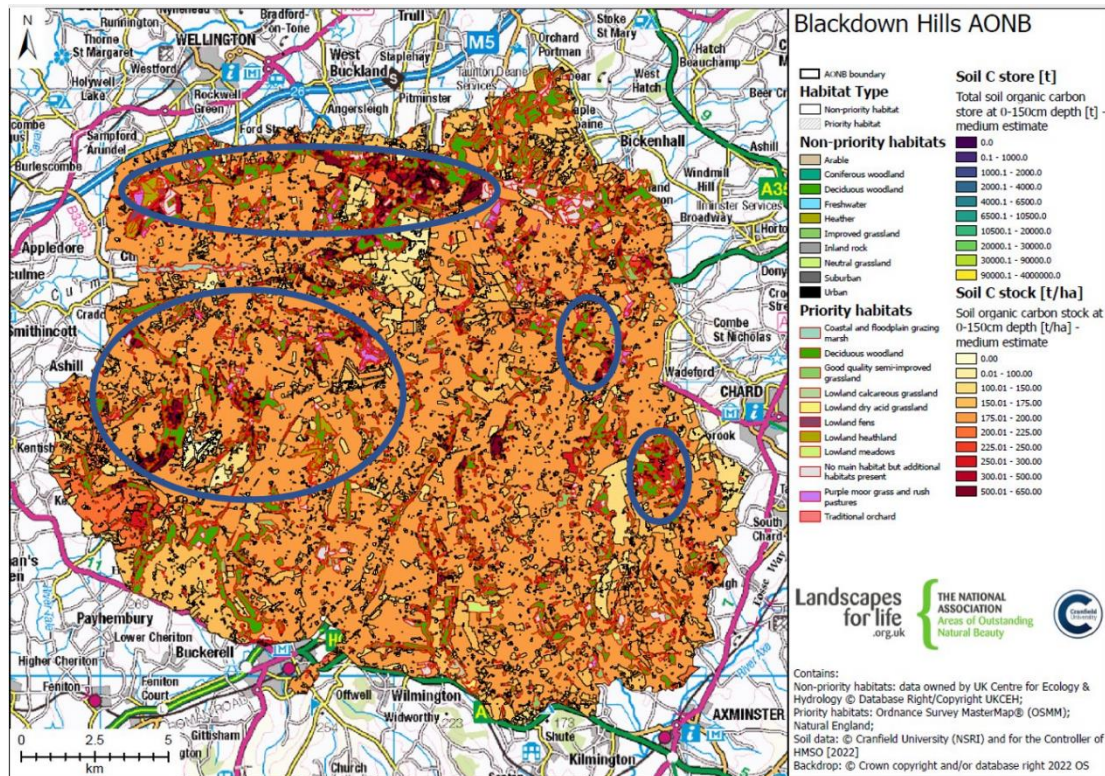
Based on literature, an alternative carbon flux metric= 164.90 **loss** of carbon [C gains (-)/losses
(+) per habitat area]

The maps below illustrate potential 'win-win' land management scenarios, where there are high densities of carbon stocks (dark brown colour on map 1) and also priority habitats (green/ pink colours on top of the dark brown colours on map 2). In other words, areas of high-density soil carbon in the Blackdown Hills strongly coincide with the areas of high biodiversity importance and therefore we need to prioritise these areas for restoration of habitats.

[note that the following images are an illustrative placeholder for now]



Map 1: Density of soil carbon stocks



Map 2: Priority habitats shown over soil carbon stocks

A further follow-on piece of work, building on the Cranfield carbon audit and metric study was undertaken in the Blackdown Hills to explore how this may be used to inform land management decisions, [Soil Organic Carbon in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape: Towards a Framework for Guiding Land Management Decision Making Report of a study undertaken in winter 2022-2023 in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Fred Constantine Smith with support from Gavin Saunders, Richard Smith and Tim Harrod, May 2023]. Further information can be found in the [appendices](#).

Report headlines:

- Different soil types vary greatly in their carbon stores, and their potential to hold more carbon.
- Soil carbon storage can be increased both through productive, in-field practices, and habitat creation or management.
- Managing productive soils to store more carbon also improves soil health.
- Managing wildlife habitats and creating new habitat also increases soil carbon storage.
- Each soil type can be managed to maximise its ability to store carbon, and the opportunities for doing so vary between soil types.

- Vegetation with high nature conservation value generally has the highest level of soil organic carbon (SOC), with wet woodland, mire, and wet heath having the highest of all.
- The peaty and organic 'Blackdown' and 'Hense' soil types store the most carbon per hectare.
- Medium brown soils with a large area in the landscape, such as the 'Whimple' and 'Batcombe' soil types, can play a significant role in carbon sequestration via good soil management practices.
- A focus on soil carbon can offer a triple-win, for carbon sequestration, soil health, and biodiversity
- Humic soils (e.g. Hense) – found on the springline. These naturally wet soils have high carbon levels when carrying semi-natural vegetation. Where they have been drained and agriculturally improved, rewetting them and restoring semi-natural vegetation could yield significant carbon gains
- Brown Earths (e.g. the Batcombe) – found on the plateau. These have a lower capacity for holding carbon (compared with wetter soils), but their extent means that the raising their soil carbon by just a small amount would have a significant impact on total carbon stocks in the landscape

Offering much potential to help mitigate climate change, these existing carbon stores need to be protected and restored to maximise carbon sequestration. Restoring characteristic habitats like springline mire and wetland, managing woodland and creating new woodlands in the right locations across the Blackdown Hills, will increase carbon sequestration as well as helping wildlife. And across the whole Blackdown Hills farmed landscape, modest changes in land management practices could have a large cumulative effect on carbon storage.

Chapter 8: Delivery and monitoring

8.1 Implementation

All those that have an active interest and role in the management of the Blackdown Hills landscape and in supporting the communities that live and work within it have a role in implementing the *Management Plan* through individual action as well as partnership working. This includes parish councils, landowners and managers, voluntary organisations and interest groups, local authorities, statutory agencies, advisory bodies and government departments – whether individually or as part of other partnerships. The need for, and importance of, partnership working and community engagement continues to be imperative to enable new and innovative working relationships to deliver the priorities of the *Management Plan* and draw down new sources of funding that may become available.

By helping to implement this plan, government, local authorities, public bodies and other ‘relevant authorities’ will be contributing to their Countryside and Rights of Way Act Section 85 duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. It is therefore important that the strategies, plans and action plans of key local, regional and national authorities, agencies and organisations take account of and reflect the vision, objectives and policies of this plan.

Collaboration and working together with others to achieve success underscores all National Landscape Partnership work. A key function of this plan is to encourage coordinated action in the Blackdown Hills and ensure an integrated policy context. Sitting across two counties, activities in the Blackdown Hills are very often delivered by several different organisations – or different parts of the same organisation – based on administrative boundaries. This can lead to local issues being marginalised, different approaches being taken in neighbouring areas, and divergence of policy, for instance.

The National Landscape Partnership is made up of organisations and interest groups that work together towards achieving the vision through delivering the aims, objectives and policies of this Management Plan. Policy direction and implementation of the Management Plan is guided by the Partnership Management Group. This is comprised of appointed representatives from the local authorities and several representatives elected from the statutory and non-statutory organisations, local groups and parish councils within the Blackdown Hills. The Partnership is supported by a small staff team, and it is enormously valuable that the Partnership can call on topic-specific working groups and forums drawn from the local community, interest groups, businesses, and the statutory and non-statutory agencies to coordinate action and help to deliver projects that conserve and enhance the Blackdown Hills.

One of the most important roles of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership therefore, supported by other Blackdown Hills-wide groups such as the Parish Network, is to coordinate information and facilitate action across administrative boundaries to ensure that organisations collectively can meet the needs of the environment, landscape and communities of the Blackdown Hills. This will support local authorities and other public bodies in their 'duty to co-operate', and help to develop integrated, effective collaboration at a landscape-scale through, for example, the Local Nature Partnerships and Catchment Partnerships.

A recurring message arising from consultation is the need for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to do more to communicate and promote the purpose of designation and to promote understanding and appreciation of the National Landscape and its special qualities. The continued protection and enhancement of the Blackdown Hills' landscape, biodiversity and historic assets can only be achieved by successful communication of their significance and value to a variety of audiences, from landowners, local communities and businesses to local authority officers and infrastructure providers.

8.2 Monitoring and evaluation

We can only achieve the purpose of conserving and enhancing the Blackdown Hills' natural beauty and promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities if we understand what makes the area special, the issues and challenges facing those special qualities, and are able to identify the opportunities for celebrating, conserving and enhancing them, and telling their stories.

We also need to ensure that decisions are made based on the best available evidence so that we can make the most of the funding and resources available. It is therefore important to ensure that there are adequate mechanisms in place for monitoring, research and reporting.

A role of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership is to collate, monitor and evaluate the actions that happen from the implementation of this plan to demonstrate where management actions are making a difference on the ground - but without the monitoring process being overly burdensome.

There are two main strands to this monitoring:

National Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework

As set out throughout this plan the framework defines the contribution that Protected Landscapes (as areas) should make to national targets and certain Environmental Improvement Plan outcomes. The Framework contains 10 targets. Each target is accompanied by an indicator which will measure progress towards it and its related outcome. Natural

England will evaluate overall progress towards the targets and outcomes in the Framework. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership can question and challenge the national position when necessary, where data anomalies and gaps are apparent from the picture on the ground locally.

Management reporting

Qualitative monitoring of action is relatively straightforward; the Partnership's Annual Review is the mechanism for reporting on implementing the *Management Plan* and the Blackdown Hills National Landscape website highlights a range of project work, often with its own monitoring requirements. In addition, partners regularly report to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership Management Group. This is the opportunity to highlight the work they are doing throughout the year. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership will additionally look to develop a programme to identify appropriate, effective and proportionate mechanisms to measure or judge progress towards local priorities that may not be covered elsewhere or require local knowledge and research (could be related to diversity and inclusion and engagement, or specific wildlife species, or hedgerows, for example), and will seek to work with wider partners to secure a long-term programme of monitoring along with appropriate resources.

8.3 Strategic Delivery Plan

The Strategic Delivery Plan is a key part of the *Management Plan* and can be found in the appendices. It outlines the strategic high-level actions over the five-year period required to deliver the *Management Plan's* ambitions across Place, People, Nature and Climate, based on the priorities for action set out in earlier sections of this plan.

It has been included separately in the appendices to enable it to be updated more readily through the plan period.

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**Blackdown
Hills**
National
Landscape

Blackdown Hills National Landscape: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2025-2030

Adoption draft

April 2025

PART B: APPENDICES

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Appendix 1

WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT THE BLACKDOWN HILLS: OUR SPECIAL QUALITIES

'Natural beauty' is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries (Countryside Agency, 2001). These aspects of natural beauty are key physical components of the landscape. However, landscape is also about tranquillity, sensory experiences, cultural associations and the relationship between people and place. It is therefore important that the cultural, perceptual and aesthetic dimensions of landscape are also recognised as elements of natural beauty. Natural England has developed a list of factors that contribute to natural beauty:

Landscape quality – a measure of the physical state or condition of the landscape

Scenic quality – the extent to which the landscape appeals to the senses (primarily, but not only, the visual senses)

Relative wildness – the degree to which relatively wild character can be perceived in the landscape makes a particular contribution to the sense of place

Relative tranquillity – the degree to which relative tranquillity can be perceived in the landscape

Natural heritage features – the influence of natural heritage on the perception of the natural beauty of the area. (Natural heritage includes flora, fauna, geological and physiographical features)

Cultural heritage – the influence of cultural heritage on the perception of the natural beauty of the area and the degree to which associations with particular people, artists, writers or events in history contribute to such perception

Special Qualities

The designated Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has a suite of special qualities that together make it unique and outstanding, underpinning its designation as a nationally important protected landscape. Special qualities may be considered as specific components of 'natural beauty,' distilling out the key attributes that combine in particular ways to form the natural beauty of the area. These are the

special qualities, individually and in combination, that we need to conserve and enhance for the future and they should be considered in all decisions affecting the National Landscape.

Special Landscape Character

From the dramatic, steep, wooded north-facing scarp, the area dips gently southwards as a flat-topped plateau deeply dissected by valleys. This is the northern part of the East Devon Plateau – one of the finest, most extensive in Britain. The tops are open and windswept; in the valleys villages and hamlets nestle among ancient patterns of small, enclosed fields and a maze of winding lanes lined with high hedgebanks. The steep valleys support a patchwork of woodland and heath, nationally and regionally important habitats which support a wealth of charismatic and priority species and interesting plant communities.

Key to the Blackdown Hills designation as an AONB is the subtle combination of four outstanding aspects of the landscape (The Blackdown Hills landscape: A landscape assessment. Countryside Commission, 1989):

It is an area notable for its **unspoilt rural character**, which remains relatively undisturbed by modern development and so ancient landscape features, special habitats, historical and archaeological remains have survived intact. In the winding lanes, the hidden valleys, and traditional villages there is a sense of stepping back in time; of the links between nature and humanity. The countryside remains largely unchanged and there is an identifiable and characteristic vernacular, pastoral landscape.

There is a **unique geology**. The composition of the underlying Upper Greensand geology of the Blackdown Hills and the adjoining East Devon National Landscape is unique in Britain and is one of the area's strongest unifying features. It has given rise to the distinct topography of flat-topped plateau, sharp ridges, and spring-lined valleys. The springs in turn have created the characteristic pattern of rough grassland, mire, and wet woodland vegetation on the valley sides. The nature of the Greensand rock has meant that these plant communities are particularly diverse. Moreover, the geology has provided a local building material, chert, which is uncommon elsewhere.

There is a **diversity of landscape patterns and pictures**. The visual quality of the landscape is high and is derived from the complex patterns and mosaics of landscapes. Although the scenery is immensely varied, particular features are repeated. There are long views over field-patterned landscapes. Ancient, species-rich hedgerows delineate the fields and define the character of the landscape, enclosing narrow twisting lanes. The open plateau is dissected by steep valleys, the slopes supporting a patchwork of ancient woodland. The history of medieval and

parliamentary enclosures has resulted in a contrasting landscape of small fields in the valleys and larger fields with straight hedges on the plateau. There are patches of heath and common, bog and mire and there are fine avenues of beech along the ridge. At a more detailed level there is a variety of visual and ecological interest; heathland birdlife, ground flora of woodland and mire, and colourful wildflowers on hedge banks.

It is a **landscape with architectural appeal**. The landscape pattern is punctuated by a wealth of small villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads of architectural value and distinctive character. Devon and Somerset are recognised nationally for their fine rural architecture, but the Blackdown Hills contain a special concentration of such buildings and where the vernacular character is particularly well preserved. Predominant materials are chert and cob with thatch, over time often replaced by corrugated iron, or clay-tiled roofs. The appeal lies in the way in which the buildings fit so naturally into their surroundings.

Special Historic Landscape

The Blackdown Hills landscape has great time depth, from prehistoric through to modern:

Prehistoric to Roman times

There are significant concentrations of early prehistoric evidence in the Blackdown Hills. Large numbers of Mesolithic flint and chert tools have been found, as well as Neolithic causewayed enclosures. Later prehistoric features include Bronze Age round barrow cemeteries and isolated barrows, and large Iron Age hillforts that take great advantage of the local topography. Of the 25 Scheduled Monuments in the area, 10 are Bronze Age barrows or barrow cemeteries and seven are hillforts.

Peat deposits in spring-line mires provide information back to prehistoric times, and the preserved pollen records show changes from woodland to pastoral and arable farming.

The Roman period is represented by military use of the Iron Age hillfort at Hembury, the later bathhouse at Whitestaunton and several 'Romanised' farms. Extensive evidence is emerging for Romano-British farms and field systems, that are particularly visible on LiDAR in marginal areas such as on and around the edges of commons/moors - some of these though may be Medieval.

Medieval period

Key medieval sites include Castle Neroche, an early Norman earthwork castle built on an earlier Iron Age defended site, and Hemyock Castle, a fortified manor house of the late medieval period. Dunkeswell Abbey, founded in the 13th century, had a significant influence on the landscape through its grange farms and probable involvement in iron production.

The Blackdown Hills' distinctive field patterns and many dispersed farmsteads and hamlets originate from medieval times. Across the area are properties and settlements that were recorded in the Domesday Book. Historic landscape characterisation projects have identified a high proportion of the landscape as being of medieval origin. Enclosed, former medieval strip fields are well preserved throughout the area. Irregular fields and massive hedges in the valleys represent land taken directly into cultivation from woodland in the medieval period.

There is an extraordinary concentration of medieval buildings in the villages, as well as many deserted or shrunken medieval and post-medieval settlements, which reflect the ebb and flow of agriculture on marginal land. Ancient woodland, surviving from the medieval period, is still well represented, particularly on the northern escarpment. The Royal Forest of Neroche was finally enclosed in the 1830s but traces of the old wood-banks still survive.

Modern

Parliamentary Inclosure of heath and commons on the plateau tops in the 19th century has created distinctive landscapes of large regular fields with straight roads and beech hedges. The area contains some of the latest enclosures in Devon: Stockland Hill was not enclosed from heath until 1864, and Beacon Hill, Upottery, not until 1874.

The Wellington Monument, a prominent feature on the northern skyline, commemorates the battle of Waterloo. The National Landscape also contains important evidence from the second world war – the three airfields at Culmhead (Trickey Warren), Dunkeswell and Upottery (Smeatharpe). As well as the runways, a wide range of structures still survive at all three sites including pillboxes, aircraft dispersal pen and technical and domestic buildings. Some have been designated as Scheduled Monuments or Listed Buildings. There has been a substantial loss of hedgerows and orchards to meet the needs of modern agriculture since the second world war; simplifying parts of the landscape and masking their early origins.

The landscapes of the Blackdown Hills have been created by the interplay of people and the land over many centuries:

The **unique geology** of the area has had a strong influence on the industrial archaeology and landscape. Iron production is thought to have started locally in the later Iron Age, it was an important Roman industry and continued into the Middle Ages. Recent finds in Hemyock suggest an intensive iron industry existed in the late 9th and early 10th centuries. The iron ores were found at the junction of the Upper Greensand and the capping clay layer. There was extensive iron mining on the plateau, influencing the creation of plateau commons and improved/enclosed former heath, and now wooded upper slopes. The cratered landscape of opencast iron workings can still be seen in places on the plateau tops, such as Culm Davy, and iron slag finds are widespread.

There are claypits associated with medieval and post-medieval pottery production (a vast hoard of medieval pottery pieces found in Hemyock suggests it was an important local industry) and a number of largely 18th and 19th-century limekilns particularly around the Bishopswood and Wambrook area. Deliberate planting of former extraction pits with trees and orchards started in the medieval period and has contributed to the extensive pattern of small, dispersed woodland.

Mining of a hard seam of stone within the greensand for whetstone production reached its heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries. Indications of the mines can still be seen on the western escarpment around Blackborough and Broadhembury.

In terms of **literature and the arts**, over the centuries the Blackdown Hills landscape has inspired writers and artists who have left a legacy of cultural associations. Celia Fiennes, Daniel Defoe, and Rev John Swete all travelled through the area during the late 17th and the 18th century, providing informative descriptions and historical perceptions of the landscape.

In the early 20th century the Camden Town Group of artists, including Robert Bevan, Charles Ginner and Spencer Gore used the patterned rural landscape as inspiration for their impressionist paintings that provide records of the past. Today the texture, colours and light of the Blackdown Hills continue to influence contemporary artists and makers.

The Blackdown Hills has a **distinctive local style of architecture**. Local materials such as chert, cob, thatch, and clay tiles are used extensively, as well as limestone and Beer stone. The large number of surviving late medieval houses is exceptional. Many are Grade II* Listed Buildings and contain particularly fine woodwork screens, ceilings, and jetties; there are fine examples in Broadhembury.

Historic farmsteads are a key part of the National Landscape's architectural, agricultural, and social heritage, and they too still survive intact and with unchanged associated farm buildings in exceptional numbers. Most farmsteads and hamlets are

in sheltered valleys, often terraced into the hills. Villages are often at river crossings and crossroads in the valley floors, generally clustered around the parish church. Small stone houses often directly front or butt gable-end on to the narrow lanes. The lanes themselves host traditional roadside features such as fingerposts and milestones. Topography often influences settlement pattern, such as Membury where the village straggles along the valley and Blackborough, where it follows the escarpment.

In terms of **landscape features**, although designed landscapes are not widespread within the area, there are some features that make a significant contribution. The Wellington Monument built between 1817 and 1854 is iconic, defining the north-west escarpment. Much of a Victorian designed landscape including walled garden, lakes and leats, still survives on the Otterhead Estate. Similarly, the large Victorian manors at Upottery and on the Tracey Estate, Awliscombe have gone, but their parkland, formal garden features and ancillary buildings can still be seen.

Special Natural Environment

The biodiversity of the Blackdown Hills is one of its greatest assets. The unique geology, rich history of human settlement and landscape patterns of the area have combined with traditional land management, climate and clean air to support a rich diversity of habitats and species.

The National Landscape is characterised by its intricate patchwork of semi-natural habitats, scattered throughout the landscape. This includes patches of woodland habitat, although there are larger concentrations of woodland in northern parts of the Blackdown Hills. In the past rough boggy parcels of land across the Blackdown Hills too agriculturally-poor for farming became used as a source of fuel and materials. Known as turbaries, local people had common rights to cut turf and dig peat for fuel and they are now important habitats valuable for wildlife, often designated as SSSIs and nature reserves.

This immense variety, with patches of valuable habitat scattered throughout the landscape, is notable; these include flower-rich meadows, spring-line mire, wet woodland, heathland, calcareous grassland, ancient woodland, fen, and bog, connected by ancient hedgerows. At a micro-scale there is an abundance of lichens, mosses, and fungi. Bees, butterflies, birds, bats, and many other animals, some nationally scarce, thrive in the Blackdown Hills, feeding and breeding in the habitats the area provides. These habitats and wildlife bring colour, texture, sound and life to the landscape, epitomising the mental picture of the 'English Countryside,' which has, in reality, long since disappeared elsewhere.

Spring-line mires are a key feature of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and comprise a matrix of plant communities and wetland features that support a range of specialist plants and animals, including insectivorous plants such as oblong-leaved sundew and pale butterwort. They are formed where the Greensand meets the clays, supporting priority habitats of wet grassland, heathland, mire (i.e. purple moor-grass and rush pastures) and woodland habitats. Linear features such as hedgerows are of value as wildlife in their own right and comprise important habitat for a range of notable and protected species including brown hairstreak butterfly and hazel dormouse. They have a role in landscape connectivity linking habitat patches, forming a network that allows species to move through the landscape, particularly in the provision of foraging habitat for mobile species such as bats. In places, rivers and streams host mammals including otters, beavers, and water vole, invertebrate including white clawed crayfish, and fish, including lampreys.

Summary of the special qualities and distinctive characteristics of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape

From the diverse characteristics, features and qualities outlined on the previous pages, the following list summarises the special qualities that in combination create the particular sense and spirit of place that gives the Blackdown Hills its distinctive identity, in relation to natural beauty factors. All these special qualities require protection, conservation and enhancement if the area is to retain its character and status among England's finest landscapes.

Reference can also be made to the [Blackdown Hills Landscape Character Assessment](#) for further understanding of the contrast and diversity of the designated landscape and its management requirements.

Natural Beauty component: Landscape quality

- A managed landscape sculpted and maintained by the stewardship of generations of those who work the land
- Undeveloped skyline of the northern scarp slope is a prominent feature in views from the Vale of Taunton and beyond
- Rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected semi-natural habitats; a patchwork of woodland, heathland, meadow and mire linked by hedgerows
- Clear, unpolluted streams that meander down the valleys to feed the Yarty, Otter, Culm rivers
- Ancient and veteran trees in hedgerows, fields, and woodland
- A settled landscape with a strong sense of time-depth containing farmsteads and small scattered villages well related to the landscape

Natural Beauty component: Scenic quality

- The elevation and long, panoramic views out from the Blackdown Hills create a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and transport corridors
- Unspoilt, panoramic views across flat-topped plateau and straight undisturbed ridge tops and over hidden valleys
- A well-wooded pastoral landscape with a strong pattern of hedgebanks and hedgerow trees
- Pattern of regular, larger-scale enclosure fields on the plateau contrasts with the smaller, curving medieval fields on the valley slopes
- Majestic avenues of beech trees along northern ridges
- Long straight roads across the plateau with verges and low, neat hedges give way to narrow, enclosed, high-hedged winding single-tracked lanes in the valleys

- Wellington Monument is a key landscape feature identifying the Blackdown Hills over a very wide area in all directions

Natural Beauty component: Relative wildness

- A sense of remoteness enhanced by the exposure of the plateau and more intimate extensive woodland of the upper slopes and hidden valleys
- Wide open spaces provide exposure to the elements; big sky, windswept places, contrasts of sunlight and shadow

Natural Beauty component: Relative tranquillity

- Areas of high tranquillity spared many of the intrusions of modern life, and places that offer a sense of detachment from surrounding towns and infrastructure
- Places to enjoy natural sounds; the melody of the song thrush and skylark, the call of buzzards
- Dark night-time star-filled skies contrasting with the light pollution of the surrounding towns

Natural Beauty component: Natural heritage features

- One of the finest, most extensive plateaus in Britain; a distinctive landform that contrasts with the surrounding lowlands to the east, north and west
- The underlying Upper Greensand geology is unique in Britain
- The presence of straight, uninterrupted ridges are evident as a visual backdrop over a wide area
- Distinctive spring-line mires located at uniform height around the upper slopes of the valleys
- The varied landscape supports a rich assemblage of wildlife including many species of bats, butterflies and moths and meadow flowers and healthy populations of ferns, lichens, mosses, and fungi
- Ancient, species-rich hedges with many hedgerow trees and flower-rich banks; colourful displays of primrose and bluebells in spring
- A network of ancient semi-natural woodland linked by hedgerows support a thriving dormouse population
- Streams and rivers are home to otters, beavers, lamprey and the vulnerable white-clawed crayfish

Natural Beauty component: Cultural heritage

- The number and extent of well-preserved 17th Century and earlier buildings, and of complete traditional farmsteads in the local vernacular style – chert, cob, and thatch – are an important element of the landscape
- Ancient hillforts are prominent features on the ends of the plateau ridges
- Mining remains from the once internationally significant whetstone industry and extensive evidence of ironworking
- Three World War Two airfields and remains of their associated buildings are found on the high, flat land of the plateau
- A community with a strong sense of place closely linked to the land and its management, with a particularly strong tradition of hedge laying
- A landscape that has inspired artists from the early 20th century Camden Town Group to the Blackdown Hills Artists and Makers of today

Natural Capital Stock and Ecosystem Services in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Natural capital and the elements of natural beauty have a natural overlap: they are ways of categorising elements of the landscape and some of the benefits we derive from it.

Many of the elements which make up the natural beauty of the National Landscape can be described in terms of natural and cultural capital. Natural capital refers to both the living (e.g. fish stocks, forests) and non-living (e.g. minerals, energy resources) aspects of nature which produce value to people, both directly and indirectly. It is this capital that underpins all other capital in our economy and society, including cultural capital which is the historic environment and cultural landscape. Natural and cultural assets are the actual stock: living and non-living parts. From these assets we derive a flow of benefits known as ecosystem services. Essentially, **natural capital is about nature's assets, while ecosystem services relate to the goods and services derived from those assets.**

The landscape of the Blackdown Hills provides a lot to those that live, work and visit here, from the quantifiable benefits of fresh food and clean water to those that are harder to define such as mental health benefits from contact with the natural environment.

These benefits can be defined as **ecosystem services**, all critical to maintaining human health and wellbeing. They are categorised into four types of services:

Provisioning services: the products we gain and use from the National Landscape, such as food, energy, and water

Regulating services: the natural functioning of the National Landscape purifies water, pollinates crops and maintains air quality

Cultural services: non-material benefits derived from interaction with the National Landscape, such as inspiration, education, and spiritual connection

Supporting services: the foundations for all other services – primary production (carbon fixation), the formation of soil, nutrient cycling, and water cycling.

A high-quality landscape (of rich natural and cultural heritage) delivers wide economic benefits. Some ecosystem services have related economic markets, some do not. Those that don't can be considered 'public goods.'

Public goods

Some ecosystem goods and services that flow from the landscape's natural and cultural assets have a market which rewards the producer. Farming and forestry, although frequently not high return enterprises, are nonetheless producing goods for a functional marketplace.

However, some goods and services do not have a fully functional marketplace. For example, farmers who maintain species-rich grasslands are not rewarded by the market for the external value of that work. These are known as 'public goods' as they are non-excludable (i.e. no-one can be stopped from benefiting from that good) and nonrival (one person's enjoyment does not preclude another's). Private markets are developing for some of these goods, but while they do not exist public investment should be made to adequately reward the conservation of natural assets.

Public goods from the Blackdown Hills National Landscape could be considered to include:

- conservation of biodiversity
- conservation of built heritage
- maintenance of characteristic landscape features such as hedges and tree clumps (these will vary by landscape character area)
- providing clean air and water by taking uneconomic land management choices to reduce pollution (e.g. stopping fertiliser applications)
- maintaining rights of way
- providing educational access

Some of the ecosystem goods and services provided by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape include:

- Farmers and foresters produce food, fibre, timber, and wood fuel
- The Upper Greensand aquifer providing water for both public and private supplies
- The sources of the rivers Culm, Otter, and Yarty and some of the river Tone headwaters are in the Blackdown Hills and wetland mires help attenuate flows and trap sediment
- Carbon storage in woodland, lowland heathland, and peat deposits, for example in turbaries
- Hedgerows, rough grassland, wood pasture and woodland help to regulate soil erosion and water flow, addressing flooding downstream, and support nutrient cycling
- Species-rich grasslands are biodiverse and support pollinating insects
- Historic features link, and add value, to the natural heritage stock and have cultural heritage value in their own right
- Recreational and access opportunities support the health and wellbeing of both residents and visitors
- The characteristic and richly patterned landscape and ancient features provide a strong sense of place and history
- The distinctive landform and coherent landscape are inspirational at a personal, cultural, and spiritual level
- The area gives access to clean air, tranquillity and freedom from noise and light pollution

Appendix 2

PLANNING

Part A: General Principles for Development Proposals

All applicants of development proposals in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape should consider the following and where possible demonstrate, through the planning application process how the development has responded positively to the AONB designation:

Think Special Qualities - explain how the development will impact on the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and what actions you are taking both to conserve and to enhance the landscape, scenic beauty and other factors of natural beauty;

Think Enhancement - positively set out to 'enhance' the natural beauty of the National Landscape with your development proposal – be proud of your contribution to this special place;

Think Location - avoid development that creates incongruous features in prominent and highly visible locations that detract from the long views and open character of the Greensand plateau and views from or to the ridge lines, undeveloped valley sides and scarps of the National Landscape. Fit development into the landscape, not on top of it;

Think scale and massing - again this will help reduce harmful impact on the prevailing character of the National Landscape;

Think vernacular - consider how the development relates to the vernacular style of local building materials and styles;

Think biodiversity – explain how the development impacts on the biodiversity assets of the National Landscape and how you will avoid, mitigate, or as a last resort compensate for any residual impacts;

Think dark skies - consider the need for and impact of artificial lighting. Dark skies are recognised as important elements of tranquillity and contribute to the sense of wildness and remoteness as well as being culturally important;

Think geology, soil, air and water - explain how the development impacts on these natural capital assets of the National Landscape and how you will avoid, mitigate, or as a last resort compensate for any residual impacts;

Think cumulative effects – identify, describe and evaluate whether there are cumulative effects on the different natural beauty criteria which although alone may appear to be insignificant when considered together have a greater impact on the National Landscape. Identify and describe whether there are cumulative impacts from your development in combination with development already in place, or that which is reasonably foreseeable (such as allocated sites and sites with planning permission).

Part B: Major Development

Note that all paragraph and footnote references relate to the December 2024 version of the [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#)

Footnote 67 of the NPPF clarifies that:

‘For the purposes of paragraph 190 [relating to protected landscapes], whether a development 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’.

As such, it is not possible or appropriate to apply a blanket definition for what should be treated as major development in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. Nevertheless, there are some key factors that help to define if a development is major, as outlined below.

The purpose for which the Blackdown Hills National Landscape has been designated is to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Therefore, the judgement as to whether or not a development is major development depends, to a large degree, on whether or not the development could have a significant adverse impact on the natural beauty of the area. As outlined elsewhere, natural beauty incorporates a number of criteria, including landscape quality, scenic quality, tranquillity, natural heritage and cultural heritage. Within the context of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape those aspects of natural beauty which make the area distinctive and which are particularly valuable – the ‘special qualities’ - are described in detail elsewhere in the appendices.

On this basis, a development should be considered ‘major’ if, by reason of its nature, scale, location and/or setting, it could have a significant adverse impact on any of the above criteria, including the National Landscape’s ‘special qualities’. As well as potential impacts within the Blackdown Hills, consideration should also be given to impacts on these criteria within the setting of the National Landscape, particularly in the context of visual impact (i.e. views into and out) and impacts on tranquillity.

As outlined in paragraph 190 of the NPPF, to help inform whether there are exceptional circumstances and whether it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest, applications for such development 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’;

The National Landscape Partnership would expect any such development proposal to be accompanied by a statement of need in the context of national and local considerations and, ideally, in the context of needs arising from within the Blackdown Hills. The impacts of permitting or refusing the development should be clearly

identified in respect of the local economy, ideally including that of the local communities affected. Such a statement should be based on objective assessment and clear evidence.

b. 'the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way';

The National Landscape Partnership would encourage any such development proposal to be accompanied by a report setting out a sequential approach to site selection. This should evidence the extent to which alternative sites have been assessed before the selection of sites within the National Landscape, and clearly identify and justify why sites outside of the designated area could not be developed. The report should also identify and evidence why the need for the development could not be met in some other way. An important principle to address is that even if there are deemed to be exceptional circumstances generally, such as the need for housing in a particular local authority area, this does not necessarily equate to exceptional circumstances for a particular development at a specific location because there may be alternative sites that could result in less harm to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. These can be outside the local planning authority's area. Thus, the proper consideration of alternatives, (with a view to ascertaining if alternative(s) which would result in less harm to the National Landscape exist), is an essential component of exercising the assessments correctly.

c. 'any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated'.

The National Landscape Partnership would expect any such development proposal to be accompanied by a report identifying any detrimental effects upon the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities. Such a report should relate directly to the natural beauty and special qualities of the National Landscape taken as a whole, as well as those specific to the development site.

Any mitigation identified to moderate these impacts should be:

- clearly detailed, in line with the purpose to conserve and enhance the National Landscape,
- be compatible with the objectives and policies of the Management Plan,
- be compatible with special qualities and local landscape character, and
- be capable of realisation through robust planning conditions or obligation.

Appendix 3

CLIMATE

Part A: Climate Change Adaptation Management Plans

The government's 2023 Climate Adaptation Strategy under the [Third National Adaptation Programme \(NAP3\)](#) requires all National Parks and National Landscapes to have Climate Change Adaptation Management Plans produced, embedded in or linked with their management plans by 2028, and in all future plans.

Background

The UK government's third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) introduces the requirement for all Protected Landscapes to produce Climate Change Adaptation plans by 2028. Whilst the plan can be independent of management plans, it may be easier and beneficial to an authority to complete their Adaptation plan alongside or as part of their management plan. The plans will have regard to relevant guidance and UK government policy.

Protected Landscapes are some of England's most important areas for delivering on national climate goals, including the government's target to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Adopting Climate Adaptation Plans will be essential in protecting England's Protected Landscapes from the impacts of climate change. Alongside the publication of NAP3, climate change adaptation should be considered in each phase of delivering on the ambitions set out in Management Plans. Climate Adaptation should be considered in all aspects of the Authority's remit, not just the impacts on Nature, but on the People and the Place itself.

Timing

Climate Adaptation plans are to be completed on a 5-year cycle, preferably in line with Protected Landscape management plans. Further to this each Protected Landscape Authority will have a climate adaptation plan in place and published by 2028.

Content

A Protected Landscapes Climate Adaptation Plan should contain action focused policies looking to adapt areas of the designation where climate change is projected to have an impact. Each plan will take the form of the following:

- Identification of areas within the designation that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- Identification of any new risks since the last Climate Adaptation plan.
- Understanding of the predicted impact and identifying measures for adaptation.
- Evidence on adaptation actions and outcomes and how these interact with socioeconomic drivers and Net-Zero
- Production of an action plan to implement the adaptation measures, ensuring these are SMART.
- Climate Change risk management – governance on how each risk identified is managed.

Those preparing the plans may wish to consider the government's latest climate change risk assessment (CCRA3). This was informed by the Climate Change Committee's independent assessment of climate risk.

When identifying actions, ensure there is a responsible owner, even if that is not the Protected Landscape management body – e.g. if infrastructure such as roads may be at risk of damage from extreme weather, work with the responsible authority to identify adaptations.

Those preparing the plan should think broadly on areas at risk across the Protected Landscape designation and be ambitious in the adaptations they can identify.

Publication / Follow up: Climate Adaptation Plans must be submitted to Defra and Natural England once completed and published. Each subsequent climate adaptation plan produced should note in detail the progress that has been made in implementing these adaptations.

An initial **climate adaptation risk assessment matrix** has been prepared for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and the tables are included on the following pages:

Blackdown Hills National Landscape climate adaptation risk assessment matrix

| Natural Environment | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|------------|--------|------|
| Area of Impact | Headline Projection and impact | Risks and Opportunities | Mitigation | Likelihood | Impact | Risk |
| Variety of grasslands | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Unpredictable forage yields and grazing. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Deeper rooted plants, including grasses favoured. | | 5 | 2 | 10 |
| | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Flora reducing or ceasing nectar production | Element of scrub to provide partial shade & wildflower grasslands on a variety of aspects ¹² | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Unpredictable forage yields and grazing. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Stock kept inside longer, resulting in increased demand for forage | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Loss of soil | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Longer growing season | | 4 | 3 | 12 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Difficulty harvesting | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Longer growing season (grass grows when temperature is above 4°C | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of grazing, natural habitat, loss of wildlife | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Soil erosion, flooding, grazing unavailable | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | Longer growing season (grass grows when temperature is above 4°C | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Loss of pollinators | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | economic pressures leading to intensification of agriculture | Reduction in grassland leading to diversification | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| Dark skies | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | rainfall intensity and frequency | | | | | |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | n/a | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | n/a | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Increase in population density, loss of character. Thoughtless developments. Many impacts of climate change will have indirect effect on dark skies. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| Biodiverse small rivers | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Loss of water, reduced river levels or rivers dry up. Potential total loss of aquatic life | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased | Reduction of water. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | likelihood of extreme heat | | | | | |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Higher flow, erosion, loss of biodiversity. Increase in invasive species | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Flooding, erosion, rivers changing course, silting | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | n/a | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Rising sea levels | Salinity levels and flood plains may be affected | | 5 | -1 | -5 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Flooding, erosion, rivers changing course, silting | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Loss of biodiversity, new pests and diseases | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | More abstraction, more pollution. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| Bat population | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Reduction in number and ranges of invertebrate species and loss of habitat | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Hotter summers, increased | Reduction in number and ranges of | | 5 | -3 | -15 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | likelihood of extreme heat | invertebrate species | | | | |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Reduction in number and ranges of invertebrate species | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Reduction in feeding opportunities | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Risk to roosts | | 4 | -4 | -12 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Risk to roosts. Risk to feeding opportunities | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | Reduction in number and ranges of invertebrate species at the right time. | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Hibernation impacted | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Reduction in habitat | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| Veteran trees | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Death and dieback of veteran trees | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased | Change in supported biodiversity. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | likelihood of extreme heat | | | | | |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | More fungal diseases | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Change in supported biodiversity. | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Not predictable | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of ancient trees | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Soil erosion, trees falling | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Risk to key species, e.g. ash dieback, processionary moth etc. | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Ash dominated woodlands | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Death and dieback of trees. Particular risk to young trees | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Change in supported biodiversity. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | More fungal diseases | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Change in supported biodiversity. | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Reduction in viability of some species that require chilling period | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of woods | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Soil erosion, trees falling | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | Not predictable | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Risk to key species, of ash dieback. | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Wildlife diversity | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Reduction / change in biodiversity | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Reduction / change in biodiversity | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Change in migration patterns. Reduction in pollinators. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Change in migration patterns. Reduction in pollinators. | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Change in migration patterns | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of habitat. | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Rejuvenation of woodlands. | | 4 | 3 | 12 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Loss of habitat | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | Changes to food chains. Reduction in pollinators | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Reduction / change in biodiversity | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Reduction / change in biodiversity. Loss of habitat. Reduction in pollinators especially bees | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| Soils | Hotter summers, increased | Drier, sandy soils – the top | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | likelihood of extreme heat | surface will blow away | | | | |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Less absorption of rainfall will be likely on clay leading to flooding | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Waterlogging. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Inability to get farm equipment into fields | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Potential rotting of seeds before germination | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Inability to get farm equipment into fields | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Potential rotting of seeds before germination | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Freeze-thaw process compromised | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | n/a | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Topsoil washing away, depending on crop | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Pests and diseases more likely to persist | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Reduction in soil quality, loss of crop, loss of income | | 5 | -5 | -25 |

Headlines

Reduced and changed biodiversity – loss of trees, loss of pollinators, loss of water, flooding, loss of soil

Mitigation actions for Natural Environment

- Resilient and diverse habitats help to mitigate extremes (as a result of climate change) and well-connected habitat allow species to move to new climate spaces (e.g. different aspects, slopes, feeding and breeding opportunities, shade/ sun) and avoid local extinctions.
- Impacts of browsing regenerating woodlands and trees may need to involve control of browsing animals such as deer
- Mainstream soil health & regenerative farming & forestry techniques, in order to build resilience of soils, that will in turn help with infiltration of water and storage of carbon

| Farming and Forestry | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|------------|------------|--------|------|
| Area of Impact | Headline Projection and impact | Risks and Opportunities | Mitigation | Likelihood | Impact | Risk |
| Small Scale agriculture | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Change of viable crops and grass favouring deep rooted species. | | 5 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Pressure on water resources. | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Decreased yields and crop failure | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Increased growing season for grass and other plants. | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Restricted access to the land for cattle. Change in necessary farming practices | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Loss of soil | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Restricted access to the land for cattle. Change in necessary farming practices | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Loss of soil | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Reduced opportunity to spread slurry | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Risk to all aspects of farming | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Flooding and soil erosion | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | Change in the viable crop range. | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Arrival of new pests from the continent. Increased use of pesticides and medicines at greater cost. Veterinary and plant inspection costs increased. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | economic pressures leading to intensification of agriculture | Diversification and intensification. Loss of farms | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressures leading to intensification of agriculture | Increase of solar panels and energy crops | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| Traditional orchards | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Fruit drop. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Better quality fruit; | | 5 | 4 | 20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Reduction of "uniqueness" of English apples | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Loss of chilling period. Increase of root diseases. | | 5 | -3 | -15 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Loss of chilling period. Increase of root diseases. Difficulty harvesting. | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Better fruit set. | | 5 | 4 | 20 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of ancient orchards | | 4 | -4 | -12 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | More fungal diseases, increased risk from hail damage | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | New varieties, e.g. peaches and nectarines become viable. Interruption of dormant season. | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Arrival of new pests from the continent. Increased use of pesticides, plant inspection costs increased. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| Devon banks | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Change in vegetation profile | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Change in vegetation profile | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Risk of collapse | | 5 | -3 | -15 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Risk of collapse | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Destruction of banks | | 4 | -1 | -4 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Risk of collapse | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | Not predictable | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | economic pressures leading to intensification of agriculture | Damage due to larger farm equipment | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| Ancient Hedges | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Change in species profile, gapping | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Change or reduction in supported biodiversity. | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Change in growing season. More fungal diseases | | 5 | -2 | -10 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Change in growing season. More fungal diseases | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Not predictable | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of ancient hedges | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Soil erosion, trees falling | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Risk to key species, e.g. ash dieback, processionary moth etc | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | economic pressures leading to intensification of agriculture | Removal of some hedges | | 5 | -3 | -15 |

Headlines

Necessary changes to farming practices. Reduced and changed biodiversity – loss of trees, loss of pollinators, loss of water, flooding, loss of soil, new pests and diseases, reduction in crop yield.

Mitigation actions Farming & Forestry

- Halo thinning and management of browsing around veteran trees will help make them more resilient.

| The Built Environment, Community and Economy | | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------|------|
| Area of Impact | Headline Projection and impact | Risks and Opportunities | Mitigation | Likelihood | Impact | Risk |
| Listed buildings | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | subsidence | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Stability of cob construction | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Reduction in heating required. | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Flooding | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Flooding | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Increase in heating required | | 4 | -3 | -12 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Reduction in heating required. | | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Risk to thatch | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Rising sea levels | Increased risk of flooding | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Flooding, risk of lightning to thatch | | 5 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Increased risk from mould. Damaging species e.g. termites | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | n/a | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| Disused farm buildings | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Subsidence | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Stability of cob construction | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Flooding | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Flooding | | 4 | -4 | -20 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | n/a | | 3 | -3 | -9 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Risk to thatch and wooden construction | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Flooding, risk of lightning to thatch | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | -3 | -15 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Increased risk from mould and damaging species to timber structures. | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Replacement of traditional farm buildings with modern replacements. Conversion of disused building to dwellings. (class Q) | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| Small villages and hamlets | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Subsidence; | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Reduced water table; pressure on aquifers | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Hosepipe bans, reduced garden diversity | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Increased tourism | | | | |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Increased housebuilding and infrastructure as a result of migration | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Flooding | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer | Flooding | | 4 | -4 | -16 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | winters and milder wetter summers. | | | | | |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Reduced risk of parishes being cut off by snow and ice. Reduced risk of injury to people | | 3 | -4 | -12 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Risk of injury and loss of dwellings | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | flooding | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Risk to gardens and garden biodiversity | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Reduced water table; pressure on aquifers; increased insurance premiums; higher house prices, | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| Critical Infrastructure | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | Loss of drinking water | | 5 | -5 | -25 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | Insufficient shading / cooling in urban environments | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Hotter summers, increased | Increased drain on medical resources | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|----|-----|
| | likelihood of extreme heat | | | | | |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Increased drain on medical resources | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | Increased pressure on sewerage | | 5 | -4 | -20 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Increased drain on medical resources | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | Increased pressure on sewerage | | 4 | -4 | -16 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | Less risk of broken bones due to falls | | 5 | 3 | 15 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | Loss of critical buildings e.g. hospitals, surgeries | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | - |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Strain on blue light responders | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Increased insurance premiums | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and disease pressures | Increased drain on medical resources | | 5 | -4 | -20 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Low population density | Drier summers, increased likelihood of drought | As people move to the countryside population density may increase. Pressure on infrastructure | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Hotter summers, increased likelihood of extreme heat | As people move to the countryside population density may increase. Pressure on infrastructure | | 5 | -2 | -10 |
| | Milder wetter winters, increase in rainfall intensity and frequency | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Jetstream driven longer winters and milder wetter summers. | n/a | | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | Less snowfall, frost and ice | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the risk of wildfires | n/a | | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| | Rising sea levels | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Increase in the intensity and frequency of storms | Some villages prone to flooding may become unsustainable | | 5 | -3 | -15 |
| | Shift in the growing seasons | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| | Milder winters and changes to pest and | n/a | | 5 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|----|-----|
| | disease pressures | | | | | |
| | economic pressure leading to intensification of agriculture | Increase in density, loss of character. | | 5 | -2 | -10 |

Headlines

Increased flooding and pressure on infrastructure, especially medical. Pressure on sewerage and loss of drinking water

Mitigation actions for Built environment, community & economy

- Nature based solutions that build resilience for communities and critical infrastructure, as well as provide a range of co-benefits including for biodiversity, carbon and water quality- e.g. by reducing flooding in the built environment, providing 'natural sponge' type functions to store and slowly release water in times of drought and 'natural filter' to help improve water quality
- Tree and shrub canopies provide shade and significant cooling benefits for communities and more tree planting to field boundaries as well as single trees in fields gives protection to livestock and wildlife alike.

Part B: Greenhouse gas emissions

UK Protected Landscapes greenhouse gas emissions statistics: 2005-2022

Greenhouse gas emissions data for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Data supplied by Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2024. Data reported in kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (kt CO₂e)

| Calendar Year | Industry Total | Commercial Total | Public Sector Total | Domestic Total | Transport Total | LULUCF Net Emissions | Agriculture Total | Waste Total | Grand Total | Population ('000s, mid-yr | Per Capita Emissions | Emissions per km ² (kt CO ₂ e) |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 2005 | 5.2 | 7.3 | 0.9 | 41.0 | 57.3 | -46.3 | 199.8 | 11.2 | 276.4 | 12.7 | 21.7 | 0.7 |
| 2006 | 5.0 | 7.8 | 0.9 | 42.7 | 55.9 | -47.2 | 195.3 | 10.5 | 271.0 | 12.8 | 21.1 | 0.7 |
| 2007 | 5.0 | 7.5 | 0.9 | 40.3 | 54.8 | -47.9 | 194.5 | 9.7 | 264.8 | 12.9 | 20.5 | 0.7 |
| 2008 | 4.6 | 7.4 | 0.9 | 40.5 | 56.0 | -49.1 | 192.2 | 9.3 | 261.8 | 13.0 | 20.1 | 0.7 |
| 2009 | 4.1 | 6.5 | 0.8 | 38.1 | 53.8 | -49.3 | 192.8 | 9.2 | 256.0 | 13.1 | 19.5 | 0.7 |
| 2010 | 4.3 | 6.8 | 0.8 | 41.4 | 53.3 | -49.5 | 194.3 | 7.3 | 258.6 | 13.2 | 19.5 | 0.7 |
| 2011 | 3.9 | 6.1 | 0.7 | 35.7 | 51.7 | -49.9 | 187.8 | 7.0 | 243.0 | 13.4 | 18.2 | 0.7 |
| 2012 | 4.1 | 6.6 | 0.8 | 37.1 | 51.0 | -48.6 | 193.3 | 6.7 | 250.9 | 13.4 | 18.7 | 0.7 |
| 2013 | 3.8 | 6.2 | 0.7 | 35.8 | 51.8 | -50.2 | 186.4 | 5.7 | 240.1 | 13.5 | 17.8 | 0.6 |
| 2014 | 3.6 | 5.3 | 0.6 | 30.5 | 53.3 | -49.8 | 192.0 | 5.0 | 240.5 | 13.6 | 17.7 | 0.7 |
| 2015 | 3.3 | 4.6 | 0.5 | 28.1 | 57.7 | -50.4 | 195.6 | 5.1 | 244.5 | 13.7 | 17.9 | 0.7 |
| 2016 | 3.0 | 3.7 | 0.5 | 25.6 | 61.2 | -48.7 | 190.1 | 5.3 | 240.7 | 13.9 | 17.4 | 0.7 |
| 2017 | 3.0 | 2.5 | 0.4 | 23.7 | 61.1 | -50.1 | 192.0 | 6.1 | 238.8 | 13.9 | 17.1 | 0.6 |
| 2018 | 3.0 | 2.6 | 0.3 | 23.4 | 61.1 | -49.7 | 185.3 | 5.8 | 231.7 | 14.0 | 16.5 | 0.6 |
| 2019 | 3.4 | 2.7 | 0.4 | 22.0 | 61.9 | -49.9 | 185.6 | 6.7 | 232.8 | 14.1 | 16.5 | 0.6 |
| 2020 | 3.3 | 2.5 | 0.3 | 21.5 | 50.3 | -50.6 | 181.9 | 5.7 | 214.9 | 14.1 | 15.2 | 0.6 |
| 2021 | 3.7 | 2.8 | 0.3 | 21.9 | 57.9 | -49.6 | 185.8 | 3.0 | 225.9 | 14.1 | 16.0 | 0.6 |
| 2022 | 3.0 | 2.7 | 0.3 | 19.7 | 58.3 | -49.5 | 166.6 | 3.9 | 204.8 | 14.2 | 14.4 | 0.6 |

Part C: Carbon audit soil organic carbon

In 2022, the National Association of AONBs commissioned Cranfield University to undertake a **Carbon Audit and Metric (land management) assessment**.

[Zawadzka, J.E., Keay, C., Hannam, J., Burgess, P.J, Corstanje, R. (2022). *National Landscapes Carbon Audit & Metric (land management)*, Bedfordshire: Cranfield University.]

Before the AONB-specific datasets could be used for comparison with NATMAP Carbon, it was necessary to ensure that the data referred to the soil organic carbon contents for a soil depth of 0-30cm, which is one of the depths data in NATMAP Carbon are reported at. Brief descriptions of the sampled data are available in Table 4.2.1. Samples obtained from the Blackdown Hills AONB covered the soil depths of 0 – 15 and 15 – 30 cm and an average value of organic carbon reported at these depths was calculated for comparison to the 0 – 30 cm depth in the NATMAP Carbon dataset. This was only possible for 59 out of 74 samples which had data for both depths. Observations that reported organic carbon for the 0 – 15 cm depth only were discarded.

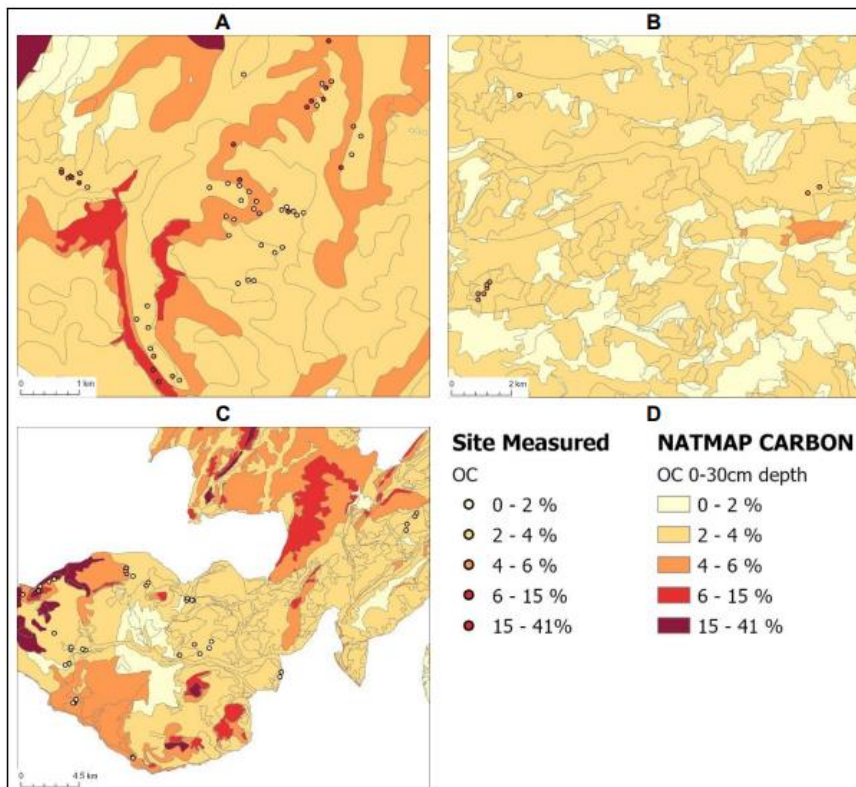


Figure 4.2.2.1 Distribution of site SOC point measurements within NATMAP Carbon polygons for A – Blackdown Hills AONB, B – High Weald AONB, and C – Shropshire Hills AONB, D – legend to the maps.

In the Blackdown Hills AONB (Figure 4.3.1.1) the direct comparisons were the strongest ($R^2 = 0.23$) for the maximum SOC values in NATMAP, which was likely determined by the fact that samples within that AONB were taken from various semi-natural habitats, which likely store more carbon in soils. After aggregation of the site measurements to NATMAP polygons, this relationship increased to 0.98, **indicating near-perfect agreement**. The indirect comparison resulted in a fairly good fit of the site measurements to the average value of SOC assigned to the NATMAP polygons, with R^2 of 0.89. In the case of this AONB the relationships with the minimum SOC values reported by NATMAP was the weakest, which could be explained by the overall high SOC contents of the sampled soils.

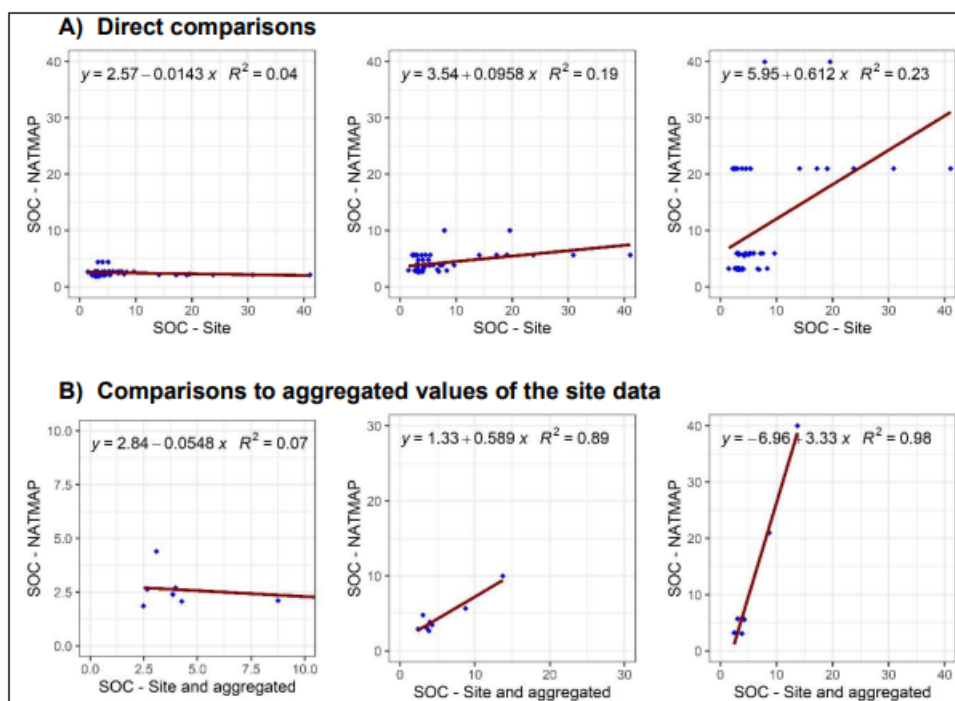


Figure 4.3.1.1 Results of the regression analysis for the Blackdown Hills AONB. The x-axis shows the SOC values measured on site and the y-axis, SOC values derived from NATMAP Carbon: left – minimum SOC, middle – average SOC, right – maximum SOC in each polygon.

The aim of the comparisons carried out between minimum, mean and maximum SOC values reported by the NATMAP Carbon database at national scales to SOC data sampled on sites within selected AONBs was to evaluate whether soil carbon stock assessments based on the NATMAP dataset could reliably represent soil carbon within the AONBs. The results of these comparisons indicate that NATMAP does not represent local, i.e., within-field, variations in SOC very well, however, it can reliably represent soil carbon at wider scales such as related neighbourhoods or landscapes. Results obtained here confirmed findings of a previous study indicating that NATMAP Carbon can represent soil carbon well for areas with relatively low SOC stocks at field rather than sub-field scales (Beka et al., 2022). The results of the comparisons presented here should be treated as indicative, given that the site samples were collected for other purposes than the evaluation of the capacity of NATMAP to accurately represent soil carbon at local scales. Some other sensitivities affecting the strength of the relationship include different laboratory methods to extract soil carbon from samples or different sampling dates – NATMAP is based on legacy soil observations collected by the Soil Survey for England in Wales, spanning across 1939 to 1987, with possible changes in soil carbon contents over time due to past changes in land use and management (Kirk and Bellamy, 2010).

Soil Organic Carbon in the Blackdown Hills AONB: Towards a Framework for Guiding Land Management Decision Making Report of a study undertaken in winter 2022-2023 in the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

This was a follow-on piece of work, building on the Cranfield carbon audit & metric study.

Project objectives:

- To identify which soil types are most valuable for their *existing* carbon stores
- To identify which soil types have the greatest potential to sequester *more* carbon via land management change
- To develop this information into the basis for practical guidance for land managers in the AONB

Soil Carbon:

UK soils store over 10 billion tonnes of carbon, roughly equal to 80 years of annual UK greenhouse gas emissions

Soil carbon sequestration = CO₂ being removed from the atmosphere and stored in the soil in the form of soil organic carbon

Soil organic carbon drives the mechanisms of infiltration and retention of air, water and nutrients in the soil which provide multiple benefits to farmers and society

Net Zero:

The UK Government has committed to reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Sectors such as industry, agriculture and aviation will be difficult to decarbonise completely by 2050.

Greenhouse gas removal (GGR), such as through soil carbon sequestration, is therefore essential to compensate for the residual emissions

Agriculture, Net Zero and Soils:

Estimates suggest that UK agricultural land could sequester 1-2 tonnes of CO₂e per hectare per year

The move towards 'blended' finance for agric support – mixing Government support with private finance – means land managers will soon be encouraged to store more carbon on their land, and realise a market value for that carbon by selling carbon credits

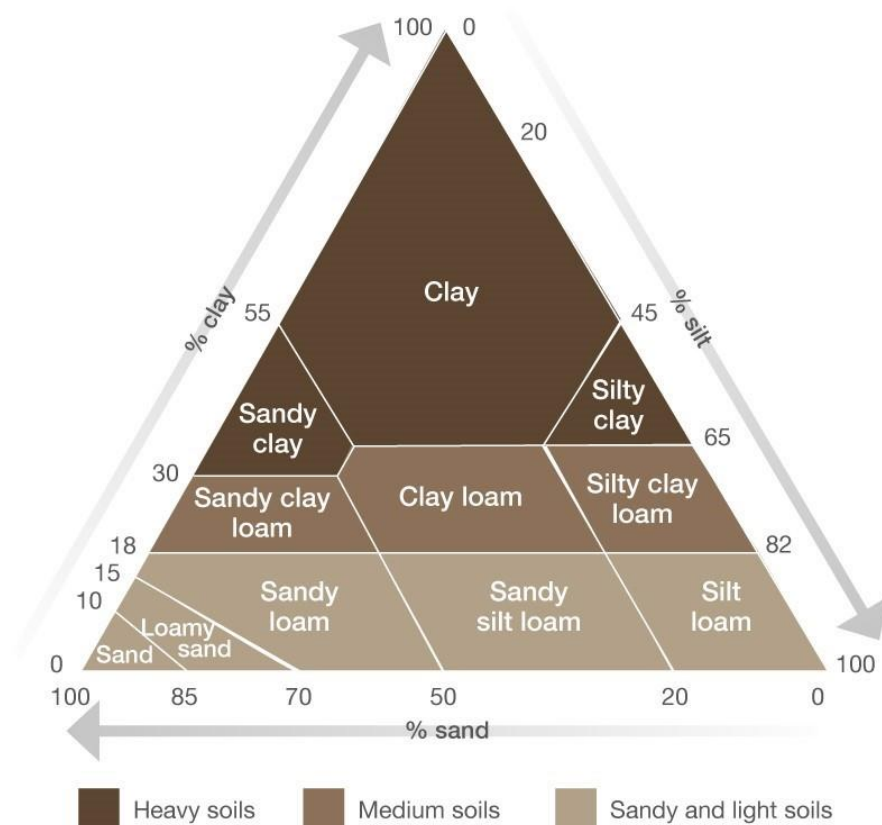
A 'carbon market' is rapidly evolving, but we lack an understanding of current soil carbon stores and metrics for measuring it, both at a landscape and single farm scale.

Soil type and carbon storage:

This project focuses on the carbon in the soil, rather than in the vegetation

Soils vary across the landscape, and each soil type has a different inherent capacity to store carbon. That capacity remains the same, though land use and vegetation may vary

If a soil type has a high inherent carbon-storing potential, then carbon sequestration efforts directed towards that soil type will yield the best results



Headlines:

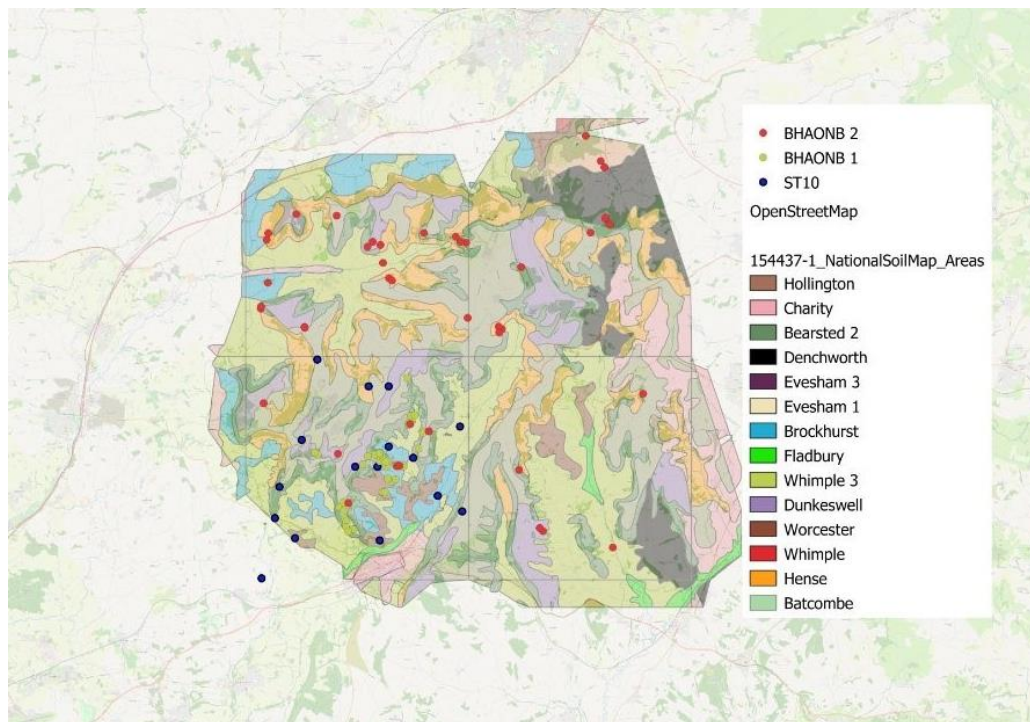
Different soil types vary greatly in their carbon stores, and their potential to hold more carbon.

Soil carbon storage can be increased both through productive, in-field practices, and habitat creation or management.

Managing productive soils to store more carbon also improves soil health.

Managing wildlife habitats and creating new habitat also increases soil carbon storage.

Each soil type can be managed to maximise its ability to store carbon, and the opportunities for doing so vary between soil types.



Vegetation with high nature conservation value generally has the highest level of soil organic carbon (SOC), with wet woodland, mire, and wet heath having the highest of all.

The peaty and organic ‘Blackdown’ and ‘Hense’ soil types store the most carbon per hectare.

Medium brown soils with a large area in the landscape, such as the ‘Whimble’ and ‘Batcombe’ soil types, can play a significant role in carbon sequestration via good soil management practices.

A focus on soil carbon can offer a triple-win, for carbon sequestration, soil health, and biodiversity




Humic soils (e.g. Hense) – found on the springline

These naturally wet soils have high carbon levels when carrying semi-natural vegetation. Where they have been drained and agriculturally improved, rewetting them and restoring semi-natural vegetation could yield significant carbon gains

Brown Earths (e.g. the Batcombe) – found on the plateau

These have a lower capacity for holding carbon (compared with wetter soils), but their extent means that the raising their soil carbon by just a small amount would have a significant impact on total carbon stocks in the landscape

| Soil map unit | Area (ha) in BHAONB | Tonnes Soil Organic Carbon per ha | Total S.O.C. (tonnes) in BHAONB |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Batcombe | 8,690 | 11.60 | 100,838 |
| Bearstead | 4,786 | 11.25 | 53,847 |
| Blackdown | 2,000 | 32.36 | 64,720 |
| Brockhurst | 5,561 | 16.33 | 90,801 |
| Charity | 3,035 | 9.70 | 29,450 |
| Denchworth | 4,729 | 17.16 | 81,130 |
| Dunkeswell | 3,318 | 14.79 | 49,069 |
| Evesham | 2,553 | 18.68 | 47,701 |
| Fladbury | 915 | 32.29 | 29,548 |
| Hallsworth | 302 | 18.03 | 5,455 |
| Hense | 5,607 | 44.87 | 251,608 |
| Hollington | 1,236 | 17.66 | 21,844 |

| Soil Map Unit | Profile image | Horizon | SOC% | Fine earth | Bulk Density | Thickness (dm) | gC / dm ³ | Total Carbon in Profile (gC / dm ³) |
|--|--|---------|------|------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|---|
| <u>Batcombe Series</u> (Arable/Short term ley) |  | A | 4.2 | 0.95 | 0.99 | 2 | 7.9002 | 13.92 |
| | | E | 2.1 | 0.9 | 1.18 | 2.5 | 5.5755 | |
| | | Bt(g) | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.24 | 0.5 | 0.4464 | |
| <u>Batcombe Series</u> (Unimproved Permanent Grass) |  | A | 2.5 | 0.8 | 1.17 | 2 | 4.68 | 9.01 |
| | | E | 1.9 | 0.75 | 1.21 | 2 | 3.4485 | |
| | | Bt(g) | 1.4 | 0.5 | 1.26 | 1 | 0.882 | |
| <u>Batcombe Series</u> (Woodland) |  | O | 24.2 | 1 | | 0.2 | 0 | 26.48 |
| | | A | 10.2 | 0.95 | 0.81 | 2.2 | 17.2676 | |
| | | Bt(g) | 1.5 | 0.92 | 1.36 | 3.8 | 7.13184 | |

Appendix 4

INDICATORS AND DATA - PROTECTED LANDSCAPES TARGETS AND OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK (PLTOF)

The Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework (PLTOF) defines the contribution that all Protected Landscapes (as areas) should make to national targets and Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) outcomes/goals.

The PLTOF contains 10 targets. Each target is accompanied by an indicator.

The indicator will measure progress towards each target and its related outcome, which are set out in **Part 1** of this document.

The indicator is supported by statistics generated from nationally available data. Natural England has collated national statistics from a range of data providers (where available) to establish the baseline for the Framework's indicators. Data owners include Natural England, Defra, the Forestry Commission and Historic England.

Natural England has also identified and collated a wider set of additional statistics relevant to the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes, listed in **Part 2** of this document.

Statistics for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape are listed in **Part 3** of this document, organised under the four management plan themes of place, people, nature and climate.

This new 2024 data release should largely be considered as a new baseline, utilising a consistent national methodology. Defra have indicated that they will review the Framework at least every five years, linked to refreshes of the EIP. Defra will adjust the targets, indicators and supporting statistics in the interim (as needed) to ensure they remain relevant and functional. Natural England will support this process and will collate and provide annual updates of statistics (where available) each April to the Protected Landscapes Partnership, Defra and Protected Landscape bodies. A full set of statistics are due to be reissued in April 2025, which will address and update any anomalies or interim status of the 2024 data used in this management plan.

Part 1: Outcomes, Targets and Target Indicators

Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 outcome – Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

PLTOF 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).

Target Indicator 1 (TI_1):

Extent of wildlife rich habitat created or restored within Protected Landscapes, outside of protected sites

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2025 (tbc)

Licensing: tbc

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: Indicator is in development.

PLTOF Target 2

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

Target Indicator 2 (TI_2):

Percentage of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes in favourable condition.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

PLTOF Target 3

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

Target Indicator 3 (TI_3):

Percentage of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

PLTOF 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 Indicator 4 (TI_4):

Extent of priority habitat within Protected Landscapes, outside of protected sites, in favourable management through agri-environment schemes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2025

Licensing: tbc

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: Indicator is in development.

PLTOF 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.

Target Indicator 5 (TI_5):

Percentage of land managers adopting nature-friendly farming on a percentage of their land.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2025

Licensing: tbc

Reporting cycle:

Notes: Annual Indicator is in development.

Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 outcome – Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

PLTOF Target 6

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

Target Indicator 6 (TI_6):

Level of greenhouse gas emissions within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ)

Release date: June 2024

Licensing: tbc

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: See: [2005-22-uk-protected-landscapes-ghg-emissions.xlsx](#)

PLTOF Target 7

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

Target Indicator 7 (TI_7):

Extent of peat under restoration in Protected Landscapes. *(This dataset describes the Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme (NCPGS) funded peatland restoration sites in England that occur in Protected Landscapes.)*

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

PLTOF Target 8

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

Target Indicator 8 (TI_8):

Extent of tree canopy and woodland cover in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Forestry Commission
Release date: April 2024
Licensing: Open Government Licence
Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes:

Indicator is in development. Interim statistics provided for woodland cover. Statistics on extent of tree canopy to be released when available

Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 outcome – Goal 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

PLTOF Target 9

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

Target Indicator 9 (TI_9):

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

TI_9a: Metres of accessible path as a % of total path.

TI_9b: Number of accessible toilets and rest stops.

TI_9c: Number of disability accessible parking spaces.

TI_9d: Number of accessible gates and gaps.

TI_9e: Number of visits and volunteer days facilitated by new equipment.

TI_9f: Number of schools engaged (primary and secondary) both inside and outside the Protected Landscape boundary.

TI_9g: Number of volunteer days.

TI_9h: Number of accessible or easy access routes for which wayfinding has been created or improved.

TI_9i: Policies in place to ensure Protected Landscapes are taking positive action to widen the diversity of their staff, boards and volunteers.

Provider: Protected Landscape bodies
Release date: tbc

Licensing: tbc

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes:

Defra has requested this information from Protected Landscapes bodies, as part of the annual Farming in Protected Landscapes and 'Access for All' monitoring survey/ commission.

PLTOF Target 10

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

Target Indicator 10 (TI_10):

Number and percentage of nationally designated heritage assets in Protected Landscapes to be deemed at risk.

Provider: Historic England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes:

Covers the categories of scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, listed buildings (grade I or II*) and protected wreck sites.

Part 2: Additional baseline statistics made available to Protected Landscapes in 2024

Statistic 1

Extent of priority habitat and other habitats within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024 (interim measure)

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes:

Statistics on 'other habitats' available in April 2025, based on updated Living England data.

Statistic 2

Area of land within Protected Landscapes designated at international, national and local level for nature conservation.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 3

Area of woodland within Protected Landscapes under sustainable management.

Provider: Forestry Commission

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 4

Extent of ancient woodland within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 5

Ecological status of watercourses and water bodies within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Environment Agency

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Every three years

Statistic 6

Area, depth and percentage cover of peatland within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024 (interim measure), updated July 2024

Licensing: Non-Commercial Government Licence

Reporting cycle: See notes

Notes: Links to spatial data added plus note on 'grand total % values'. Updated evidence on peat extent/depth/ condition due April '25 (based on the England Peat Map which is due to be published at the end of March '25).

Statistic 7

Estimate of the amount of carbon stored and sequestered by habitats within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: due June 2024

Licensing: Aiming to release under Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Every five years

Notes: Statistics due 2024.

Statistic 8

Length of National Trails within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 9

Number of nationally designated heritage assets in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Historic England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 10

National Character Areas which contain Protected Landscape(s), where changes to landscape and waterscape character is assessed as improving/no change/declining.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2025

Licensing: tbc

Reporting cycle: Every five years

Statistic 11

Length of hedgerows and other traditional field boundaries (drystone walls) within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024 (interim measure). Reissued May '24.

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: Initial figures are for hedgerow length. Reissued to correct formatting error.

Statistic 12

Total area of land managed under agri-environment schemes and total value of schemes within Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024, reissued July '24

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: Reissue only includes area of schemes currently.

Statistic 13

Area of land under different agricultural land uses within Protected Landscapes and number of livestock.

Provider: Defra

Release date: Already released

Licensing: Published on-line

Reporting cycle: Publication of next updates: Spring 2025, spring 2028 (tbc) and 2031.

Notes:

See [Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK at June - GOV.UK](#)

Statistic 14

Area and distribution of main landcover types within Protected landscapes.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2025

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: tbc

Notes: Derived from Living England data.

Statistic 15

Number of geological and geomorphological SSSI unit features and percentage in favourable or recovering condition.

Provider: Natural England

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 16

Extent of agricultural businesses within Protected Landscapes (number and size of holdings, number of agricultural workers).

Provider: Defra

Release date: Already released

Licensing: Published on-line

Reporting cycle: Publication of next updates: Spring 2025, spring 2028 (tbc) and 2031.

Notes: See [Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK at June - GOV.UK](#).

Statistic 17

Population estimates for Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Every 10 years

Notes: These are refined population estimates, following the draft estimates provided by the Office for National Statistics in 2023.

Statistic 18

Average age of the population living in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Every 10 years

Statistic 19

Proportion of the population within each ethnic group in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Every 10 years

Statistic 20

Median earnings in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024, reissued July 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: Reissued to correct estimates for a small number of Protected Landscapes.

Statistic 21

House price affordability ratios in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: tbc. Depends on availability of refined data on estimated incomes.

Statistic 22

Registered businesses by size and type in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Statistic 23

Proportion of the population living in each decile of deprivation in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: No regular reporting cycle; potential update 2026 (tbc)

Statistic 24

Number of pupils on the school roll (against total capacity) in Protected Landscapes.

Provider: Defra

Release date: April 2024, reissued July 2024

Licensing: Open Government Licence

Reporting cycle: Annual

Notes: Reissued to correct how source data is apportioned to Protected Landscapes.

Part 3: Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes

Framework datasets for Blackdown Hills National Landscape

All April 2024 (unless stated otherwise).

Place

Statistic 3

Area of woodland within the protected landscape under sustainable management:

Managed private: 1445.1 hectares

Managed public: 1023.2 hectares

Unmanaged: 2945.1 hectares

Total: 5413.3 hectares

Statistic 4

Extent of ancient woodland within the protected landscape:

Ancient and semi-natural woodlands (ASNW): 426.7 hectares (1.2% of protected landscape)

Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS): 440.5 hectares (1.2% of protected landscape)

Grand total: 867.2 hectares (2.3% of protected landscape)

Location and extent of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW):

Ashcombe Copse: 7.45 hectares
Bickham Wood: 16.47 hectares
Blackborough Wood: 4.42 hectares
Buckeshayes Wood: 0.75 hectares
Buckhayes Covert: 4.64 hectares
Butsons Copse: 4.25 hectares
Bywood Copse: 20.96 hectares
Cod Wood: 2.99 hectares
Combe Wood: 7.25 hectares
Cotley Copse: 5.25 hectares
Court Wood: 7.99 hectares
Coxs Wood: 15.05 hectares
Crown All Wood: 4.44 hectares
Cummins Copse: 4.23 hectares
Farm/Buckland Woods: 27.64 hectares
Fourteen Acre Copse: 5.69 hectares
Great Copse: 7.23 hectares
Greyborough Copses: 3.16 hectares
Hayne Wood: 3.52 hectares
Hayne Wood West: 0.58 hectares
Hey Wood: 0.97 hectares
Higher Ash/Long Woods: 23.64 hectares
Knapp Copse: 0.40 hectares
Knowles Wood: 0.80 hectares
Luxhay Wood: 18.29 hectares
Middleroom/Castle Woods: 20.53 hectares
Murlinch/Adcombe Woods: 90.15 hectares
Parsonage Wood: 2.48 hectares
Pen Point Wood: 15.32 hectares
Rectory Wood: 3.22 hectares
Sadbeer Wood: 3.74 hectares
Shapcombe Copses: 4.32 hectares
Summerhayes Wood: 3.70 hectares
The Chase: 10.61 hectares
Trotts Wood: 5.13 hectares
Wellands Coppices: 4.86 hectares
Wellsprings Wood: 3.14 hectares
Wood Copse: 5.06 hectares
Wood Moor Copse: 4.09 hectares
Yarty Copse: 4.05 hectares
Young/Piddle Woods: 28.77 hectares

Statistic 5

Water Framework Directive status – ecological status of watercourses and water bodies within the Protected Landscape:

This includes rivers, canals and surface-water transfers.

Number of waterbody catchments within each status

High: 0

Good: 0

Moderate: 19

Poor: 9

Bad: 2

Not assessed: 0

Length of water bodies within each status (km)

High: 0km

Good: 0km

Moderate: 123km

Poor: 24km

Bad: 0.8km

Not assessed: 0km

Number of lakes within each status

High: 0

Good: 0

Moderate: 2

Poor: 0

Bad: 0

Not assessed: 1

Number of groundwater waterbodies within each status

High: 4

Good: 0

Moderate: 0

Poor: 3

Bad: 0

Not assessed: 0

Statistic 9

Number of nationally designated heritage assets in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

(December 2023)

Listed buildings

Grade I: 13

Grade II*: 47

Grade II: 710

Total: 770

Scheduled monuments

26

Registered parks and gardens

0

Registered battlefields

0

Protected wreck sites

0

Target Indicator 10

Number and percentage of nationally designated heritage assets in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape deemed to be at risk:

(November 2023)

Listed buildings

Grade I: 0

Grade II*: 1 (2.1%)

Grade II: 0

Total: 1 (0.1%)

Scheduled monuments

3 (11.5%)

Statistic 11

There are 4,400 kms of hedgerows within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

Statistic 12

The total area of land in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape managed under agri-environment schemes, i.e. Countryside Stewardship Environmental Stewardship and the Sustainable Farming Incentive, is 6,800 hectares (18% of the protected landscape).

Statistic 15

Number of geological and geomorphological SSSI unit features and percentage in favourable or recovering condition:

Favourable: 1 (33.3%)

Unfavourable - no change: 2 (66.7%)

Total: 3

Wilmington Quarry

Condition: favourable

Classification: disused quarry, pits and cuttings

Interest: Earth heritage, Late Cretaceous

Furley Chalk Pit

Condition: unfavourable – no change

Classification: disused quarry, pits and cuttings

Interest: Earth heritage, Late Cretaceous

Reed's Farm Pit

Condition: unfavourable – no change

Classification: disused quarry, pits and cuttings

Interest: Earth heritage, Late Cretaceous

People

Population data, April 2024 from analysis of 2021 Census. Note that a geographical best fit approach was used to provide these figures, whereas other analysis may have used a population-weighted centroid approach which gives different results.

Statistic 17

Population estimate for Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

16,400.

Statistic 18

Average age of the population living in Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

48

Statistic 19

Proportion of the population within each ethnic group in Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: <1%

Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African: <1%

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: 1%

White: 98%

Other ethnic groups: <1%

Based on allocation of Output Areas, Census 2021.

Source: Defra analysis; [Ethnic group - Office for National Statistics](#).

Statistic 20

Median earnings in Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

£2,100 (per calendar month).

Based on apportioning of local authorities and rounded to nearest £50.

Source: Defra analysis; [Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

Statistic 21

House purchase affordability ratios in Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

Affordability ratio: 9

Based on apportioning of middle-layer Super Output Areas. Ratios have been rounded to the nearest whole number. They represent the mean house purchase price to mean gross annual household income, i.e. full-time employees in the area could expect to spend around 9 times their annual earnings buying a home.

Sources: Defra analysis; [House price statistics for small areas in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#); Income estimates for small areas - ONS ; [Housing affordability in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#).

Statistic 22

Registered businesses by size in Blackdown Hills National Landscape, 2021/22:

10+ employees: 80 (5%)

1-9+ employees: 895 (61%)

0 employees: 490 (33%)

Total number of local units: 1465 (100%)

Source: Defra analysis; [Inter-Departmental Business Register \(IDBR\) - Office for National Statistics](#).

Local units of registered businesses in Blackdown Hills National Landscape by industry type, 2021/22:

Accommodation & food service activities: 60 (4%)
Administrative & support service activities: 85 (6%)
Agriculture, forestry & fishing: 560 (38%)
Arts, entertainment & recreation: 30 (2%)
Construction: 130 (9%)
Education, health, and social work: 60 (4%)
Finance: 15 (1%)
Information & communication: 40 (3%)
Manufacturing: 70 (5%)
Mining/ quarrying, and utilities: 5 (0%)
Professional, scientific & technical services: 155 (11%)
Public administration and defence; other services: 50 (3%)
Real estate activities: 45 (3%)
Transport & storage: 30 (2%)
Wholesale & retail trade, repair of motor vehicles: 130 (9%)
Total: 1465

Source: Defra analysis; [Inter-Departmental Business Register \(IDBR\) - Office for National Statistics](#).

Statistic 23

Proportion of the population living in each decile of deprivation in Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

Based on apportioning of Lower-Layer Super Output Areas.

Decile 1: 0%

Decile 2: 0%

Decile 3: 0%

Decile 4: 0%

Decile 5: 33%

Decile 6: 44%

Decile 7: 8%

Decile 8: 15%

Decile 9: 0%

Decile 10: 0%

Average IMD decile (mode): 6

Average IMD decile (median): 6

Source: Defra analysis; [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK](#)

Nature

Target indicator 2

Percentage of SSSI features within Blackdown Hills National Landscape in favourable condition:

Favourable: 7

Unfavourable – Recovering: 19

Unfavourable - No change: 5

Unfavourable – Declining: 3

Partially destroyed: 0

Not Recorded : 9

Total no. of SSSI features: 43

% SSSI features in favourable condition: 16.3%

Target Indicator 3

Percentage of SSSI features within Blackdown Hills National Landscape assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition:

Negative: 43

Positive: 0

Total: 43

% SSSI features on track: 0%

Note: 'negative' refers to actions which have not been yet undertaken or which are resulting in a negative impact on the SSSI.

Statistic 1

Priority habitat – totals

Priority habitat area: 4,556 ha

Protected Landscape area: 36,959 ha

Priority habitat %: 12%

Priority habitat area – by main habitat type

Not priority habitat: 32,402 ha

Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh: 60 ha

Deciduous woodland: 3,538 ha

Good quality semi improved grassland: 285 ha

Lowland calcareous grassland: 24 ha

Lowland dry acid grassland: 19 ha

Lowland fens: 88 ha

Lowland heathland: 149 ha

Lowland meadows: 142 ha

Ponds: 0

Purple moor grass and rush pastures: 169 ha

Traditional orchard: 82 ha

Statistic 2

Area of land (km²) within Blackdown Hills National Landscape designated at international, national and local level for nature conservation:

Local Nature Reserves (LNR): 21.53 ha (0.1%)

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC): 20.34 ha (0.1%)

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): 638.85 ha (1.7%)

Climate

Target Indicator 7

Area of peat committed for restoration by March 2025:

0 ha

Note: Only six National Landscapes return a result for this indicator.

Statistic 6

Area, depth and percentage cover of peatland within Blackdown Hills National Landscape:

Extent of types of peat:

Deep peaty soils (>40cm) 0

Shallow peaty soils (10-40cm) 0

Soils with peaty pockets (scattered pockets) 10017.17 ha (27.1%)

Target Indicator 8

Extent of woodland cover; The area (in hectares) of woodland in Blackdown Hills National Landscape, by woodland type from the National Forest Inventory (NFI).

Interim data, with extent of tree canopy cover to be released when available.

Broadleaved: 3,766 ha

Conifer: 772 ha

Felled: 338 ha

Ground Prepared for New Planting: 11 ha

Mixed: 388 ha

Shrub: 16 ha

Young trees: 87 ha

Total: 5,379 ha



Blackdown Hills National Landscape: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2025-2030

Adoption draft

April 2025

PART C: 5 year Strategic Delivery Plan 2025-2030

INTRODUCTION

There is a hierarchy of strategies and plans within which the National Landscape 5 year Delivery Plan sits:

- The 20-year **vision** in the revised 5 year National Landscape Management Plan sets the direction for the work of the National Landscapes Partnership. Flowing from this, **objectives and policies** are defined that *conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape*, tackling issues that impact the National Landscape as well as seeking opportunities to enhance it.
- Embedded in the National Landscape Management Plan, this **5 year Delivery Plan** sets high level actions and National Landscape Partnership delivery goals, in order to deliver agreed measurable outcomes.
- Guided by the 5 year Delivery Plan, **annual National Landscape Business Plans** sets out key priorities and actions for the National Landscapes Partnership, that follow a thread all the way down from the vision and via monitoring, it can be demonstrated (see below) that each of the action/s (focusing primarily on the actions associated with Key Priorities) help deliver objectives and policies as set out in the National Landscape Management Plan.
- Monitoring via the Protected Landscape Targets and Outcome Framework (PLTOF) and other indicators, will help in demonstrating impact and can be related back to the government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) and other plans and strategies e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Climate Action Plans/ Strategies.

National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30

The revised Management Plan 2025-2030 is jointly 'owned' by the component Local Authorities.

The National Landscape Management Plan has 4 themes (Place, People, Nature & Climate), each with Objectives, Principles and Policies per Topic. It provides a vision for the future, identifies the challenges and opportunities for the area, and how these will be tackled.

It aims to:

- Inform and influence decisions
- Stimulate and prioritise action
- Promote collaboration
- Help prioritise resources

Its audiences include:

- Local authority partners
- Other National Landscape Partnership organisations
- Relevant public and statutory bodies
- Landowners and managers

- Local communities and businesses

This 5 year Blackdown Hills National Landscape Delivery Plan 2025-30

The Management Plan outlines the strategic priorities necessary to achieve the objectives set out under the 4 themes (Place, People, Nature & Climate) and the main programmes, projects and partnerships that will provide the action.

National Landscape Business Plan 2025-26

The annual plans for the National Landscape team and main partners is informed by the 5 year National Landscape Delivery Plan. The National Landscape team leads on some actions, while with others it works in partnership or plays a supportive role, with other National Landscape partners leading.

The actions follow the same 4 Themes of the National Landscape Management Plan. The Objectives (from the Management Plan) and the Partnership Delivery actions (from the Delivery Plan) are listed at the top of each of the Theme headings.

The National Landscapes Business Plan provides the financial figures for the Defra grant, and the support agreed by the local authority funding partners.

Its audience includes: National Landscapes staff team, National Landscapes partners, Funding partners and Other stakeholders

This Delivery Plan is subject to change; first version April 2025.

Key priorities and actions

- The table below highlights the priority work areas of the National Landscape Partnership for the period 2025-2030 (split into the 4 Management Plan themes), within which there will be a mix of core work and externally funded programmes/ component projects
- The priority work areas are designed to be ambitious yet achievable (through direct delivery, support or advocacy mechanisms), however many are reliant on external funding. Many of the activities covered in the detail of the plan are embraced in a number of the key projects/ initiatives.

| THEME 1: PLACE | |
|-----------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support the farming and land management community through agricultural transition, via farm facilitation support programmes and by responding to ever-changing agricultural policy and the need/incentives to provide ecosystem services for society, including green finance • Step up the action needed to tackle Water Environment Regulations (WER) water quality failures, linked to drinking water/ resource (including drought), surface quality and downstream coastal waters. • Undertake significant new tree planting, including orchards, restore undermanaged woodlands (to promote regeneration), and restore/reestablish 'trees outside woods' habitats, seeking an additional 1108.76 hectares of tree canopy and woodland cover by 2050. • Increase the uptake in agri-environment schemes, across all components of Environmental Land Management (ELM), including supporting the Luppitt Landscape Recovery scheme • Desk based appraisal of the historic environment - use the results to identify where the most significant gaps in understanding are and how they can be addressed. The potential opportunities for community heritage and citizen science projects to help fill those gaps will also be identified. • Continue to inform and influence planning policy, decisions and implementation through development of additional planning guidance and other tools and mechanisms, working with local planning authorities. Develop a shared understanding of the potential opportunities and effects of measures such as carbon offsetting, nutrient credits and biodiversity net gain in relation to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. |
| THEME 2: PEOPLE | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalise on opportunities to secure physical works to improve accessibility, such as accessible trails, parking and facilities. • Ensure that projects have opportunities for volunteering and engagement with schools built in • The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to take positive action to increase diversity within the management group and the voices reflected in decision making • Promote activities, including organised activities, which support the physical, mental and social health of residents and visitors • Collect data so that we have a clear definition and better understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion issues relevant to the Blackdown Hills. This includes undertaking further work to deepen our knowledge of the population within the Blackdown Hills and the surrounding area and responding accordingly |

- Build relationships among local community organisations and agencies to collaborate on inclusion
- Undertake an audit of the current ways in which the qualities of the landscape and historic environment are presented to the local population and the visiting public. Use the results to identify the opportunities for methods and locations for improvement in the presentation of information and explore ways that the local community could be actively involved
- Collaboration among partners to champion and find solutions to practical issues widely affecting communities, such as high speed broadband connectivity and highway maintenance

THEME 3: NATURE

- Restore all priority habitat to a favourable condition, thereby helping to restore the characteristic 'patchwork' landscapes and habitat features for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, particularly springline mires
- Undertake significant work to move SSSI sites from 'unfavourable recovering' to 'favourable'
- Enhance the data baseline, particularly for areas outside designated sites, including refresh / ground-truthing priority habitat maps to improve their accuracy and coverage
- Ensure that activities for nature are consistent with actions arising from the Local Nature Recovery Strategies in Devon and Somerset
- Focus on habitat creation in the highest priority areas, as per the Lawton hierarchy

THEME 4: CLIMATE

Adaptation:

- Mainstream soil health and regenerative farming and forestry techniques, in order to build resilience of soils, that will in turn help with infiltration of water and storage of carbon
- Nature based solutions that build resilience for communities and critical infrastructure, as well as provide a range of co-benefits including for biodiversity, carbon and water quality- e.g. by reducing flooding in the built environment, providing 'natural sponge' type functions to store and slowly release water in times of drought and 'natural filter' to help improve water quality.

Mitigation:

- Produce a comprehensive pathway to net zero by 2026

ACTION PROGRAMME

- The table below shows the actions under each of the four themes (Place, People, Nature and Climate)
- Acronyms are listed in full in the glossary (below the action table)
- ‘Targets’ listed below are the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcome Framework (PLTOF) targets

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------------|---------------------------|-----|--|--|--|------------------|
| 1: PLACE | | | | | | |
| | Target 5 ²³ | 1.1 | Increase the uptake of appropriate agri-environment scheme (AES) options, aiming for 75%+ uptake of Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), to underpin Countryside Stewardship and Landscape Recovery (the three components of Environmental Land Management- ELM) | BHNL (RPA, NE, FC) | Ascertain where the SFI agreements are currently located, where are the gaps in take-up and look to fill these, via land advisory effort that supports farmers and land managers in choosing the most beneficial options Aim to increase take-up from agri-environment schemes from 20% to 27% (2017 level) | |

¹ Is not necessarily the National Landscape staff unit

² “Ensuring at least 65% to 80% of land managers adopt nature friendly farming on at least 10% to 15% of their land by 2030”

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|-----------------------|-----|--|--|--|------------------|
| | Target 5 | 1.2 | Support and add value to schemes such as the Luppitt Landscape Recovery project (Landscape Recovery round 2) and the potential extension to the Upper Axe Landscape Recovery project (round 1), as well as rolling out successful Landscape Recovery type management to other areas in the Blackdown Hills | BHNL (RPA, NE, FC) | Better understand how to add value and articulate what rolling out Landscape Recovery type management looks like, then implement | |
| | Target 8 ⁴ | 1.3 | Undertake significant new tree planting, including orchards, restore undermanaged woodlands (to promote regeneration), and restore/re-establish 'trees outside woods' habitats, seeking an additional 1108.76 hectares of tree canopy and woodland cover by 2050 Provide woodland advisory support for willing landowners (including relevant authorities), while applying the 'right place right tree' principles. The Somerset and Devon Tree Strategies will help guide and support this | BHNL (FC) | Therefore, 39.6 hectares per year between 2022 and 2050. There are 5,380 ha of woodland covering 14.5% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Brings the total amount of woodland to 9,302.93 hectares (22,988 acres) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obtain data to inform progress towards the target e.g. EWCO Create a shared plan to achieve this target Work with the Somerset and Devon Tree Strategy teams and woodland advisers | |

⁴ "Increase tree canopy and woodland cover (combined) by 3% of total land area in Protected Landscapes by 2050 (from 2022 baseline)"

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|------------------------|-----|---|--|---|------------------|
| | Target 10 ⁵ | 1.4 | Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes There are 770 Listed Buildings and 26 Scheduled Monuments. Of these, eight assets are at risk; this is a minor improvement since 2019 | BHNL (HE, DCC) | Review the reasons why the eight assets are still at risk and produce an Action Plan for removing as many as possible off the list, as quickly as possible | |
| | Other priorities | 1.5 | Step up the action needed to tackle Water Framework Directive (WFD) failures (now referred to as the Water Environment Regulations (WER), linked to drinking water quality and supply (including drought), surface quality and downstream coastal waters. This will involve working with land managers, water industry and other delivery partners | BHNL (EA, CSF, East Devon Catchment Partnership) | Support the Culm, Otter and Axe water quality citizen science groups, under the Making Rivers Better banner Focus significant project effort at improving water quality, via Triple Axe, Connecting the Culm and partnerships projects in the Otter catchment and headwaters of the Tone and Parrett | |
| | Other priorities | 1.6 | Continue to promote, deliver and advocate for 'mainstreaming' natural-based solutions as a mechanism to provide resilience to property and infrastructure, both within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape but also, importantly, downstream where major critical infrastructure is at risk from flooding and where improving resilience is only possible through upstream interventions | BHNL (All partners) | Nature-based solution interventions rely on land managers to collaborate at scale. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership will play a key role here, to help support, incentivise and deliver (Connecting the Culm, Triple Axe) | |

⁵ "Decrease the number of nationally designated heritage assets at risk in Protected Landscapes"

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|------------------|-----|---|--|---|------------------|
| | Other priorities | 1.7 | Continue to support the farming and land management community through agricultural transition, via farm facilitation support programmes and by responding to ever-changing agricultural policy and the need/incentives to provide ecosystem services for society, including green finance opportunities such as nutrient credits and Biodiversity Net Gain | BHNL (NFU, CLBA) | The National Landscape Partnership play a key convening, supporting and delivery role here and lead on the farm facilitation work (Blackdown Hills Sustainable Farming Network) | |
| | | 1.8 | Desk based appraisal of the historic environment - use the results to identify where the most significant gaps in understanding are and how they can be addressed. The potential opportunities for community heritage and citizen science projects to help fill those gaps will also be identified. | BHNL (DCC, SWHT) | <i>To be determined.</i> | |
| | | 1.9 | Continue to inform and influence planning policy, decisions and implementation through development of additional planning guidance and other tools and mechanisms, working with local planning authorities. Develop a shared understanding of the potential opportunities and effects of measures such as carbon offsetting, nutrient credits and biodiversity net gain in relation to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. | BHNL (LPAs) | <i>To be determined.</i> | |

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁶ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----|--|--|---|------------------|
| 2: PEOPLE | | | | | | |
| | Target 9 ⁷ | 2.1 | Capitalise on opportunities to secure physical works to improve accessibility, such as accessible trails, parking and facilities | BHNL (All partners) | Continue and expand (subject to funding) the Linking People and Places (LPAP) programme Utilise FiPL and Defra Access for ALL funding | |
| | Target 9 | 2.2 | Ensure that projects have opportunities for volunteering and engagement with schools built in | BHNL (All partners) | Build into all current projects including Connecting the Culm and Triple Axe Re-build the volunteering offer Maintain the education programme each year, moving the focus around different themes/ topics and areas | |
| | Target 9 | 2.3 | The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to take positive action to increase diversity within the management group and the voices reflected in decision making | BHNL (PMG) | Work hard to diversify the Management Group and make sure that a range of voices are heard and have a role in decision making | |
| | Target 9 | 2.4 | Promote activities, including organised activities, which support the physical, mental and social health of residents and visitors | BHNL (All partners) | <i>To be determined.</i> | |

⁶ Is not necessarily the National Landscape staff unit

⁷ "Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using metrics based on those in the Defra Access for All programme".

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁶ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|------------------|-----|---|--|---|------------------|
| | Other priorities | 2.5 | Collect more data so that we have a clear definition and better understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion issues relevant to the Blackdown Hills | BHNL (All partners) | This includes undertaking further work to deepen our knowledge of the population within the Blackdown Hills and the surrounding area and responding accordingly | |
| | Other priorities | 2.6 | Build relationships among local community organisations and agencies to collaborate on inclusion | BHNL (All partners) | Create and pump prime a Nature Connection Network, help address barriers to engagement (e.g. transport) and enable/ support group training on key topics | |
| | Other priorities | 2.7 | Undertake an audit of the current ways in which the qualities of the landscape and historic environment are presented to the local population and the visiting public. Use the results to identify the opportunities for methods and locations for improvement in the presentation of information and explore ways that the local community could be actively involved. | BHNL | <i>To be determined.</i> | |
| | Other priorities | 2.8 | Collaboration among partners to champion and find solutions to practical issues widely affecting communities, such as high speed broadband connectivity and highway maintenance | BHNL (PC, BHPN, LA) | <i>To be determined.</i> | |

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁸ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----|--|--|---|---------------|
| 3: NATURE | | | | | | |
| | Target 4 ⁹ | 3.1 | Restore all priority habitat to a favourable condition | BHNL (All partners, FC, FE, LNRS responsible authorities) | <p>There are 4,724.43 ha of priority habitats covering 12.8% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape</p> <p>There are 867 ha of ancient woodland covering 2.3% of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.</p> <p>Investigate PAWS¹⁰ woodland and create an Action Plan</p> <p>Prioritise improving the condition of priority habitat (and ensuring no deterioration) via actions 1.1 to 1.4 listed above</p> | |

⁸ Is not necessarily the National Landscape staff unit

⁹ "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".

¹⁰ Plantation on Ancient Woodland

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁸ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|-----------|-----|---|--|--|---------------|
| | Target 4 | 3.2 | Enhance the data baseline, particularly for areas outside designated sites, including refresh / ground-truthing priority habitat maps to improve their accuracy and coverage. | BHNL (All partners) | <p>Note that the priority habitat inventory (PHI) is not considered definitive and underestimates the true extent of priority habitat. Other habitat inventories also underestimate the extent of habitat within mosaics</p> <p>Ascertain (by proxy) what condition all priority habitat is currently in, making assumptions e.g. best case (based on Devon Wildlife Trust data) is 50%</p> <p>45% of woodland is in 'active management'</p> | |

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁸ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|-----------|-----|--|--|---|------------------|
| | Target 4 | 3.3 | Conserve and restore the characteristic 'patchwork' landscapes and habitat features for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, particularly springline mires. | BHNL (All partners) | Value additional co-benefits including, integrated natural capital benefits from nature recovery include carbon budgets, catchment-scale improvements to fluvial management, well-being benefits from access and recreation, and cultural and heritage enhancements | |

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁸ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|---|-----|---|--|--|------------------|
| | Target 2 ¹¹ and 3 ¹² | 3.4 | Undertake significant work to move SSSI sites from 'unfavourable recovering' to 'favourable'. | BHNL (NE) | <p>This will require more condition surveying by Natural England and more incentives through Environmental Land Management (ELM) and other schemes, backed up by trusted local advisers</p> <p>The current status of SSSI condition in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is that only 16.3% is in favourable condition. 94% is in a favourable or unfavourable recovering condition. There is one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, currently failing to meet its conservation targets (marsh fritillary butterfly)</p> | |

¹¹ "Bring 80% of Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs) within Protected Landscapes into favourable condition by 2042"

¹² "60% of SSSIs within Protected Landscapes assessed as having 'actions on track' to achieve favourable condition by 31 January 2028"

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ⁸ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|------------------------|-----|---|--|---|---------------|
| | Target 1 ¹³ | 3.5 | Focus on habitat creation in the highest priority areas, as per the Lawton hierarchy. [See habitat network opportunity/targeting map] | BHNL (NE, LNRS responsible authorities) | <p>If the target was pro rata'd based for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape area without any local factors this would be 2,919.10 ha. This would be equivalent to 145.96 ha per year between 2022 and 2042</p> <p>Use the BHNL Nature Recovery Plan to work with partners to agree how this target can be achieved</p> | |

¹³ "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)"

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹⁴ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|---------------|---|-----|--|---|---|------------------|
| 4: CLIMATE | | | | | | |
| | Mitigation: Target 6 ¹⁵ and actions for shallow/pocket peat | 4.1 | Produce a comprehensive pathway to net zero for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape following these steps agreed among the National Landscapes family: | BHNL (DCC, EDDC, MDDC, SC) | Using the greenhouse gas emission data from government (and other data sources) to identify key areas of emissions, Assess which areas the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and key partners can impact directly, and address emissions that are outside the jurisdiction of the National Landscape by engaging with local authorities, businesses, or other relevant stakeholders. Prioritise areas for immediate impact and plan how to engage stakeholders to reduce emissions or promote land use changes for carbon sequestration Coordinate with existing plans and integrate climate action plans with nature recovery strategies to | |

¹⁴ Is not necessarily the National Landscape staff unit

¹⁵ "Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions in Protected Landscapes to net zero by 2050 relative to 1990 levels".

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹⁴ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|-------------|-----|---|---|---|------------------|
| | | | | | create a cohesive approach to climate action. Evaluate the feasibility and interdependencies of different actions and identify potential barriers to implementation. Develop planned actions for the short, medium, and long term to meet Net Zero targets | |
| | Adaptation: | 4.2 | Produce a climate change adaptation management plan for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, linked with this management plan by 2028, and all future plans. | BHNL (DCC, EDDC, MDDC, SC) | Work collaboratively to address the risks and actions identified in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape climate change adaptation plan, seeking to highlight where actions from the Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Adaptation Plan and Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy to build resilience and allow communities and the natural world to adapt, can be most effective. | |

| Theme | Sub-theme | Ref | 5 year Actions/projects (new or continuing)- <i>Strategic Delivery</i> | Lead partner ¹⁴ (supporting partners) | Targets/ Milestone- <i>BHNL Partnership delivery/ key role</i> | Deadline (FY) |
|-------|------------|-----|--|---|--|------------------|
| | Adaptation | 4.3 | | | Refine the climate adaptation risk assessment matrix already drafted, which identifies the climate risks in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and use the information to develop the required climate adaptation plan for the area: | |

| GLOSSARY | | | |
|--------------------|---|---------|--|
| National Landscape | Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty | HoSWLEP | Heart of South West Local Enterprise Partnership |
| BHNL | Blackdown Hills National Landscape | LA | Local Authority |
| EDNL | East Devon National Landscape | LNP | Local Nature Partnership |
| MHNL | Mendip Hills National Landscape | LPA | Local Planning Authority |
| NLA | National Landscapes Association | LWS | Local Wildlife Site |
| QHNL | Quantock Hills National Landscape | MDDC | Mid Devon District Council |
| BHPN | Blackdown Hills Parish Network | NE | Natural England |
| BHRGA | Blackdown Hills Rough Grazing Association | NT | National Trust |
| BC | Butterfly Conservation | OSG | Officer Support Group |
| DBRC | Devon Biodiversity Records Centre | PMG | Partnership Management Group |
| DCC | Devon County Council | SC | Somerset Council |
| DLPG | Devon Landscape Policy Group | SDF | Sustainable Development Fund |
| DWT | Devon Wildlife Trust | SERC | Somerset Environmental Records Centre |
| EA | Environment Agency | SM | Scheduled Monument |
| EDCP | East Devon Catchment Partnership | SWHT | South West Heritage Trust |
| EDDC | East Devon District Council | SWPLF | South West Protected Landscape Forum |
| FWAGSW | FWAG South West | SWT | Somerset Wildlife Trust |
| FC | Forestry Commission | WRT | Westcountry Rivers Trust |
| FF | Facilitation Fund | WT | Woodland Trust |
| HE | Historic England | | |
| NLHF | National Lottery Heritage Fund | | |

Blackdown Hills National Landscape: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2025 - 2030

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report

Final Draft

April 2025



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Executive Summary

This Screening Report has been produced to determine whether it is necessary to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape 2025 – 2030 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan.

It is determined that full Strategic Environmental Assessment will not be required for the 2025 – 2030 Management Plan because the Plan demonstrates little deviation from its previous iterations. The 2014-2019 version was subject to full Strategic Environmental Assessment and the current revision is unlikely to display further significant environmental effects.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan

Although now known as a National Landscape, 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' (AONB) remains the legal term for the designation and so is referred to as such in legislation.

Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 establishes the primary purpose of AONB designation as the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. Section 85 of the CRoW Act (as amended by section 245 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023) places a duty on all relevant authorities (public bodies) to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'. Under section 89, the relevant local authorities must prepare and publish a Management Plan for each AONB that "formulates their policy for the management of the area of outstanding natural beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it"; and keep it under review (every 5 years).

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan (from hereon in referred to as 'the Management Plan') addresses this legal requirement by setting out the policy framework for the conservation and enhancement of the designated Blackdown Hills AONB for the next five years. Put simply, it describes the Special Qualities of the area and why the National Landscape is important, sets out an agreed long term vision for its future, identifies the challenges and opportunities for the area, and sets out objectives and policies for how these will be addressed.

The Management Plan 2025-2030 is the result of a review of the previous iteration (2019-2024), and is a revised and updated version of all previous management plans for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. The first revision in 2009 and subsequent 2014–2019 management plan both underwent full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

1.2 Purpose of this Report

The purpose of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening is to determine whether a plan, programme, or strategy is likely to have significant environmental effects, thus deciding if a full SEA is required.

This report has been produced to determine whether it is necessary to undertake an SEA of the Management Plan for 2025-2030. This is to ensure compliance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004 (Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 1633), commonly referred to as 'The Strategic Environmental Assessment or SEA Regulations'.

The three statutory bodies for the purposes of SEA screening are Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England. These bodies will be consulted for their views on the conclusions of this screening assessment.

2.1 SEA Guidance

This Screening Report has been developed in accordance with extant government guidance: [A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive](#) (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005), and with reference to [Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal - GOV.UK](#).

In 2012, Natural England, the National Association for AONBs and Defra published an 'Advice Note to AONB Partnerships, the Conservation Boards and Relevant Authorities on Management Plan Reviews', which gave guidance on considering the need for SEA:

'The requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directives, and the need for compliance with them, apply to new management plans, and to revisions or re-issues of existing management plans.'

AONBs and National Park Authorities (protected landscape managing bodies) should screen their revised or amended Management Plan to evaluate whether the individual or cumulative effect of the changes which they are proposing is likely to have a significant effect, as defined under the Strategic Environmental Assessment or Habitats Regulations. They may wish to seek informal guidance from Natural England (and Environment Agency, English Heritage for SEA) at this screening stage'.

That same guidance goes on to state that:

'Given that all the extant AONB Management Plans have been assessed under the regulations, the AONB Partnership / Conservation Board (protected landscape managing body) may decide that the proposed changes to the extant plan are not likely to have a significant effect and may conclude that there is no requirement to carry out further assessment. The AONB Partnership / Conservation Board should record the screening decision and supporting reasons for it'.

2.2 Screening Process

The 2005 guidance referred to at Section 2.1 helpfully synthesises the requirements of the European SEA Directive, and as transposed into UK law by the SEA Regulations, into a flowchart to determine which plans and programmes require SEA.

Figure 1 shows the flowchart with the decision process applied for the Management Plan (blue arrows).

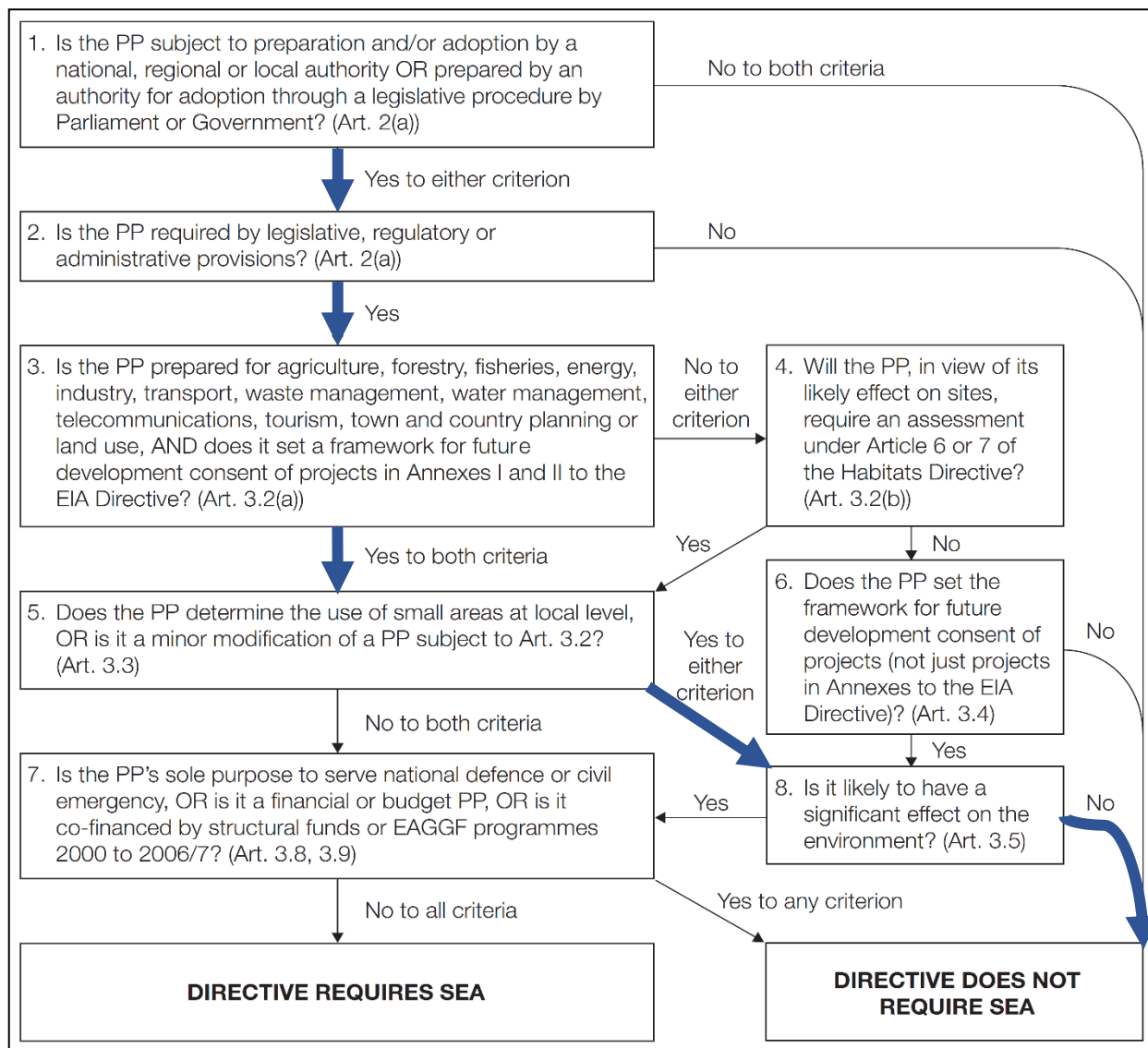


Figure 1 – SEA decision process for the Management Plan. Flowchart taken from “A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive” (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005). ‘PP’ is an abbreviation for ‘Plan or Programme’. Article numbers refer to those of the SEA Directive.

Table 1 provides an explanation for the decisions taken within the flowchart in Figure 1.

| Flowchart Question | Decision | Explanation |
|--|----------------|---|
| 1. Is the PP subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2 (a)) | Yes | The Management Plan is being prepared by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership through delegation from Devon County Council, Somerset Council, East Devon District Council, and Mid Devon District Council, and it will be adopted by them. |
| 2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2(a)) | Yes | Part IV, Section 89 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 sets out the requirement for Local Authorities to publish and review a management plan for their AONB. |
| 3. Is the PP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use AND does it set a framework for future development consents of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art. 3.2 (a)) | Yes | <p>Although the Management Plan is not explicitly prepared to cover these topics, it could arguably influence all of them within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape.</p> <p>Whilst it is unlikely that development of the scale described for projects in Annexes I and II of the EIA Directive (Schedule 1 and 2 EIA Regulations) will occur in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape as a matter of course, the Management Plan nonetheless would be used as a “framework for future development consent” – all the more so in the context of relevant authorities duty to seek to further the purpose of designation.</p> <p>The “framework” is defined by the European Commission¹ as “criteria or conditions that guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent. Such criteria could place limits on the type of activity or development which is to be permitted in a given area; or they could contain conditions which must be met by the applicant if permission is to be granted; or they could be designed to preserve certain characteristics of the area concerned”.</p> |
| 4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 | Non-Applicable | |

¹ European Commission (2001) [*Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment*](#)

| Flowchart Question | Decision | Explanation |
|---|----------------|---|
| or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art 3.2 (b)) | | |
| 5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art 3.2? (Art 3.3) | Yes | <p>The Management Plan does not “determine the use of small areas at local level”. The European Commission¹ suggest that this phrase is intended to refer to plans that, for example, outline how buildings must be constructed.</p> <p>However, the Management Plan is a minor modification to the 2019-2024 Management Plan. The European Commission advise that the interpretation of ‘minor’ must consider the likelihood that the modified elements of the plan will lead to significant environmental effects. See Flowchart Question 8 below.</p> |
| 6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects ? A narrower interpretation of ‘framework for development consents’ would exclude the (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive) (Art 3.4) | Non-Applicable | |
| 7. Is the PP’s sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, or is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7 (Art 3.8, 3.9)? | Non-Applicable | |
| 8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art 3.5) | No | <p>Firstly, looking strategically, the PP does not propose uses or make allocations, and the improvements to the National Landscape resulting from the strategic direction given by the Management Plan are unlikely to have negative effects on the environment.</p> <p>In addition, the objectives of the Management Plan (reflecting the purpose of designation) seek to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape, which will have a moderating impact on any development and other actions that may seek to modify the environmental character of the National Landscape.</p> |

| Flowchart Question | Decision | Explanation |
|--------------------|----------|---|
| | | Furthermore, the vision of the Management Plan, although updated, remains true to the previous version, and the environmental outcomes of the revised objectives and policies are not substantially or significantly different – see Appendices 1 and 2 of this report. |

2.3 Screening Conclusion

It is determined that an SEA will not be required for the 2025-2030 Management Plan because the Plan demonstrates little deviation from its previous iteration (as described in Appendices 1 and 2).

The previous version (2019-2024) was itself an iteration of the 2014-2019 plan which was subject to full SEA. As such it is concluded that therefore the current revision is unlikely to display further significant environmental effects and hence the modifications are considered minor within the context of question 5 in the flowchart shown in Figure 1.

Appendix 1 – Comparison of Management Plan Objectives

The table below compares the 2019 – 2024 Management Plan objectives (as updated post-public consultation) with the proposed objectives for the 2025-2030 Management Plan. The objectives and policies were checked and compared to identify and determine whether the modifications are minor or could lead to outcomes that would result in the plan having a significant effect on the environment.

| Proposed Objective 2025-2030 | Similar Objectives 2019-24 | Notes on likely significance of any divergence to the environment |
|--|---|---|
| PLACE | | |
| To restore, conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services it provides. | Objective NC To conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the AONB and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services they provide | Minor Positive. The proposed objective recognises there may be requirement to restore features as well as conserve and enhance. |
| To support sustainable farming, forestry and land management practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and deliver a range of ecosystem services | Objective FLM To support sustainable farming and forestry practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the AONB and deliver a range of ecosystem services | None. The proposed objective in the 2025-2030 Management Plan achieves the same outcome. |
| To strengthen the Blackdown Hills special sense of place, with a diversity of landscape patterns and pictures, unique geology, archaeology, and buildings of architectural appeal, through sound custodianship | Objective LC To ensure that the distinctive character and qualities of the Blackdown Hills landscape are understood, conserved, enhanced and restored Objective CH To ensure effective conservation, management and understanding of the Blackdown Hills historic environment, including historic buildings, archaeological sites and heritage landscapes Objective PD To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills by ensuring that all development affecting the AONB is of the highest quality, sensitive to landscape setting and conserves its wildlife, historic character and other special qualities | None. The proposed objective in the 2025-2030 Management Plan achieves the same outcome. The three previous objectives collectively are concerned with strengthening sense of place through sound custodianship. |

| Proposed Objective 2025-2030 | Similar Objectives 2019-24 | Notes on likely significance of any divergence to the environment |
|---|---|---|
| PEOPLE | | |
| To nurture flourishing communities, where the population is both cohesive and diverse, where there is easy access to a range of services and facilities, and where the commitment of local people helps to conserve and enhance the environment, heritage and landscape of the Blackdown Hills. | Objective CC To foster vibrant, healthy and resilient communities who enjoy a high quality of life and feel connected to the AONB and its special qualities | None. The proposed objective in the 2025-2030 Management Plan achieves the same outcome. |
| To foster a thriving and diverse Blackdown Hills economy that provides jobs for local people, makes wise use of local resources and benefits local communities, while conserving and enhancing the outstanding landscape and distinctive character of the countryside and villages. | Objective RET To sustain a local economy that makes wise use of the resources of the AONB and conserves and enhances the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills Objective CC To foster vibrant, healthy and resilient communities who enjoy a high quality of life and feel connected to the AONB and its special qualities | None. The proposed objective in the 2025-2030 Management Plan achieves the same outcome. |
| To ensure that appropriate opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and its special qualities that are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty are available to all and that everyone feels welcome. | Objective AE To ensure that opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and special qualities are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | The parallel Habitat Regulations Assessment proposes that this objective is amended to include the reference to conserving and enhancing natural beauty, and that being so, there is no divergence . |
| To commit to eliminate discrimination, provide equal opportunities, and challenge prejudice and foster good relationships between diverse groups in and around the Blackdown Hills. | No direct equivalent, but is relatable to; Objective CC To foster vibrant, healthy and resilient communities who enjoy a high quality of life and feel connected to the AONB and its special qualities | This is outside the scope of SEA, as it seeks to address equality, diversity and inclusion. |
| NATURE | | |
| To ensure the effective conservation, enhancement, expansion and connectivity of habitats to form coherent and resilient ecological networks across the Blackdown Hills and beyond, facilitating the movement of | Objective BG To conserve geodiversity and ensure effective conservation, enhancement, expansion and connectivity of habitats, forming coherent and resilient ecological networks across the Blackdown Hills and | None. The proposed objective in the 2025-2030 Management Plan achieves the same outcome. Geodiversity is now addressed in the Place theme and is encapsulated in the relevant objective there. |

| Proposed Objective 2025-2030 | Similar Objectives 2019-24 | Notes on likely significance of any divergence to the environment |
|--|--|---|
| species of conservation concern across the landscape. | beyond, facilitating the movement of priority species across the landscape | |
| CLIMATE | | |
| To safeguard the carbon stores in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, reduce emissions from land and increase carbon sequestration, in ways which are compatible with nature. | Objective NC To conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the AONB and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services they provide | None. The new objective deals with a specific element of natural capital stock and relevant ecosystem services. |
| To promote and deliver nature-based solutions to climate change. | Objective NC To conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the AONB and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services they provide | None. The new objective deals with a specific element of natural capital stock and relevant ecosystem services. |
| To play an active role in addressing the climate emergency by delivering meaningful actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, ensuring the actions are aligned with existing national, regional and local plans. | No direct objective, but aligns with policies NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint PM1 Encourage co-ordination and partnership amongst the wide range of national, regional and local agencies and organisations to secure funding for the care and enhancement of the AONB | Minor positive. The new objective deals with a specific, important priority that was not specifically spelt out previously. It is more pro-active than the previous comparable policy. |

Appendix 2 - Comparison of Management Plan Policies

The table below compares the 2019 - 2024 Management Plan policies (as updated post-public consultation) with the proposed policies for the 2025 - 2030 Management Plan.

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|--|---|
| PLACE | | |
| PL1 Approach the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape according to landscape-led principles, based on landscape character, underpinned by a sound understanding of the area's rich stock of natural and cultural capital assets and its value to society in terms of the flow of goods and services. | <p>LC1 Approach the conservation and enhancement of the AONB based on landscape character underpinned by comprehensive and up-to-date evidence bases that are also made widely available to decision makers and others</p> <p>NC3 Support studies, research and improve understanding of the AONB's rich stock of natural capital and ensure that its value to society (in terms of the flow of goods and services) is recognised and understood by decision-makers and others</p> | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them, reflecting the revised themes of the new plan. |
| PL2 The special qualities, distinctive character and key features of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape will be conserved and enhanced, and opportunities will be sought to strengthen or restore landscape character where landscape features are in poor condition, missing or fragmented. | LC7 Opportunities will be sought to strengthen landscape character by improving the condition of landscape features in poor condition and reinstating landscape features identified as missing or fragmented | Minor positive. The amended policy wording provides a fuller framework, reiterating the purpose of designation, but does not alter the outcome. |
| PL3 Promote a catchment-scale, multiple-benefit, collaborative-based approach to soil conservation and restoration, water quality improvements, reducing flood risk, and improving resilience, based on the Otter, Axe, Culm and Parrett/Tone catchments. | NC1 Promote a catchment, multiple-benefit, collaborative-based approach to soil conservation, water quality and flood alleviation improvements utilising the Otter, Axe, Culm and Parrett/Tone catchments | Minor positive. Amended wording to include soil restoration and improving resilience are typical of such an approach. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|--|--|---|
| PL4 Approaches to flood risk management and erosion control which work with natural processes, conserve the natural environment and improve biodiversity will be advocated and supported. | NC2 Improve land management in respect of the control of surface water run-off, to mitigate against flooding during more extreme weather events. Where appropriate within the landscape, seek to reinstate or improve the management of woodland, wetland and hedges to slow and store run-off | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PL5 A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming, forestry and land management sector providing a range of public goods and services will be fostered as one of the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the National Landscape. | FLM1 A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming and land management sector providing a range of public goods and services will be fostered as one of the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the AONB | None. No change to policy, other than including forestry as a separate sector. |
| PL6 Promote, encourage and support widespread take-up of Environmental Land Management schemes that help conserve and enhance natural beauty and deliver a range of environmental outcomes through sustainable farming and forestry practices. | FLM2 Encourage a high take-up of agri-environment schemes, especially high quality environmental land management that helps conserve and enhance the natural beauty through sustainable farming and forestry practices | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PL7 Encourage the production and marketing of local food, timber and other agricultural and wood products where these are compatible with the National Landscape and purpose of designation. | FLM4 Encourage the production and marketing of local food and other agricultural products where these are compatible with the AONB designation | None. No change to policy, other than including wood products as a separate sector. |
| PL8 Encourage sensitive management of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, woodlands, orchards and ponds, protect ancient woodland and veteran trees, and restore the original broadleaved character of plantations on ancient woodland sites. | FLM5 Support and promote initiatives that encourage sensitive environmental management of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, woodlands, particularly those that conserve ancient woodland and veteran trees, orchards and restore the | Minor. The policy has been amended to include ponds, and the wording simplified, but this does not alter the intended outcome. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|---|--|
| | original broadleaved character of plantations on ancient woodland sites | |
| PL9 Encourage well managed woodland creation and expansion that considers both the ecological value and landscape character of a site and surroundings and opportunities for maximising ecosystem services including natural flood management. | FLM6 Give careful consideration to the landscape and visual impact of new woodland planting schemes | Minor positive. The amended policy wording provides a more detailed framework, but does not alter the outcome. |
| PL10 Monitor, manage and mitigate damaging diseases such as ash dieback that have potential to impact negatively on landscape and biodiversity. | FLM7 Monitor, manage and mitigate damaging diseases such as ash dieback | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PL11 Wider community engagement with the farming and land management sector will be encouraged to enable a deeper understanding and appreciation of the important role played by land managers in maintaining the National Landscape's special qualities. | FLM9 Wider community engagement with the farming and land management sector will enable a deeper understanding of the important role played by land managers in maintaining the AONB's special qualities | None. The policy has been amended by the inclusion of 'encourage' – this was the intent of the previous policy but it was missed in error. It does not alter the outcome. |
| PL12 Conserve and enhance the historic built environment and rural heritage assets, support training in traditional heritage skills, and promote the use of Historic Environment Record (HER), historic landscape characterisation and other tools to inform projects, policymaking and management activities. | CH1 Conserve and enhance the historic built environment and rural heritage assets and integrate into other land management initiatives in the AONB CH2 Monitor the extent and condition of historic sites, features and landscapes in the AONB and promote the use of Historic Environment Record (HER), historic landscape characterisation and other tools to inform projects, policy-making and management activities | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them. |
| PL13 Monitor the extent and condition of historic sites, features and landscapes across the Blackdown Hills and seek to address | CH2 Monitor the extent and condition of historic sites, features and landscapes in the AONB and promote the use of Historic | Minor positive. Part of the old policy has been incorporated into a separate new policy. The amended policy wording provides |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| sites and features in poor and declining condition. | Environment Record (HER), historic landscape characterisation and other tools to inform projects, policy-making and management activities | a more detailed framework, but does not alter the outcome. |
| PL14 Promote awareness and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of the Blackdown Hills and secure effective management of important features and sites. | BG4 Ensure sites of geological and geomorphological importance are appropriately managed to conserve their special features and reduce impacts of development | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PL15 All relevant strategic, local and neighbourhood plan documents and planning decision-making will: Seek to further the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape. Utilise the Management Plan and consider other Blackdown Hills statements and guidance. Ensure that conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty is given great weight. | PD1 All relevant local and neighbourhood plan documents and planning decision-making will have regard to the AONB purpose, the management plan and other AONB statements and guidance, and ensure that conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB is given great weight | Minor positive. The new policy has been updated to reflect the updated duty to further the purpose of designation. |
| PL16 All development affecting the Blackdown Hills National Landscape should conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by: Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale. Reinforcing local distinctiveness. Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity. | PD2 All necessary development affecting the AONB will conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by: Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment, Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale, Reinforcing local distinctiveness, and Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome.. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|--|--|
| PL17 Promote and protect tranquillity and dark skies by minimising intrusive noise and development and light pollution that may undermine the intrinsic character of the National Landscape. | LC3 Promote high levels of peace and tranquillity with dark night skies by minimising noise, intrusive development and light pollution | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PL18 The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the National Landscape will be protected and enhanced. | LC5 The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the AONB will be protected | Minor positive. The amended policy wording provides a fuller framework, reiterating the purpose of designation, but does not alter the outcome. |
| PL19 The deeply rural character of much of the land adjoining the National Landscape boundary forms an essential setting for the Blackdown Hills and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character. | LC6 The deeply rural setting of much of the land adjoining the AONB boundary forms an essential setting for the AONB and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character | None. No change to policy. |
| PL20 Community-led planning tools, such as neighbourhood plans, and initiatives such as Community Land Trusts will be supported as the principal means of identifying need and securing local community assets such as affordable housing. Any development should conserve and enhance natural beauty. | PD4 Support the provision of affordable housing to meet identified local needs in locations with access to employment and local services, ensuring that developments are appropriately scaled and sited to respect landscape and settlement character, and avoiding impacts on nature conservation and historic interests CC2 Community-led planning tools (neighbourhood plans, parish plans, village design statements and others) that contribute to conserving and enhancing the AONB will be supported | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcomes. The design related detail of previous policy PD4 is covered by PL16 which covers any development. |
| PL21 Road and transport schemes (including design, maintenance, signage, landscaping and safety measures) affecting the National Landscape will be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to landscape character and special qualities, seeking to | TH1 Road and transport schemes (including design, maintenance, signage, landscaping and safety measures) affecting the AONB will be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to landscape character, having regard to the purpose of AONB | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|--|--|
| further the purpose of designation. The landscape, biodiversity and cultural features of the area's road network such as hedge banks, flower-rich verges, and locally distinctive historic highway furniture, will be protected, conserved and enhanced. | designation and conserving and enhancing the area's special qualities. The landscape and cultural features of the AONB's road network (including hedge banks, flower-rich verges, and locally distinctive historic highway furniture) will be protected and conserved | |
| PEOPLE | | |
| PE1 Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of sensitive and sustainable opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area. | <p>AE3 Opportunities to use the Blackdown Hills AONB to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, seeking a range of sensitive and sustainable access opportunities for users of all abilities to enjoy the special qualities of the AONB</p> <p>CEA1 Through promotion and education make more people aware of what makes the Blackdown Hills special, inspiring them to help care for the area and contribute to its conservation and enhancement</p> | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PE2 Take a coordinated, strategic approach to the management of public rights of way and publicly accessible land to achieve an accessible, well-connected network that conserves and enhances the special qualities of the National Landscape, improves access and connectivity with surrounding areas, avoids impact on sensitive sites and minimises conflict between different interests. | <p>AE1 Take a coordinated, strategic and planned approach to the management of public rights of way and publicly accessible land to achieve an accessible, well-connected network that conserves and enhances the special qualities of the AONB, avoids impact on sensitive sites and minimises conflict between different interests</p> <p>AE2 Opportunities will be sought to extend and improve the rights of way network, including improving connections with surrounding settlements where this is</p> | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|--|---|
| | compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | |
| PE3 Opportunities to use the natural and historic environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors which are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access. | <p>AE3 Opportunities to use the Blackdown Hills AONB to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, seeking a range of sensitive and sustainable access opportunities for users of all abilities to enjoy the special qualities of the AONB</p> <p>CC4 Support local community engagement in cultural and natural heritage initiatives within the AONB</p> <p>CEA2 Develop and support a range of opportunities for active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills AONB, promoting the benefits that the natural environment provides to us</p> | The parallel Habitat Regulations Assessment proposes that this policy is amended to include the reference to sensitive and sustainable access opportunities as previously, and that being so, there is no divergence , and the outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them. |
| PE4 Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce and celebrate local cultural traditions, and engagement in cultural and natural heritage initiatives. Support initiatives that help to provide, retain or enhance community facilities and services where they are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | <p>CC1 Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking community activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce local cultural traditions, and in celebrating their achievements and strengths</p> <p>CC3 Support and promote initiatives that help to provide, retain or enhance community facilities and services where they are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty</p> | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them. |
| PE5 Support the principle of local markets and sustainable local products where it adds | FLM4 Encourage the production and marketing of local food and other agricultural | None. Policy FLM4 has not been carried forward, but it is not necessary to as it is |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|--|---|
| value to the local economy without compromising the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape | products where these are compatible with the AONB designation RET1 Support the principle of local markets and sustainable local products where it adds value to the local economy without compromising the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the special qualities of the AONB | encapsulated by old policy RET1 and the new policy. |
| PE6 Economic capacity, employment and skills in the area will be supported through training opportunities, community enterprise, business networking and cooperation especially where these assist businesses to conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape and contribute to employment and prosperity. | RET2 Economic capacity, employment and skills in the area will be supported through training opportunities, community enterprise, business networking and cooperation especially where these assist businesses to contribute to AONB purposes | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PE7 Tourism and recreation provision will be supported where it contributes to the local economy without harm or detriment to the Blackdown Hills landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity, and respecting special qualities. | RET3 Tourism and recreation provision will contribute to the local economy without harming the Blackdown Hills landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity, and respecting the special qualities of the AONB | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PE8 Support efforts to secure and improve fast and reliable broadband and mobile phone coverage without adversely affecting special qualities | RET4 Support efforts to secure and improve superfast broadband and mobile phone coverage in the AONB without adversely affecting special qualities | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| PE9 Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the impact of large and heavy vehicles on the most minor roads and help to provide a safer environment for walking, cycling and horse riding, where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | TH2 Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the impact of large and heavy vehicles on the most minor roads and help to provide a safer environment for walking, cycling and horse riding, where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | None. No change to policy. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|--|--|--|
| PE10 Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the Blackdown Hills where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character | TH3 Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the AONB where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character | None. No change to policy. |
| NATURE | | |
| N1 Use the Lawton <i>making space for nature</i> principles of ‘better, bigger, more and joined’ to create networks that are fit for purpose for nature to thrive in and adapt to climate change. | BG1 Take a strategic landscape-scale based approach to the creation, restoration and maintenance of habitats within the AONB (focussing on designated and undesignated priority sites) in order to ensure resilience to climate change and other pressures BG2 Connect habitats at a landscape scale and ensure permeability for species movement within coherent and resilient ecological networks | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them. |
| N2 The mantra of ‘right tree, right place’ should be extended to ‘right habitat/species, right place’. This should ensure that scarce and irreplaceable habitats are protected and that the development of one habitat does not damage the network of another. | BG1 Take a strategic landscape-scale based approach to the creation, restoration and maintenance of habitats within the AONB (focussing on designated and undesignated priority sites) in order to ensure resilience to climate change and other pressures | Minor positive. The new policy deals with a specific aspect of the ‘strategic landscape-scale based approach’ of the old policy. Both are concerned with positive habitat management. |
| N3 Species of conservation concern will be conserved. Targeted action will be taken to support the recovery of champion/priority/indicator species. | BG3 Priority species (including Section 41, Devon Special Species, Protected Species) will be conserved. Targeted action will be taken to support the recovery of priority species | None. The amended policy wording does not alter the outcome. |
| N4 All public bodies within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape must have regard to Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). | No direct equivalent, but is within the context of; | Minor positive. Policy N4 is specific to local nature recovery strategies, which is |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|--|--|---|
| There should be alignment between the National Landscape and LNRS needs, and LNRS opportunities need to be reflected in partnership delivery on the ground. | PM1 Encourage co-ordination and partnership amongst the wide range of national, regional and local agencies and organisations to secure funding for the care and enhancement of the AONB | something the more general previous policy PM1 would cover. |
| N5 A strategic approach to the control, or eradication where feasible, of invasive non-native species will be taken where they threaten or damage local habitats and species and where action is practicable. | BG6 A strategic approach to the control, or eradication where feasible, of invasive non-native species will be taken where they threaten or damage local habitats and species and where action is practicable | None. No change to policy. |
| N6 Increased recreational pressure will be resisted at locations where unacceptable damage or disturbance to vulnerable habitats or species is likely to arise. | BG7 Increased recreational pressure will be resisted at locations where unacceptable damage or disturbance to vulnerable habitats or species is likely to arise | None. No change to policy. |
| CLIMATE | | |
| C1 To transition to net zero, support communities, businesses and individuals to collectively make changes to their behaviour, such as energy use, eating habits, travel choices, waste disposal and more, in addition to using technological solutions. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint CC1 Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking community activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce local cultural traditions, and in celebrating their achievements and strengths TH3 Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the AONB where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them, reflecting the revised themes of the new plan. |
| C2 Use less energy to reduce the amount of new energy infrastructure required to meet net zero. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the | Minor positive. The new policy deals with a specific aspect of the old more general NC4 policy in line with the revised themes of the |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|--|--|---|
| | environment and minimise their carbon footprint PD3 Support measures to improve energy efficiency and resource use and support appropriate small scale renewable energy schemes that do not detract from historic character or visual amenity, and do not conflict with the special qualities of the AONB or the conservation of natural beauty | new plan. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy. |
| C3 Transition to renewables; energy used within the area needs to rise to near 100% renewable by 2050. The transition to low carbon and renewable energy should be undertaken in a way that seeks to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and is compatible with its special qualities, landscape character and heritage value. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint PD3 Support measures to improve energy efficiency and resource use and support appropriate small scale renewable energy schemes that do not detract from historic character or visual amenity, and do not conflict with the special qualities of the AONB or the conservation of natural beauty | None. While the new policy has a specific driver, the outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy. |
| C4 Reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions through encouraging sustainable farming practices and maximise carbon storage in the environment by encouraging interventions such as tree planting and peaty soil restoration. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint FLM1 A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming and land management sector providing a range of public goods and services will be fostered as one of the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the AONB | Minor positive. The new policy deals with a specific aspect of the old more general NC4 policy and policy FLM1 in line with the revised themes of the new plan. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy. |
| C5 Develop demand for sustainably produced food. | FLM4 Encourage the production and marketing of local food and other agricultural | Minor positive. The previous policy was focused on local food production, where compatibility with the AONB designation |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|---|--|--|
| | products where these are compatible with the AONB designation | could be deemed to equate to 'sustainably produced'. The new policy seeks to shift demand to such products. |
| C6 Avoid waste and create a circular economy through redesigning products to reduce their environmental impacts and improve their reusability and recyclability, buying second hand and recycling. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint CC1 Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking community activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce local cultural traditions, and in celebrating their achievements and strengths | Minor positive. The new policy deals with a specific aspect of the old more general NC4 and CC1 policies in line with the revised themes of the new plan. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy. |
| C7 Reduce emissions from unavoidable biodegradable waste and wastewater treatment. | NC1 Promote a catchment, multiple-benefit, collaborative-based approach to soil conservation, water quality and flood alleviation improvements utilising the Otter, Axe, Culm and Parrett/Tone catchments NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint | Minor positive. The new policy deals with a specific aspect of the previous more general NC4 and NC1 policies in line with the revised themes of the new plan. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy. |
| C8 Develop and encourage measures which reduce energy usage in existing buildings and improve energy efficiency for all buildings using low carbon technology in all refurbishment, regeneration and improvement schemes. As part of the transition, new buildings need to be net zero as soon as possible. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint PD3 Support measures to improve energy efficiency and resource use and support appropriate small scale renewable energy schemes that do not detract from historic character or visual amenity, and do not conflict with the special qualities of the AONB or the conservation of natural beauty | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them, reflecting the revised themes of the new plan. |

| Proposed policy 2025-2030 | Similar 2019 – 2024 Management Plan Policies | Divergence of environmental outcomes |
|--|---|---|
| C9 Reduce the need to travel and support the development of sustainable low carbon transport and active travel options, while working to avoid leaving any community isolated. | NC4 Encourage local communities, businesses and visitors to respect the environment and minimise their carbon footprint TH3 Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the AONB where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character | None. The outcomes from the previous policies will be achieved by the proposed new policy, which combines them, reflecting the revised themes of the new plan. |

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**Blackdown
Hills
National
Landscape**

**Appropriate Assessment Screening of the Blackdown Hills
National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30
(Pre-adoption final draft version January - April 2025)**

Prepared by: The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership
April 2025

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1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the screening and assessment stages of the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30. This entails a review of the proposed Plan (the consultation draft and any further relevant amendments were considered) to identify any 'Likely Significant Effects' (LSEs) on the conservation objectives of European sites. If, following screening, LSEs are anticipated, subsequent stages of AA would consider these in more detail and determine whether alternative measures could be adopted. If there are no viable alternatives, a Plan can only be implemented if there are 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest'.

1.1 The Structure of this Report

This chapter (Chapter 1) explains the requirement for AA for the National Landscape Management Plan, summarises the AA process and explains the purpose of screening in more detail.

Chapter 2 identifies the European Sites which could be affected.

Chapter 3 summarises the plan to be assessed: the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30. It presents the results from screening of objectives and policies and identifies possible effects on European Sites. Screening matrices are provided as Tables 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 sets out a more detailed assessment of some objectives and policies.

Chapter 5 explains why in this case potential "In Combination Effects" are not analysed.

Chapter 6 draws a conclusion for the screening process.

Appendix 1 provides details of the European sites included in the assessment.

1.2 The European Habitats Directive

The [Habitats Regulations](#) [The Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)] transpose the requirements of the European Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) that aims to protect habitats and species of European nature conservation importance. The Directive establishes a network of internationally important sites designated for their ecological status. These are referred to as *Natura 2000 sites* or *European Sites* and comprise *Special Areas of Conservation* (SACs) and *Special Protection Areas* (SPAs). The UK Government also requires that *Ramsar* sites (that support internationally important wetland habitats and are listed under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance [Ramsar Convention]) are included within the HRA process (and as required by the Regulations).

A competent authority must carry out an assessment under the Habitats Regulations, known as a *Habitats Regulations Assessment* (HRA), to test if a 'plan or project' could significantly harm the designated features of a European site (also known as 'habitat sites').

All plans and projects (including planning applications) which are not directly connected with, or necessary for, the conservation management of a habitat site, require consideration of whether the plan or project is likely to have significant effects on that site. This

consideration should take into account the potential effects both of the plan/project itself and in combination with other plans or projects. The process of HRA is based on the precautionary principle and where the potential for likely significant effects cannot be excluded, a competent authority must make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for that site, in view of the site's conservation objectives. The competent authority may agree to the plan or project only after having ruled out adverse effects on the integrity of the habitats site.

In 2018, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued a judgment (*People over Wind & Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta* Case C-323/17), which ruled that Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive must be interpreted as meaning that mitigation measures (referred to in the judgment as measures which are intended to avoid or reduce effects) should be assessed within the framework of an appropriate assessment (AA), and that it is not permissible to take account of measures intended to avoid or reduce the harmful effects of the plan or project on a European site at the initial screening stage.

1.3 The Appropriate Assessment (AA) Process

The purpose of AA is to ensure that significant effects on European sites are avoided. The assessment is carried out solely in respect of the 'conservation objectives' for which a European site has been designated and its integrity in relation to its ability to support those objectives. There are four stages:

- *Stage One: Screening*
 - To identify the likely impacts on a European site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and consider whether these impacts are likely to be significant;
- *Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment (where there are likely to be significant impacts)*
 - To consider the impact on the integrity of the European site of the project or plan, either alone or 'in combination' with other projects or plans, with respect to the structure, function and conservation objectives of the site. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, to assess the potential mitigation of those impacts;
- *Stage Three: Assessment of alternative solutions*
 - To examine alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the European site;
- *Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist (where adverse impacts remain)*
 - To assess compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest, it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. If, for example, the conclusions at the end of Stage One are that there will be no significant impacts on the European site, there is no requirement to proceed further.

1.4 The Appropriate Assessment of the National Landscape Management Plan

Natural England considers that National Landscape Management Plans are plans which could have significant effects (both positive and negative) on European sites. Thus, they should be assessed before formal adoption.

When undertaking HRA on a plan, it is important to ensure that the assessment is carried out at an appropriate scale and level of detail. The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan is reviewed at 5-yearly intervals and provides a strategic framework for partnership working comprising a long-term Vision for a vibrant and sustainable landscape and responding to climate change and nature recovery. It includes aspirational Guiding Principles and Objectives with targets and policies for guiding management of the National Landscape within the context of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Such a management plan does not include allocations for development nor locationally specific plans or projects, which are more likely to have potential significant effects on the protected European sites.

This HRA screening is being undertaken in accordance with good practice; the available guidance on process; and using the following principles:

- Use existing information
- Systematic and as simple as possible whilst retaining a robust process
- Proportionate assessment – the management plan is a strategic management plan for conserving and enhancing natural beauty

This report documents the AA process to provide the information required for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership to determine whether further stages of Appropriate Assessment are required for the National Landscape Management Plan. The assessment process was undertaken on the [Consultation Draft of the Management Plan](#) as amended, and will be subject to confirmation by Natural England (as the statutory nature conservation body).

1.5 Approach

Stage 1: Screening

The purpose of screening (this stage) is to identify whether any European site might be exposed to Likely Significant Effects (LSEs) and therefore to determine whether further stages of AA would be required.

This screening assessment comprises three steps:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| One | Describing the Management Plan and possible impacts |
| Two | Identifying the <i>potential</i> effects on the European sites |
| Three | Assessing the <i>significance</i> of any effects on the European sites |

The actual 'screening' evaluation is being completed as a two stage process:

Preliminary considerations (Step 2 above) considers the vulnerabilities of each site, and what potential impacts may be damaging to the site, this then 'screens out' policies that clearly have no possible negative impacts.

For some policies the decision of No Likely Significant Effect will be obvious, and these can be screened out immediately. At the other extreme, some policies may very clearly have a Likely Significant Effect. These policies will need to be taken forward for 'appropriate assessment' or removed from the Management Plan.

In other cases the judgement about a Likely Significant Effect will be less clear cut. It is in these cases that it is necessary to consider further the nature of the potential effect. This is the purpose of the fuller considerations (Step 3 above) assesses the potential impacts of each policy on the specific conservation objectives of the site, the significance of such an impact and the degree of risk of it occurring.

it is important to consider the possibility of impacts for any European site which might be affected, whatever its location, given the activities included in the plan and their range of influence. This may extend some distance from the area within the immediate influence of a plan.

Sites which could possibly be affected were identified and information obtained about designated interest features and associated conservation objectives, largely using information contained on the JNCC and Natural England websites. These were reviewed against the Management Plan objectives and policies that might affect interest features or the ability to achieve favourable condition.

2 European Sites Potentially Affected

Initial screening centred on the Appropriate Assessment Screening of the previous National Landscape Management Plan, together with checks on the JNCC online record of European sites for any additions or amendments that may have been made since 2019. Two European sites were immediately identified that might possibly be affected by the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan and should be subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening.

These are:

- Quants SAC
- River Axe SAC (outside of the National Landscape but within 50 metres of the boundary at its nearest point)

The following European sites are within 15km of the National Landscape but have not previously been included in HRA screening because of their distance from the National Landscape boundary and the absence of any impact pathway that might indicate that activity within the National Landscape could have an effect on the site. The distances at the nearest points are also shown.

- Beer Quarry and Caves SAC (9.0km)
- Holme Moor and Clean Moor SAC (7.8km)
- Sidmouth to West Bay SAC (8.9km)
- Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC (8.6km)
- East Devon Heaths SPA (11.6km)
- East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SAC (11.6km)
- Somerset Levels and Moors SPA (6.8km)
- Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar Site (6.8km)
- Hestercombe House SAC (8.1km)

However, since the preparation of previous management plans, in August 2020 Natural England issued an Advice Note to the former Somerset Councils regarding the implications of the Court of Justice of the European Union CJEU case known as the “Dutch N” in relation to high levels of phosphate and planning applications that may affect the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar and Special Protected Area (SPA) European Sites.

The ruling has resulted in greater scrutiny of plans or projects that are likely to, either directly or indirectly, increase nutrient loads to these internationally important sites where a reason for their unfavourable condition is an excess of a specific pollutant.

In March 2022, Natural England issued similar advice to East Devon District Council (and some of the Somerset Councils) about phosphates in the River Axe.

The catchments of both the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar and River Axe SAC include areas within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, see Figure 1.

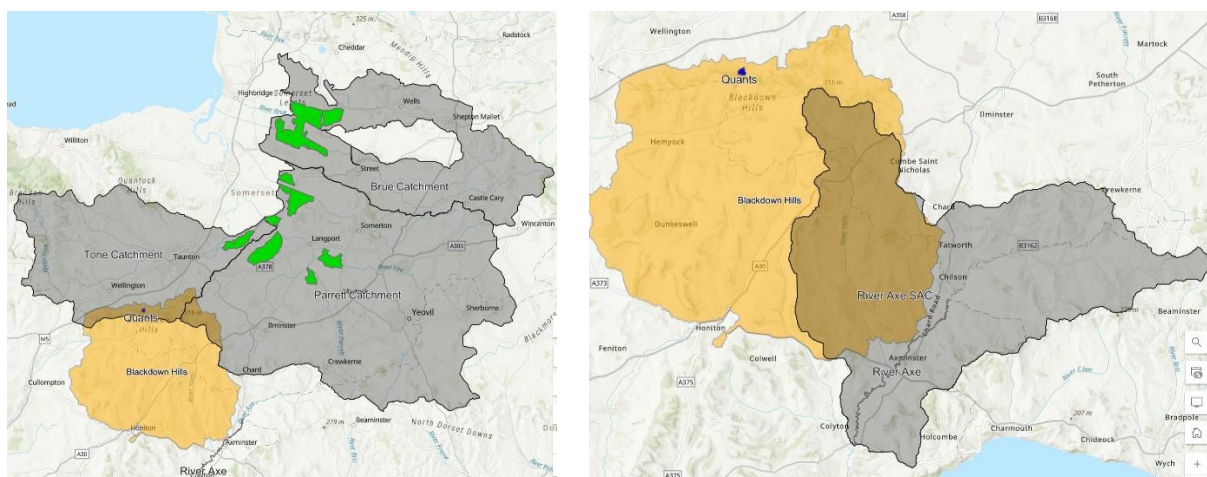


Figure 1 Nutrient Neutrality Catchment Areas in relation to Blackdown Hills National Landscape

The Somerset Levels and Moors are designated as an SPA under the Habitat Regulations 2017 and listed as a Ramsar Site under the Ramsar Convention. The Ramsar Site broadly covers the same area as the Somerset Levels and Moors SPA. While the SPA is designated for its international waterbird communities, the Ramsar Site is designated for its internationally important wetland features including the floristic and invertebrate diversity and species of its ditches, which is shared as a designated feature of the underpinning Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). The interest features of the Ramsar Site are considered unfavourable, or at risk, from the effects of eutrophication caused by excessive phosphorous. The vast majority of the ditches within the Ramsar Site and the underpinning SSSIs are also classified as being in unfavourable condition due to excessive phosphorous and the resultant ecological response.

Mirroring conclusions reached by Natural England in relation to development, it is unlikely that the management plan either alone or in-combination, will have a 'likely significant effect' on the internationally important bird communities for which the SPA site is designated and it is screened out of this assessment. However, given that parts of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape are within the Nutrient Neutrality Catchment for the Ramsar site, that site has been included in this assessment.

Figure 2 shows the three European sites included in this HRA.

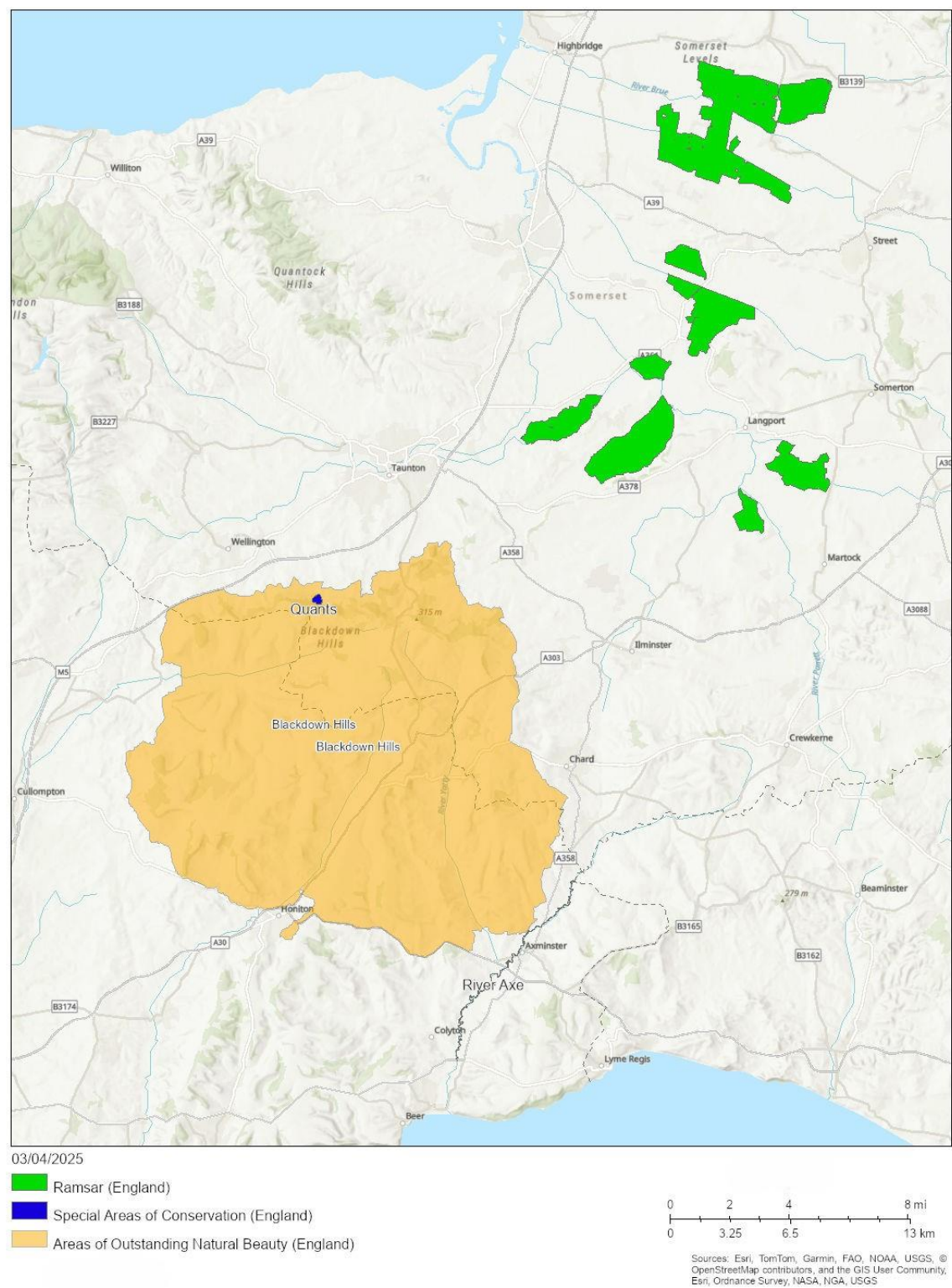


Figure 2 European Sites within and close to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Site descriptions are set out in Appendix 1. This includes the qualifying features, conservation objectives and requirements to maintain the favourable conservation status of the European sites.

Table 1 summarises the conditions necessary to maintain site integrity taking into account the qualifying features and conservation objectives.

Table 1 – Principal requirements to maintain site integrity

| European Sites | Summary of Requirement |
|---------------------------|--|
| Quants | Maintenance of specialist intensive habitat management for the marsh fritillary butterfly, restore population connectivity. |
| River Axe | Protection of the water course from raised nutrient levels, most likely deriving from surrounding land uses and land management. |
| Somerset Levels and Moors | Protection of the site from raised nutrient levels, deriving from surrounding land uses and land management. |

3 Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030

Section 82 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 establishes the primary purpose of AONB (now known as National Landscapes) designation as the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. Section 85 of the CROW Act, as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, places a duty on all public bodies to ‘seek to further’ the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty. Under Section 89, the relevant local authorities must prepare and publish a Management Plan for each AONB; and keep it under review. The Management Plan is a statutory document, which provides a policy framework to focus partnership action and priorities for the AONB designation. It also guides and informs all other plans and activities that may affect the AONB so that they can contribute to the continued conservation and enhancement of the area.

The reviewed Management Plan continues on from the previous Management Plans with updating and refinement, and a particular focus on nature recovery and addressing the climate emergency.

A 25 Year Vision for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape has evolved from previous visions statements, which sets the ambition for the plan (draft version):

Our vision is that in 2050, as a result of collaboration and positive change, the Blackdown Hills will be a rich and vibrant landscape, resilient to the effects of climate change, where:

Thriving, diverse communities, with a strong sense of place and wellbeing, are sustained by a connection to the land and a rich local culture. Living and working sustainably in and around the area, they underpin the prospering local economy and can access the services they need.

Sense of place is maintained and strengthened, characterised by small villages and hamlets set within a distinctive panorama of wide plateaux bisected by deep valleys, containing an intimate patchwork of fields, woodlands and extensive hedges, all shaped by the unique geology.

Farming and land uses work successfully within the natural tolerances of the land to create a resilient place, providing food, energy, timber, clean water and other wider benefits needed by society, nurturing the area’s rich resources for future generations.

Wildlife and habitats are in good condition, diverse and abundant, species moving freely through a connected and healthy landscape.

Our collective heritage is conserved and celebrated, keeping alive traditional skills.

Everyone seeking inspiration and enjoyment of its landscape and natural benefits is welcomed and can readily access and experience this special place.

In order to implement and deliver the vision, a set of objectives, guiding principles, targets and policies are set out in the Management Plan under the themes of Place, People, Nature, and Climate, and are summarised below.

Key Themes

1. Place

- **Objectives:** Restore natural capital, support sustainable farming, and enhance landscape character.
 - **Targets:** Increase nature-friendly farming and tree cover.
 - **Policies:** Soil conservation, flood management, and sustainable development.
2. **People**
- **Objectives:** Flourishing communities, diverse economy, and accessible countryside.
 - **Targets:** Improve accessibility and engagement.
 - **Policies:** Support local markets, sustainable tourism, and transport.
3. **Nature**
- **Objectives:** Enhance and connect habitats for resilient ecosystems.
 - **Targets:** Restore wildlife-rich habitats and improve SSSI conditions.
 - **Policies:** Prioritise habitat restoration and species conservation.
4. **Climate**
- **Objectives:** Reduce emissions, increase carbon sequestration, and promote nature-based solutions.
 - **Targets:** Achieve net zero emissions by 2050.
 - **Policies:** Support appropriate renewable energy, sustainable farming, and energy efficiency.

3.1 Screening of policies to identify Likely Significant Effects

Draft management plan **objectives** and **policies** were assessed to identify any likely significant effects on one or more European sites. These are assessed because these are the core aspects of the management framework that set out what we want to achieve and what needs to be done by way of management to achieve the objectives.

During this assessment, reference was made to the European sites' vulnerabilities, requirements to maintain favourable condition, and activities considered to be damaging or likely to lead to deterioration of the site. If a policy set the framework for any of these activities to occur then a potential effect was recorded. Broad categories of impacts and potentially damaging activities are set out in Table 2 below.

Table 1 Broad impacts and examples of possible contributing activities

| Category of Impact | Examples of activity (on and off site) which may cause this impact |
|----------------------|---|
| Physical loss | <p>Land claim for development - fragmentation and isolation of habitats and populations</p> <p>Changes in channel morphology – canalising, weirs, dams or erosion from alterations to natural processes</p> <p>Construction of artificial features, e.g. wind turbines, electricity transmission structures etc.</p> <p>Changes in land management e.g. cultivation, ploughing, felling, afforestation, deforestation etc</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| Physical damage/ deterioration | Recreation - trampling, erosion, direct disturbance of species Changes in land management – grazing, cutting, burning regimes etc leading to changes in species and community composition Mineral extraction Selective removal of species e.g. scrub removal Changes in hydrological regime – changes in water abstraction for domestic, agricultural or industrial use Changes channel morphology |
| Non-physical disturbance | Recreation – visual presence leading to disturbance of species (e.g. boat activity, walking etc.) Noise – disturbance of species Lighting – disturbance to diurnal rhythms |
| Toxic contamination | Changes in land management – application of pesticides, fertilizers etc. Increases in emissions to water, land or air e.g. from transport, domestic, commercial or industrial sources |
| Non-toxic contamination | Changes in land management - addition of manure, slurry etc. nutrient enrichment and sediment from run-off Waste Water Treatment Works outfalls – nutrient enrichment |
| Biological disturbance | Changes in management regime, or cessation of management – grazing, cutting, burning Non-native species introduction or translocation Selective removal of species e.g. exploitation from recreational fishing Stocking with non-native and native species e.g. fish farming, recreational fishing, deer farming Introducing barriers to movement or dispersal e.g. weirs, dams, areas of poor water quality (can create a barrier to migration preventing River and Sea lampreys from reaching their spawning grounds), woodland belts, development (roads, buildings etc) |

Source: Compiled from Site Vulnerabilities, Favourable Condition Tables, and Operations Likely to Damage from Component SSSI information for the relevant Habitats sites.

Policies and objectives were screened using the 9-point scoring system as outlined in Table 3 overleaf (adapted from David Tyldesley & Associates advice for Natural England 2006, and used in previous assessments).

For each objective and policy in turn, a score was assigned to each European site according to interpretation of the likely effects as set out in the 'Reasoning' column. The assessment takes account of the conservation objectives of each European site and the conditions required to maintain site integrity.

Table 3 System for interpretation of likely effects of objectives and policies

| Effect | | Reasoning |
|--|----------|---|
| None | 0 | The policy relates to activities which are not likely to have an effect on the Natura 2000 site by virtue of their specificity, scale, or distance from the site. |
| No likely (negative) effect | 1 | The policy is specifically intended to conserve and enhance biodiversity, and measures under this policy will not be likely to lead to negative effects on the Natura 2000 site. |
| | 2 | The policy is intended to conserve and enhance the natural, geological, built or historic environment and measures under this policy will not be likely to lead to negative effects on the Natura 2000 site. |
| | 3 | The policy is not likely to lead to activities which are likely to have a negative effect on the Natura 2000 site. |
| | 4 | The policy addresses activities which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, but the policy itself is worded so as not to encourage activities or allow projects which would be likely to cause negative effects on the Natura 2000 site. |
| Potential for a negative effect | 5 | The policy addresses activities which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, the effects of which may or may not be significant. But the policy itself could be reworded if necessary, so as not to support or encourage activities which would be likely to cause significant effects on the Natura 2000 site. |
| Potential for a negative effect / effects uncertain | 6 | The policy encourages activities which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, but the likelihood and risk of significance of effects depends on the location, scale or design (& etc.) of individual schemes or projects. It is therefore more appropriate to screen individual schemes or projects as these come forward. |
| | 7 | The policy encourages activities in an area which have the potential to affect the Natura 2000 site, either directly or indirectly. Activities under this policy must be subject to assessment to establish, in the light of the site's conservation objectives, whether it can be objectively concluded that there would not be significant effects on the Natura 2000 site. |
| Likely Significant Effect | 8 | This policy makes provision for activities likely to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site. Activities under this policy must be subject to appropriate assessment to establish, in the light of the site's conservation objectives, whether it can be objectively concluded that the activities would not have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site. |

The screening results are shown in Table 4 and 5 below. Scores are colour coded according to the scheme in Table 3.

Table 4 Assessment of effects of Objectives on European Sites

| Theme | Objective | Site | | |
|--------|---|------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| | | Quants SAC | River Axe SAC | Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar |
| Place | To restore, conserve and enhance the natural capital stock of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and maximise the flow of ecosystem goods and services it provides. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | To support sustainable farming, forestry and land management practices that conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape and deliver a range of ecosystem services | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | To strengthen the Blackdown Hills special sense of place, with a diversity of landscape patterns and pictures, unique geology, archaeology and buildings of architectural appeal, through sound custodianship | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| People | To nurture flourishing communities, where the population is both cohesive and diverse, where there is easy access to a range of services and facilities, and where the commitment of local people helps to conserve and enhance the environment, heritage and | 3 | 3 | 3 |

| Theme | Objective | Site | | |
|---------|---|------|---|---|
| | landscape of the Blackdown Hills. | | | |
| | To foster a thriving and diverse Blackdown Hills economy that provides jobs for local people, makes wise use of local resources and benefits local communities, while conserving and enhancing the outstanding landscape and distinctive character of the countryside and villages. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | To ensure that opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and its special qualities are available to all and that everyone feels welcome. | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| | To commit to eliminate discrimination, provide equal opportunities, and challenge prejudice and promote foster good relationships between diverse groups in and around the Blackdown Hills. | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Nature | To ensure the effective conservation, enhancement, expansion and connectivity of habitats to form coherent and resilient ecological networks across the Blackdown Hills and beyond, facilitating the movement of species of conservation concern across the landscape. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Climate | To safeguard the carbon stores in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, reduce emissions from land and increase carbon sequestration, in ways which are compatible with nature. | 2 | 2 | 2 |

| Theme | Objective | Site | | |
|-------|--|------|---|---|
| | To promote and deliver nature-based solutions to climate change. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | To play an active role in addressing the climate emergency by delivering meaningful actions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, ensuring the actions are aligned with existing national, regional and local plans. | 4 | 4 | 4 |

Table 5 Assessment of effects of Policies on European Sites

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|---|------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| | | Quants SAC | River Axe SAC | Somerset Levels & Moors SPA/ Ramsar |
| Place | PL1 Approach the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape according to landscape-led principles, based on landscape character, underpinned by a sound understanding of the area's rich stock of natural and cultural capital assets and its value to society in terms of the flow of goods and services. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL2 The special qualities, distinctive character and key features of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape will be conserved and enhanced, and opportunities will be sought to strengthen or restore landscape character where landscape features are in poor condition, missing or fragmented. | 2 | 2 | 2 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|--|------|---|---|
| | PL3 Promote a catchment-scale, multiple-benefit, collaborative-based approach to soil conservation and restoration, water quality improvements, reducing flood risk, and improving resilience, based on the Otter, Axe, Culm and Parrett/Tone catchments. | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| | PL4 Approaches to flood risk management and erosion control which work with natural processes, conserve the natural environment and improve biodiversity will be advocated and supported. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | PL5 A profitable, sustainable and environmentally beneficial farming and land management sector providing a range of public goods and services will be fostered as one of the principal means of maintaining the special qualities and distinctive landscape of the National Landscape. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL6 Promote, encourage and support widespread take-up of Environmental Land Management schemes that help conserve and enhance natural beauty and deliver a range of environmental outcomes through sustainable farming and forestry practices. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL7 Encourage the production and marketing of local food and other agricultural products where these are compatible with the National Landscape and purpose of designation. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL8 Encourage sensitive management of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, woodlands, orchards and ponds, protect ancient woodland and veteran trees, and restore the original broadleaved | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|---|------|---|---|
| | character of plantations on ancient woodland sites. | | | |
| | PL9 Encourage woodland creation and expansion that considers both the ecological value and landscape character of a site and surroundings and opportunities for maximising ecosystem services including natural flood management. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL10 Monitor, manage and mitigate damaging diseases such as ash dieback that have potential to impact negatively on landscape and biodiversity. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | PL11 Wider community engagement with the farming and land management sector will be encouraged to enable a deeper understanding and appreciation of the important role played by land managers in maintaining the National Landscape's special qualities. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | PL12 Conserve and enhance the historic built environment and rural heritage assets, support training in traditional heritage skills, and promote the use of Historic Environment Record (HER), historic landscape characterisation and other tools to inform projects, policymaking and management activities. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL13 Monitor the extent and condition of historic sites, features and landscapes across the Blackdown Hills and seek to address sites and features in poor and declining condition. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PL14 Promote awareness and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of the Blackdown Hills and secure effective | 2 | 2 | 2 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|--|------|---|---|
| | management of important features and sites. | | | |
| | <p>PL15 All relevant strategic, local and neighbourhood plan documents and planning decision-making will:</p> <p>Seek to further the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape.</p> <p>Utilise the Management Plan and consider other Blackdown Hills statements and guidance.</p> <p>Ensure that conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty is given great weight.</p> | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | <p>PL16 All necessary development affecting the Blackdown Hills National Landscape will conserve and enhance natural beauty and special qualities by:</p> <p>Respecting landscape character, settlement patterns and local character of the built environment</p> <p>Being sensitively sited and of appropriate scale.</p> <p>Reinforcing local distinctiveness.</p> <p>Seeking to protect and enhance natural features and biodiversity.</p> | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | <p>PL17 Promote and protect tranquillity and dark skies by minimising intrusive noise and development and light pollution that may undermine the intrinsic character of the National Landscape.</p> | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | <p>PL18 The character of skylines and open views into, within and out of the National Landscape will be protected and enhanced.</p> | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | <p>PL19 The deeply rural character of much of the land adjoining the National Landscape boundary forms</p> | 2 | 2 | 2 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|--------|--|------|---|---|
| | an essential setting for the Blackdown Hills and care will be taken to maintain its quality and character. | | | |
| | PL20 Community-led planning tools, such as neighbourhood plans, and initiatives such as Community Land Trusts will be supported as the principal means of identifying need and securing local community assets such as affordable housing. Any development should conserve and enhance natural beauty. | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | PL21 Road and transport schemes (including design, maintenance, signage, landscaping and safety measures) affecting the National Landscape will be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate to landscape character and special qualities, seeking to further the purpose of designation. The landscape, biodiversity and cultural features of the area's road network such as hedge banks, flower-rich verges, and locally distinctive historic highway furniture, will be protected, conserved and enhanced. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| People | PE1 Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area. | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| | PE2 Take a coordinated, strategic approach to the management of public rights of way and publicly accessible land to achieve an | 4 | 4 | 3 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|---|------|---|---|
| | accessible, well-connected network that conserves and enhances the special qualities of the National Landscape, improves access and connectivity with surrounding areas, avoids impact on sensitive sites and minimises conflict between different interests. | | | |
| | PE3 Opportunities to use the natural and historic environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access. | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| | PE4 Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce and celebrate local cultural traditions, and engagement in cultural and natural heritage initiatives. Support initiatives that help to provide, retain or enhance community facilities and services where they are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PE5 Support the principle of local markets and sustainable local products where it adds value to the local economy without compromising the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the special qualities of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | PE6 Economic capacity, employment and skills in the area will be supported through training opportunities, community enterprise, business networking and cooperation especially where these | 4 | 4 | 4 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|--------|--|------|---|---|
| | assist businesses to conserve or enhance the special qualities of the National Landscape and contribute to employment and prosperity. | | | |
| | PE7 Tourism and recreation provision will be supported where it contributes to the local economy without harm or detriment to the Blackdown Hills landscape, historic environment, biodiversity or tranquillity, and respecting special qualities. | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | PE8 Support efforts to secure and improve fast and reliable broadband and mobile phone coverage without adversely affecting special qualities | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| | PE9 Traffic management measures will be supported which reduce the impact of large and heavy vehicles on the most minor roads and help to provide a safer environment for walking, cycling and horse riding, where this is compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | PE10 Promote the development of high quality, integrated and sustainable transport services and initiatives in and around the Blackdown Hills where they can be achieved without compromising the conservation of natural beauty and local character | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Nature | N1 Use the Lawton <i>making space for nature</i> principles of 'better, bigger, more and joined' to create networks that are fit for purpose for nature to thrive in and adapt to climate change. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | N2 The mantra of 'right tree, right place' should be extended to 'right habitat/species, right place'. This should ensure that scarce and | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|---------|---|------|---|---|
| | irreplaceable habitats are protected and that the development of one habitat does not damage the network of another. | | | |
| | N3 Species of conservation concern will be conserved. Targeted action will be taken to support the recovery of champion/priority/indicator species. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | N4 All public bodies within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape must have regard to Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). There should be alignment between the National Landscape and LNRS needs, and LNRS opportunities need to be reflected in partnership delivery on the ground. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | N5 A strategic approach to the control, or eradication where feasible, of invasive non-native species will be taken where they threaten or damage local habitats and species and where action is practicable. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | N6 Increased recreational pressure will be resisted at locations where unacceptable damage or disturbance to vulnerable habitats or species is likely to arise. | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Climate | C1 To transition to net zero, support communities, businesses and individuals to collectively make changes to their behaviour, such as energy use, eating habits, travel choices, waste disposal and more, in addition to using technological solutions. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | C2 Use less energy to reduce the amount of new energy infrastructure required to meet net zero. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | C3 Transition to renewables; energy used within the area needs to rise to | 4 | 4 | 4 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|--|------|---|---|
| | near 100% renewable by 2050. The transition to low carbon and renewable energy should be undertaken in a way that seeks to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and is compatible with its special qualities, landscape character and heritage value. | | | |
| | C4 Reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions through encouraging sustainable farming practices and maximise carbon storage in the environment by encouraging interventions such as tree planting and peaty soil restoration. | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | C5 Develop demand for sustainably produced food. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | C6 Avoid waste and create a circular economy through redesigning products to reduce their environmental impacts and improve their reusability and recyclability, buying second hand and recycling. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | C7 Reduce emissions from unavoidable biodegradable waste and wastewater treatment. | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| | C8 Develop and encourage measures which reduce energy usage in existing buildings and improve energy efficiency for all buildings using low carbon technology in all refurbishment, regeneration and improvement schemes. As part of the transition, new buildings need to be net zero as soon as possible. | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | C9 Reduce the need to travel and support the development of sustainable low carbon transport and active travel options, while | 3 | 3 | 3 |

| Theme | Policy | Site | | |
|-------|--|------|--|--|
| | working to avoid leaving any community isolated. | | | |

4 Fuller Considerations

The majority of the draft objectives and policies were assessed as not requiring more in-depth consideration as they are either beneficial or are not likely to lead to negative effects on the European sites.

For some policies (see Table 6) the potential for them to lead to activities that could have significant impacts on sites could not be obviously ruled out (applying the precautionary principle). These policies were therefore taken forward for fuller consideration of whether these effects are likely to be *significant*.

Table 6 Objectives and Policies to be taken forward for fuller consideration

| Objective/Policy | Reason | European Sites |
|--|--------|---------------------------|
| Objective: To ensure that opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and its special qualities are available to all and that everyone feels welcome. | 5 | Quants SAC, River Axe SAC |
| Policy PE1 Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area. | 5 | Quants SAC, River Axe SAC |
| PE3 Opportunities to use the natural environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access. | 5 | Quants SAC, River Axe SAC |

Assessing 'significance'

In terms of European sites a 'significant' effect is one that is not inconsequential and which is likely to undermine the achievement of the site's conservation objectives.

Examples of the types of effects, which are considered likely to be significant, include:

- 1 Causing change to the coherence of the site or to the designation series (e.g. presenting a barrier between isolated fragments, or reducing the ability of the site to act as a source of new colonisers);
- 2 Causing reduction in the area of habitat or of the site;
- 3 Causing direct or indirect change to the physical quality of the environment (including the hydrology) or habitat within the site;
- 4 Causing ongoing disturbance to species or habitats for which the site is notified;
- 5 Altering community structure (species composition);
- 6 Causing direct or indirect damage to the size, characteristics or reproductive ability of populations on the site;
- 7 Altering the vulnerability of populations etc. to other impacts;
- 8 Causing a reduction in the resilience of the feature against external change (for example its ability to respond to extremes of environmental conditions);
- 9 Affecting restoration of a feature where this is a conservation objective;
- 10 Interfering with key relationships that define the structure of the site;
- 11 Interfering with key relationships that define the function of the site.

It must be acknowledged that this list is not exhaustive, it is only indicative.

Judgements on the 'significance' of impacts was based upon the likely effect on qualifying features of each particular site as well as the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of those impacts. The risk of these impacts occurring was also considered.

Considerations and Recommendations

These considerations evaluate the risk or likelihood of the identified potential effects being *significant*.

Where effects were identified as potentially likely to be significant, policy changes were suggested to reduce or obviate the risk of any of these effects occurring, and prevent the need to progress to appropriate assessment. Consideration was also given to the availability of other mechanisms that in combination with the plan, would obviate or reduce the risk or likelihood of the effect being significant.

The tables below record the further considerations of individual objectives and policies listed in Table 6. Fuller consideration of policies and the type and significance of impacts was informed by professional judgement and the baseline data review. The final row of each table states the 'significance conclusion' for the policy, based on the recommendations here being incorporated into the final Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan.

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Objective | To ensure that opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and its special qualities are available to all and that everyone feels welcome. |
| <u>River Axe SAC</u> | |

Potential for indirect impacts from erosion if access and recreational activities are encouraged and are not sensitive. Increased erosion within the catchment could lead to increased sediment volumes in run-off, leading to elevated levels of suspended solids. This can clog the respiratory structures of the bullhead and lamprey fish species for which the site is of European importance. In addition, siltation of riverine sediments, caused by increased particulates, could prevent the successful establishment of *Ranunculus* plants, and interfere with egg and fry survival in lampreys and bullhead, and is considered a major threat. Whilst the impacts from a single access opportunity are thought unlikely to be significant, there may be cumulative impacts across the tributaries which could lead to a significant effect unless improvements / opportunities and use are sensitive.

Quants SAC

The Quants SAC is part of a site actively managed by Somerset Wildlife Trust. Any potential for increased disturbance, physical damage from erosion as a result of changes to access would be carefully managed and monitored by Somerset Wildlife Trust as an integral part of the site's Management Plan and therefore significant effects from this objective are unlikely.

Recommendations:

*Reword the Objective 'To ensure that **appropriate** opportunities to explore and enjoy the Blackdown Hills countryside and its special qualities **that are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty** are available to all and that everyone feels welcome.'*

Conclusion:

With only 'sensitive' access being encouraged within the National Landscape, significant effects from the implementation of this objective are unlikely to occur.

No Likely Significant Effects – If recommendations are implemented.

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Policy PE1 | Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area. |
| | <p>This policy is primarily concerned with <i>promoting</i> the Blackdown Hills countryside as a place for volunteering and active engagement for all. Some areas of the countryside and aspects of wildlife and heritage are more appropriate than others, and this policy should take this into account.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <p><i>Reword the policy: 'Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of sensitive and sustainable opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area.'</i></p> |

| |
|--|
| <p>Delivery implementation should consider the impacts on sensitive sites, particularly European sites, from the activities that are promoted.</p> <p>Conclusion:</p> <p>With the recommendations implemented this policy and its delivery actions (if in line with the policy) are unlikely to have significant impacts on the European sites.</p> |
| <p>No Likely Significant Effects – If recommendations are implemented.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Policy PE3</p> | <p>Opportunities to use the natural environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access.</p> |
| <p>This policy is primarily concerned with <i>promoting</i> the health and wellbeing benefits offered by the natural environment of the Blackdown Hills. Although the policy refers to the possibility of enhancing landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access, it is silent on <u>conserving</u> natural beauty. Some areas of the countryside, such as designated sites, are less appropriate than others, and this policy should take this into account.</p> <p>Recommendations:</p> <p><i>Reword the policy: ‘Opportunities to use the natural environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors which are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access.’</i></p> <p>Delivery implementation should consider the impacts on sensitive sites, particularly European sites, from the activities that are promoted.</p> <p>Conclusion:</p> <p>With the recommendations implemented this policy and its delivery actions (if in line with the policy) are unlikely to have significant impacts on the European sites.</p> | |
| <p>No Likely Significant Effects – If recommendations are implemented.</p> | |

Summary of conclusions on the likelihood of significant effects

The screening process confirms that the large majority of objectives and policies as currently worded, are considered to have No Likely Significant Effects on the identified European sites.

Three were identified in the Preliminary Screening for which the *potential* for negative effects could not be obviously ruled out (applying the precautionary principle) within the framework of their current wording. These two policies and one objective all related to access and enjoyment.

During fuller considerations, recommendations were made for rewording **all** of these policies to obviate the need for progressing them to appropriate assessment. With the recommendations implemented, there are unlikely to be any significant effects from these policies.

There are no significant changes to the plan's objectives and policies, or the overall intent, arising from the consultation period. Policy PE3 above has been amended by the inclusion of 'historic environment' as well as 'natural environment', however this is not considered to affect any earlier conclusions.

Overall Significant Effect Conclusion

The National Landscape Management Plan should be considered in its entirety and necessarily within the context of the statutory purpose of AONB designation, '*to conserve and enhance natural beauty*.' As such, the purpose of all policies, and Delivery Plan actions under those policies, is to actively and positively contribute to conserving and enhancing the area's natural beauty. Included within the definition of 'conserving and enhancing natural beauty' is the conservation of '*flora, fauna and physiographical features*' and as such encompasses the reasons for designation of European protected sites, that is to conserve flora and fauna.

The statutory purpose *to conserve and enhance natural beauty*, inherently necessitates the delivery of actions in such a way as not to compromise or prejudice the achievement of the conservation objectives of European protected sites.

When policies are interpreted within the overall framework of the Management Plan and the intention of the policies (to expand on the statutory purpose), this provides sufficient safeguards and there is a negligible risk that any adverse effects would be permitted to occur.

It is therefore concluded that the *Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030* when taken in its entirety, should have **No Likely Significant Effects** on the identified European sites, provided **all** the recommendations here are acted upon and relevant legislative provisions are adhered to in the delivery.

5 Other plans and programmes

As part of the HRA screening process, it is also necessary to consider whether the proposed plan might have any significant adverse effects 'In combination' with other plans. 'In combination' refers to the cumulative effect of influences acting on sites from other relevant plans and projects in the context of prevailing environmental conditions. The purpose of the National Landscape Management Plan is to set out the policy of the relevant local authorities towards the National Landscape. Policies are purposefully protective towards the environment in line with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and will have varying degrees of influence on the way in which local authorities, and others, carry out their duties and functions in general and under other plans.

However, given that screening of the plan itself concludes that the plan will not have significant effects on one or more European sites then it is not deemed necessary to undertake an in-combination analysis. This is based on Natural England's advice and guidance on previous rounds of Management Plans (*It is Natural England's view that if the Management plan does not have a significant environmental effect then it is not necessary to carry out an in combination assessment and that '...if no LSE [Likely Significant Effects] then no in combination effects are possible'*).

6 Conclusion

This Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening has considered the objectives and policies in the draft *Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030* for their potential effects on the two SAC European sites inside or very close to the National Landscape and the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site.

Provided the recommendations set out in this report are acted upon it can be concluded that the *Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030* when taken in its entirety, should have **No Likely Significant Effects** on the identified European sites. Therefore it is not necessary to proceed to full Appropriate Assessment.

The HRA screening considered the strategic nature of the Plan and it is noted that the need for further HRA may need to be considered again as specific projects or delivery plan action are developed.

7 References

[Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site - GOV.UK](#)

[Appropriate assessment - GOV.UK](#)

DCLG (2006): Planning for the Protection of European Sites: Appropriate Assessment. Guidance for Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents.

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Appendix 1

Qualifying Features, Conservation Objectives and Vulnerabilities of European Sites Within or Close to Blackdown Hills National Landscape

Quants SAC

Area: 20.29 Ha

Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site

1065 Marsh fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas (Eurodryas, Hypodryas) aurinia* This damp and sheltered site supports a medium-sized but strong **marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*** population in a neutral grassland/fen mosaic. It is strategically placed close to other smaller sub-populations, with which it forms a metapopulation, and may exchange individuals with the large population at Southey Moor (outside the SAC series).

[The Site Improvement Plan highlights that despite suitable habitat conditions Marsh fritillary butterfly is not currently present on site. The nearest known population is adjacent to Southey & Gotleigh SSSI which is 6km away]

Conservation Objectives

With regard to the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated ("the Qualifying Features" listed below);

Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species, and the significant disturbance of those qualifying species, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status of each of the qualifying features.

Subject to natural change, to maintain or restore:

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely;
- The populations of qualifying species;
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Qualifying Features

S1065. *Euphydryas (Eurodryas, Hypodryas) aurinia*; marsh fritillary butterfly

Vulnerability¹

The marsh fritillary population here was restricted to a comparatively small area (c. 2 ha) and is kept high by a considerable level of management directed at producing 'ideal' habitat in this area. If the highly interventionist nature of management is disrupted or discontinued the population may drop.

¹ Please note: vulnerability accounts are extracts from original Standard Data Forms submitted by JNCC to the European Commission on designation of the European Sites in the period 1995 to 2001; some references are no longer current.

River Axe SAC

Area: 25.78Ha

Annex I habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site

3260 Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculon fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation

The Axe is a south-western example of sub-type 2. Only the lower reaches of the main river have been designated, where the mixed catchment geology of sandstones and limestones gives rise to calcareous waters where *R. penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans* dominates, giving way to *R. fluitans* further downstream. Short-leaved water-starwort *Callitriche truncata* is an unusual addition to the *Ranunculus* community and gives additional interest.

Annex II species present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for site selection

1095 Sea lamprey *Petromyzon marinus* 1096 Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri* 1163 Bullhead *Cottus gobio*

Conservation Objectives

With regard to the natural habitats and/or species for which the site has been designated ("the Qualifying Features" listed below);

Avoid the deterioration of the qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species, and the significant disturbance of those qualifying species, ensuring the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes a full contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status of each of the qualifying features.

Subject to natural change, to maintain or restore:

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species;
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely;
- The populations of qualifying species;
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Qualifying Features

H3260. Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculon fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation; Rivers with floating vegetation often dominated by watercrowfoot

S1095. *Petromyzon marinus*; sea lamprey

S1096. *Lampetra planeri*; brook lamprey

S1163. *Cottus gobio*; bullhead

Vulnerability

The main threat on this site is the potential nitrification from surrounding land-use. A programme of surveys has been undertaken investigating the sources of potential

problems. On completion, management advice will be provided to the perpetrators to minimise impacts.

Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar Site

Area: 6,395 ha

The Ramsar site is designated for its internationally important wetland features including floristic and invertebrate diversity and consists of a series of Sites of Special Scientific Interest within the largest area of lowland wet grassland and associated wetland habitat remaining in Britain. It consists of areas in the flood plains of the Rivers Axe, Brue, Parrett, Tone and their tributaries. The site attracts internationally important numbers of wildfowl in winter and is one of the most important sites in southern Britain for breeding. The network of rhynes and ditches support an outstanding assemblage of aquatic invertebrates, particularly beetles.

Qualifying Features of the European Site

Ramsar criteria 2 - A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

Supports 17 species of Red Data Book invertebrates. The vascular plants *Wolffia arrhiza*, *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* and *Peucedanum palustre* are considered vulnerable by the GB Red Book.

Ramsar criteria 5 - A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

Species with peak counts in winter: 97,155 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)

Ramsar criteria 6 - A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation) -

Species with peak counts in winter:

Tundra swan , *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*

Eurasian teal, *Anas crecca*

Northern lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*

Species/populations identified subsequent to designation for possible future consideration under criterion 6 -

Species with peak counts in winter:

Eurasian wigeon, *Anas penelope*,

Mute swan, *Cygnus olor*,

Northern pintail, *Anas acuta*,

Northern shoveler, *Anas clypeata*,

European Site Conservation Objectives

Site specific conservation objectives for Ramsar sites have not been published. However, the following generic Conservation Objectives for all Ramsar sites have previously been signed off by Natural England:

With regard to the Ramsar Site and the wetland habitats, individual species and/or groups of species for which the site has been listed (its 'Qualifying Features'), and subject to natural change;

Ensure that the integrity of the [Ramsar] site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the wise use of wetlands across the UK, by maintaining or restoring:

- The extent and distribution of qualifying habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of qualifying habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying habitats and habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of each qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of each qualifying species within the site'.

Vulnerability of the European Site

The vast majority of the ditches within the Ramsar Site and the underpinning SSSI's are classified as being in unfavourable condition, or at risk, from the effects of eutrophication caused by excessive phosphorous.

Aquatic invertebrate assemblage

The designated invertebrate assemblage is sensitive to changes in water quality. Water beetles and large mouthed valve snails associated with the Ramsar are particularly dependent on the maintenance of water quality. The interest features of the Ramsar are in unfavourable condition, or at risk, due to the effects of eutrophication caused by excessive phosphates.

Migratory/wintering birds

The availability of an abundant food supply is critically important for adult fitness and survival and the overall sustainability of the population. As a result, inappropriate management and direct or indirect impacts which could affect the distribution, abundance and availability of prey and hence adversely affect species' populations.

The nature, scale, timing and duration of some human activities can result in the disturbance of birds at a level that may substantially affect their behaviour, and consequently affect the long-term viability of the population. This includes increased recreational pressure.

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Impact Assessment



Assessment of: Devon County Council's endorsement of the review of Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan

Service: Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Head of Service: Meg Booth

Version / date of sign off by Head of Service:

Assessment carried out by (job title): Kate Hind, Environment Partnership Officer, with Lisa Turner, Blackdown Hills National Landscape Planning Officer

1. Description of project / service / activity / policy under review

Devon is home to five National Landscapes, formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Each landscape has a partnership responsible for overseeing its management. The 'Blackdown Hills Management Plan' is a statutory document created and reviewed every five years by the partnership, which straddles the Devon and Somerset border.

A Management Plan provides a shared long term vision for the National Landscape and contains ambitions, targets and actions that seek to further the statutory purpose, i.e. to conserve and enhance the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW), it is a statutory requirement for local authorities to produce Management Plans for their National Landscapes and to review these at five yearly intervals. The Review aims to reflect significant changes to legislation, policy and the

environmental context to ensure that the Plan remain valid and up to date.

2. Reason for change / review

The Plan must address the significant issues of the *climate emergency* and *nature recovery*, taking account of, and contributing to, *Local Nature Recovery Strategies* and the hierarchy of *climate strategies* and action plans.

Work and priorities for managing the National Landscape set out in the Management Plan are required to contribute to Defra's *Environmental Improvement Plan* (EIP23). This sets the goals for enhancing England's natural environment, including the targets to;

- protect 30% of our land and sea for nature through the Nature Recovery Network by 2030 ('30 by 30')
- restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitats outside protected sites by 2042; and, halt the decline in species abundance by the end of 2030, increasing it above 2022 levels by 2042.

Specifically, a *Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework* (TOF) sets the ambition for how Protected Landscapes are expected to achieve 3 outcomes from EIP23 through a number of targets:

Goal 1: Thriving plants and wildlife

Goal 7: Mitigating and adapting to climate change

Goal 10: Enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment

The *Levelling Up and Regeneration Act* (LURA) (2023) amended and strengthened the CRow Act in respect of Protected Landscapes, to;

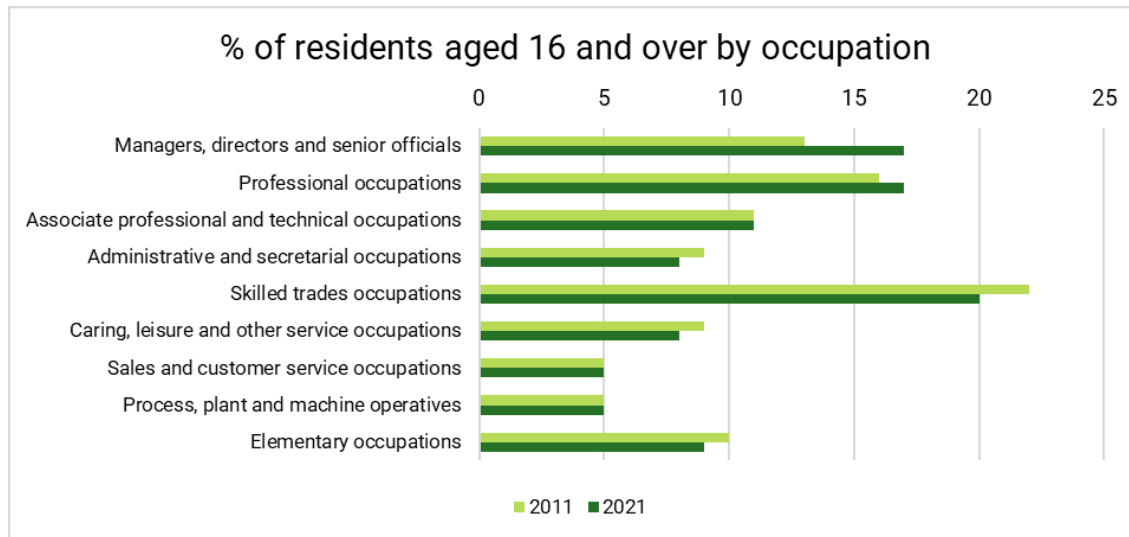
- Require relevant authorities in England to 'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the National Landscape. This replaces a 'duty of regard' to the purpose in previous legislation.
- Allow the Secretary of State to make provision to require relevant authorities in England 'to contribute to the preparation, implementation or review' of a National Landscape's Management Plan and for the Plan to contribute to meeting specific targets set under the Environment Act 2021.

3. Aims / objectives, limitations and options going forwards (summary)

See Section 1.

4. People affected and their diversity profile

- Population: 14,130 residents within the National Landscape, with around 150,000 living in the nearby towns around the periphery.
- Age: Based on the 2021 Census, 19% of resident population is age 19 and under, 21% are age 20-44, 31% are between 45 and 64 and 29% are 65 years of age and older. The largest cohort is those aged between 50 and 64. The population profile has remained stable since the 2011 Census but with a small increase in the proportion of residents over the age of 75, from 10% to 13%.
- Ethnic group: The numbers of people within the National Landscape whose ethnicity is other than White British is low:
Proportion of the population within each ethnic group in Blackdown Hills National Landscape:
 - Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: <1%
 - Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean, or African: <1%
 - Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: 1%
 - White: 98%
 - Other ethnic groups: <1%
- Deprivation spread: Official figures show there is limited deprivation within the Blackdown Hills, with 33% of the population living in the 5th Decile and 44% in Decile 6. The remainder are in the 7th and 8th Decile.
- Disability: in 2021, 75% of the resident population reported that they suffered no long-term health conditions, 17% considered themselves as disabled under the Equality Act and 8% had a long term physical or mental health condition.
- Employment: The chart below shows occupational profile of resident population, compared to 2011. Skilled trades are the largest sector, but has fallen, whereas managers, directors, senior roles and professionals have increased.
56% of the adult population is employed, whereas 42% are not seeking work.



Stakeholders, their interest and potential impacts

Numerous stakeholders have been involved in the iterative process informing the review of the Plan either through directing the review or taking part in stakeholder feedback, notably local authority partners who are responsible for the plan, other agencies such as Natural England, Historic England, Wildlife Trusts, as well as individuals from the local community and parish councils. The Management Plan is intended to be a shared strategy for the place that will have relevance to stakeholders in the following ways:

- Local authorities: The relevant authority organisations that are required to jointly prepare, adopt and review the *Management Plan*, and who carry out key functions, such as planning, that affect the National Landscape. The *Management Plan*, in its entirety, establishes the management policy of these responsible authorities.
- Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership organisations: These varied organisations will have a key role in delivering and championing the *Management Plan*.
- Relevant authorities: All public bodies and statutory undertakers (including local authorities, government and governmental organisations, parish councils, utility providers) have a duty to seek to further the purpose of the National Landscape; this *Management Plan* will guide them in fulfilling their statutory duties.

- 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 Blackdown 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.

6. Research used to inform this assessment

Different methods of research were used to inform the review of the management plan, and this has been used to inform this assessment:

- a. Literature review/other plans and strategies – to help set the scope of the review, national guidance on management plan review was referenced alongside learning best practice from other protected landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes management plans recently or concurrently undergoing review). Various other plans and strategies were reviewed, such as Devon Carbon Plan, and reference was had to the development of the Devon Local Nature Recovery Strategy for example.
- b. Data collection and statistical analysis -
 - We commissioned a State of the National Landscape report in 2023, to collate a range of data and information for the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, from Natural England, Defra, 2021 Census and other sources, relating to the topics of the previous management plan
 - Working collaboratively with other national landscapes, engagement in research projects provided us with data from Cranfield University on soil carbon
 - DEFRA/Natural England provided a set of national statistics to support the targets and outcomes framework/and monitoring
- c. Stakeholder engagement and consultation

At different stages of the review we sought direct input and feedback from partners and community. This included an online public survey, a stakeholder workshop with partner organisations, parish councils and other local representatives, and a workshop with local community environmental groups.

7. Description of consultation process and outcomes

Key consultation phases in the review process:

- Blackdown Hills Management Group workshops to scope scale of review
- Public online survey, widely promoted through parish councils, parish magazines, social media and event, to gauge views on natural beauty, and future priorities
- Stakeholder workshop for organisations, to help development vision, principles and priorities.
- Reporting to local authority partners in advance of public consultation and ongoing engagement with officers and councillors
- Six-week consultation period for partners and public on a draft plan (online via website, promoted to stakeholders and public)

Comments, advice and suggestions from agencies and individuals informed the development of the plan and appropriate amendments made at each stage.

8. Equality analysis

Giving Due Regard to Equality and Human Rights

The local authority must consider how people will be affected by the service, policy or practice. In so doing we must give due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Where relevant, we must take into account the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, race, and religion and belief. This means considering how people with different needs get the different services they require and are not disadvantaged, and facilities are available to them on an equal basis in order to meet their needs;

advancing equality of opportunity by recognising the disadvantages to which protected groups are subject and considering how they can be overcome.

We also need to ensure that human rights are protected. In particular, that people have:

- A reasonable level of choice in where and how they live their life and interact with others (this is an aspect of the human right to 'private and family life').
- An appropriate level of care which results in dignity and respect (the protection to a private and family life, protection from torture and the freedom of thought, belief and religion within the Human Rights Act and elimination of discrimination and the promotion of good relations under the Equality Act 2010).
- A right to life (ensuring that nothing we do results in unlawful or unnecessary/avoidable death).
- The Equality Act 2010 and other relevant legislation does not prevent the Council from taking difficult decisions which result in service reductions or closures for example, it does however require the Council to ensure that such decisions are:
 - Informed and properly considered with a rigorous, conscious approach and open mind, taking due regard of the effects on the protected characteristics and the general duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.
 - Proportionate (negative impacts are proportionate to the aims of the policy decision)
 - Fair
 - Necessary
 - Reasonable, and
 - Those affected have been adequately consulted.

| | | |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Characteristics | <p>Potential or actual issues for this group.</p> <p>[Please refer to the Diversity Guide and See RED]</p> | <p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary. • advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible. • foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant? <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the DCC Equality Policy?</p> |
|-----------------|--|---|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| All residents (include generic equality provisions) | <p>One of the four sections of the plan is called 'People'. It has objectives, guiding principles, targets, actions and policies.</p> <p>The guidance from Natural England on all National Landscape management plans is to improve the partnership and governance equality and diversity.</p> | <p>The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan places people at its core, recognising the essential role of residents, visitors, businesses, and landowners in its delivery. The plan is structured around four key themes: Place, People, Nature, and Climate, each with defined objectives, guiding principles, targets, actions, and policies.</p> <p>To help eliminate or reduce potential disadvantage and improve accessibility, the plan aligns with the government's PLTOF target to "Improve and promote accessibility to and engagement with Protected Landscapes for all using metrics based on those in the Defra Access for All programme." It goes further by committing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing opportunities for physical improvements to accessibility, such as enhanced trails, parking, and facilities. • Ensuring projects incorporate volunteering opportunities and engagement with schools. • Taking positive action to increase diversity within the management group and decision-making processes. <p>By focusing on improving physical accessibility and fostering engagement across different groups, the plan seeks to advance equality of access and participation. While some actions may require prioritisation of resources or changes in land use, these are considered necessary and proportionate to achieving the overall aim of an inclusive and accessible landscape.</p> |
| Age | See above | See above |
| Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, neurodiversity, long term ill health) and carers of disabled people | See above | See above |

| Characteristics | Potential or actual issues for this group. [Please refer to the Diversity Guide and See RED] | <p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary. advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible. foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant? <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the DCC Equality Policy?</p> |
|--|--|---|
| Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin, ethnic origin/race, skin colour, religion and belief | See above | See above |
| Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women's right to breastfeed) | See above | See above |
| Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership | See above | See above |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Characteristics | <p>Potential or actual issues for this group.</p> <p>[Please refer to the Diversity Guide and See RED]</p> | <p>In what way will you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary. advance equality (to meet needs/ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, 'close gaps'), if possible. foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant? <p>In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim?</p> <p>Are you complying with the DCC Equality Policy?</p> |
| Other relevant socio-economic factors such as family size/single people/lone parents, income/deprivation, housing, education and skills, literacy, sub-cultures, 'digital exclusion', access to transport options, rural/urban | See above | See above |

9. Human rights considerations:

There are no human rights considerations arising from the review of the Blackdown Hills management plan in relation to the Human Rights Act (1998).

In what way can you support and create opportunities for people and communities (of place and interest) to be independent, empowered and resourceful?

The plan provides a focus for partnership working and collaboration among agencies, with a clear geographical emphasis. Part of the plan's Vision statement is to see 'thriving, diverse communities, with a strong sense of place and wellbeing, are sustained by a connection to the land, natural environment and a rich local cultural heritage. Living and working sustainably in and around the area, they underpin the prospering local economy and can access the services they need.' This is backed by objectives and policies that help to provide the framework for supporting and creating such opportunities, for example;

Objective: To nurture flourishing communities, where the population is both cohesive and diverse, where there is easy access to a range of services and facilities, and where the commitment of local people helps to conserve and enhance the environment, heritage and landscape of the Blackdown Hills.

Policy PE4: Local communities will be supported to identify, plan, and provide for their own needs, in undertaking activities to encourage sustainable lifestyles, reinforce and celebrate local cultural traditions, and engagement in cultural and natural heritage initiatives. Support initiatives that help to provide, retain or enhance community facilities and services where they are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

In what way can you help people to be safe, protected from harm, and with good health and wellbeing?

The plan includes a policy that promotes good health and wellbeing insofar as engaging and connecting with nature and the countryside;

Policy PE3: Opportunities to use the natural environment resource of the Blackdown Hills to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors which are compatible with conserving and enhancing natural beauty will be sought and promoted, particularly where this will enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage and access.

In what way can you help people to be connected, and involved in community activities?

In addition to the vision statement, objective and policies described in the sections above, the following policy also contributes to this:

PE1 Seek to inspire and foster connection with the Blackdown Hills through provision of a range of sensitive and sustainable opportunities for volunteering and active engagement with the countryside, wildlife and heritage of the Blackdown Hills that are available and accessible to all, working to ensure that everyone feels welcome to explore and enjoy the area.

10. Environmental analysis

An impact assessment should give due regard to the following activities in order to ensure we meet a range of environmental legal duties. The policy or practice does not require the identification of environmental impacts using this Impact Assessment process because it is subject to (please mark X in the relevant box below and proceed to the 4c, otherwise complete the environmental analysis table):

| | |
|---|---|
| Devon County Council's Environmental Review Process | |
| Planning Permission | |
| Environmental Impact Assessment | |
| Strategic Environmental Assessment | X |

| | Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these). | Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible). |
|---|--|---|
| Reduce, reuse, recycle and compost: | | |
| Conserve and enhance wildlife: | | |
| Safeguard the distinctive characteristics, features and special qualities of Devon's landscape: | | |
| Conserve and enhance Devon's cultural and historic heritage: | | |
| Minimise greenhouse gas emissions: | | |
| Minimise pollution (including air, land, water, light and noise): | | |
| Contribute to reducing water consumption: | | |
| Ensure resilience to the future effects of climate change (warmer, wetter winters; drier, hotter summers; more intense storms; and rising sea level): | | |
| Other (please state below): | | |

11. Economic analysis

| | Describe any actual or potential negative consequences. (Consider how to mitigate against these). | Describe any actual or potential neutral or positive outcomes. (Consider how to improve as far as possible). |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Impact on knowledge and skills: | | <p>In the management plan there are policies for each section. Please see below the policies relating to knowledge and skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Blackdown Hills National Landscape supports local communities in meeting their needs, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and preserving cultural and natural heritage. • Economic development is encouraged through local markets and sustainable products, provided they do not compromise the area's natural beauty. • Employment, skills, and business growth are supported through training, enterprise initiatives, and networking, particularly when they align with conserving the landscape's special qualities. • Tourism and recreation are welcomed when they benefit the local economy without harming the landscape, biodiversity, or tranquillity. • Additionally, efforts to improve broadband and mobile coverage are supported, ensuring they do not negatively impact the area's character. |
| Impact on employment levels: | | See above |
| Impact on local business: | | See above |

12. Describe the linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts (Combined Impacts):

The management plan is structured around four key areas—people, place, climate, and nature—recognising their interconnectedness and the ways they can support and challenge each other. It seeks a balanced approach, such as enhancing public access to nature while mitigating potential negative environmental impacts from recreation, including dog fouling, wildlife disturbance, and litter.

Examples of policies in the plan include:

- Support farmers to take up environment land management schemes
- Continue to promote, deliver and advocate for 'mainstreaming' natural-based solutions as a mechanism to provide resilience to property and infrastructure, both within the Blackdown Hills National Landscape but also, importantly, downstream where major critical infrastructure is at risk from flooding and where building resilience is only possible through upstream interventions
- Community-led planning tools, such as neighbourhood plans, and initiatives such as Community Land Trusts will be supported as the principal means of identifying need and securing local community assets such as affordable housing. Any development should conserve and enhance natural beauty
- Transition to renewables; energy used within the area needs to rise to near 100% renewable by 2050. The transition to low carbon and renewable energy should be undertaken in a way that seeks to further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, and is compatible with its special qualities, landscape character and heritage value
- Reduce the need to travel and support the development of sustainable low carbon transport and active travel options, while working to avoid leaving any community isolated

13. How will the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area be improved through what is being proposed? And how, in conducting the process of procurement, might that improvement be secured?

The National Landscape Management Plan enhances the well-being of the area by balancing economic growth, community needs, and environmental conservation.

- Economic: The plan supports sustainable local businesses, tourism, and employment, ensuring economic activity aligns with the conservation of the landscape. It also promotes improved broadband and mobile connectivity to support local enterprise.
- Social: By improving access to nature, supporting community initiatives, and preserving cultural heritage, the plan enhances quality of life, health, and well-being.
- Environmental: Conservation is central to the plan, ensuring biodiversity, natural beauty, and climate resilience are protected. Measures are in place to manage visitor impact, promote sustainable land use, and safeguard the landscape for future generations.

All procurement follows Devon County Council procedures.

14. How will impacts and actions be monitored?

A role of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership is to monitor and evaluate the actions that happen as a result of the implementation of this plan to demonstrate where management actions are making a difference on the ground - but without the monitoring process being overly burdensome. There are two main strands to this monitoring:

National Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework

This defines the contribution that Protected Landscapes (as areas) should make to national targets and certain Environmental Improvement Plan outcomes. The Framework contains 10 targets. Each target is accompanied by an indicator which will measure progress towards it and its related outcome. Natural England will evaluate progress towards the targets and outcomes in the Framework.

2. Management reporting

Qualitative monitoring of action is relatively straightforward; partners regularly report to the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership Management Group. This is the opportunity to highlight the work they are doing throughout the year. In addition, the Partnership's Annual Review is the mechanism for reporting on implementing the Management Plan and the Blackdown Hills National Landscape website highlights a range of project work.

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership team will additionally look to develop a programme to identify appropriate, effective and proportionate mechanisms to measure or judge progress towards local priorities that may not be covered elsewhere or require local knowledge and research (could be related to diversity and inclusion and engagement, or specific wildlife species, or hedgerows, for example), and will seek to work with wider partners to secure a long-term programme of monitoring along with appropriate resources.

Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030 Engagement and Consultation Report

1. Key consultation phases in the review process:

- Blackdown Hills Management Group workshops to scope scale of review and maintain overview of process (2022-2025)
- Public online survey, widely promoted through parish councils, parish magazines, social media and events, to gauge views on natural beauty, and future priorities (September 2023 to end of January 2024)
- Stakeholder workshop for organisations, to help development vision, principles and priorities. (February 2024)
- Reporting to local authority partners in advance of public consultation and ongoing engagement with officers and councillors (summer/autumn 2024)
- Local authority and management group consultation on draft plan ahead of public consultation (November 2024)
- Six-week consultation period for partners and public on a draft plan (online via website, promoted to stakeholders and public) (January to March 2025)

2. Record of public consultation (21st January until 4th March 2025; period extended to 19th March for parish councils, and some other partner responses received during this period)

A. Comments received from:

| Type | No. | Organisation |
|-----------------------------------|------------|---|
| Parish or town council | 6 | Otterford Parish Council, Culmstock Parish Council, Hemyock Parish Council, Clayhidon Parish Council, Kentisbeare Parish Council, Broadhembury Parish Council |
| Local authority | 4 | MDDC(Cllr), DCC Heritage, South West Heritage Trust, Somerset Council (Nov 2024) |
| Statutory agency | 3 | Forestry Commission (South West Area Team), Historic England, Natural England |
| Local resident | 6 | |
| Landowner/farmer | 1 | |
| Local interest or community group | 2 | Luppitt Landscape Partnership, Partnership Management Group members (Nov 2024) |
| Non-government organisation | 2 | CPRE Somerset, Somerset Wildlife Trust |
| Other | 1 | Devon Countryside Access Forum |
| total responses | 25 | |

B. Summary of amendments made to management plan as a result of consultation:

| Section | Amendments |
|-------------------|--|
| General | <p>Added section numbering and some sub-headings to aid navigation</p> <p>‘Current status’ changed to ‘At a glance’</p> <p>Strategic Delivery Plan added to appendices</p> <p>Chair’s foreword and partnership commendation statement to be added</p> <p>Full design, maps and images to be included</p> |
| Introduction | <p>1.1</p> <p>Added text to emphasise role of plan among partnership organisations.</p> <p>Specified that relevant authorities includes the national landscape partnership.</p> <p>Additional concluding remarks added about aim/purpose of the plan.</p> <p>1.3</p> <p>Additional references to strengthened duty.</p> <p>Additional information on the protected landscapes targets.</p> <p>Amended information on the Landscapes Review.</p> <p>In the policy influences section;</p> <p>Added international context (UN sustainable development goals).</p> <p>Added reference to MDDC and EDDC climate action.</p> <p>Added reference to Natural England, Historic England, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund joint statement.</p> <p>Included a new section – summary of forces for change.</p> |
| Special Qualities | <p>Deletion of one element of a sentence in unspoilt rural character paragraph.</p> <p>Special qualities appendix;</p> <p>Corresponding amendment to the above.</p> <p>Some additional details added to historic landscape.</p> <p>Some further detail added to natural environment section, on turbaries and spring-line mire.</p> |
| Vision | <p>Minor wording change to thriving, diverse communities... part.</p> <p>Additional descriptive wording to wildlife and habitats part.</p> <p>Revised heritage part.</p> |
| Place | <p>Changed/added ‘regenerative’ alongside ‘sustainable’.</p> <p>Added archaeology to relevant objective.</p> <p>Additional principle added about national targets/local needs.</p> <p>Commentary added about take up of agri-environment schemes under priorities for action.</p> <p>Included priority for Target 10 (heritage).</p> <p>Added two ‘other priorities’, one related to heritage, the other to planning.</p> <p>Added forestry-related references to relevant policies.</p> |

| | |
|---------|--|
| | <p>Context;</p> <p>Additional commentary in respect of water quality.</p> <p>Added paragraph on air quality.</p> <p>Organised landscape section more logically, with sub-headings.</p> <p>Combined heritage and geology and some additional heritage commentary.</p> <p>Farming and land use heading changed to farming and land management.</p> <p>Soil health bullet points revised.</p> <p>Added references to UK Forestry Standard, and some other text amendments.</p> <p>‘A spotlight on planning’ heading changed to Planning and development.</p> <p>Key points from the NPPF reformatted.</p> <p>Added cross reference to Climate section and policies.</p> <p>Added specific quote from NPPF footnote regarding ‘major development’.</p> <p>Additional text added under role of the management plan.</p> <p>Added reference to noise/activity/lighting applying beyond the boundary.</p> |
| People | <p>Amended wording of access/enjoyment objective.</p> <p>Re-ordered and combined guiding principles.</p> <p>Added detail of lengths of rights of way.</p> <p>Additional priority included for Target 9.</p> <p>Two additional ‘other priorities’, communication/information audit, and collaboration to address community issues.</p> <p>Policies PE1 and PE3 amended to (activities compatible with conserving and enhancing) and added historic to natural environment.</p> <p>Context;</p> <p>Added commentary on health and wellbeing organisations and experience.</p> <p>Specified Culm garden village alongside surrounding towns in terms of green infrastructure/access.</p> <p>Expanded local access forum commentary, and included reference to Parish Paths Partnership (P3) groups in Devon.</p> |
| Nature | <p>Reference to habitat creation targets added under priorities for action for 30 by 30.</p> <p>Context;</p> <p>Included reference to marsh fritillary not being present on SAC site.</p> <p>Added reference to Somerset Levels and Moors.</p> |
| Climate | <p>Added clarification about cross-cutting nature of the climate theme at the start.</p> <p>Under actions for climate change mitigation, added new action around quantifying peat deposits and carbon contained.</p> <p>Under actions for adaptation, added point about renewable energy installations and AD plants.</p> <p>Policies;</p> |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| | <p>Added general point - clarification about cross referencing other themes.</p> <p>Context;</p> <p>Added reference to renewable energy development and signposting to Devon landscape guidance on accommodating wind and solar.</p> |
| Delivery and monitoring | <p>Added sub-heading of implementation.</p> <p>Added section about functions and role of National Landscape Partnership in delivery.</p> <p>Additional contextual information added as introduction to monitoring and evaluation.</p> <p>Note added about using local intelligence to question national targets and outcomes.</p> <p>Updated references to the delivery plan (and new delivery plan included in appendices).</p> |

All comments submitted have been recorded on a spreadsheet, with a note on response/course of action.

**Report for: Planning, Environment and Sustainability
Policy Development Group (PDG)**

Date of Meeting: 10 June 2025

Subject: Climate and Sustainability Update

Cabinet Member: Cllr Natasha Bradshaw - Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.

Responsible Officer: Jason Ball - Climate and Sustainability Specialist.

Paul Deal - Head of Finance, Property and Climate Resilience.

Exempt: None

which are Exempt from publication under paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Wards Affected: All

Enclosures: (none)

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

To receive an update on the Climate and Sustainability Programme.

Recommendation(s):

1. **That the Planning, Environment and Sustainability Policy Development Group (PDG) notes and accepts this report as an update on the Council's Climate and Sustainability Programme, and progress on its response to the Climate Emergency.**

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's [Climate Change Strategy](#) 2024-2028 aligns with the 2024-2028 Corporate Plan (CP). An annual [Climate Action Plan](#) (CAP) 'roadmap to 2030' complements the Strategy aiming to deliver corporate net-zero at the soonest opportunity. Each PDG and team must manage their remit and operations with regard to climate adaptation and mitigation.
- 1.2 The Council participates in the [Devon Climate Emergency partnership](#), is a signatory to the [Devon Climate Emergency Pledge](#) and endorsed the [Devon Carbon Plan](#) goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 at the latest.
- 1.3 The Climate and Sustainability (C&S) Specialist leads the development of the Council's C&S Programme, working with partners, all Councillors and colleagues and particularly with service leads, the Corporate Management Team and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change.
- 1.4 Council actions on **climate mitigation** (reducing greenhouse emissions) and **climate adaptation** (resilience to climate change risks) can be split into:
- An internal organisational / corporate focus for the Council;
 - Efforts to enable and facilitate actions across Mid Devon communities.
- 1.5 Therefore this report is divided into **corporate** and **community** items (some overlap is possible). Clearly the Council can monitor and manage matters related to its own assets and operations to a significant degree. For the wider agenda linked to the whole Mid Devon area, we will work as a partner with local businesses, organisations, community groups and residents.
- 1.6 This report emphasises activity and progress updates for brevity.

2.0 Performance

- 2.1 Progress on [Corporate Plan Performance Indicators](#) (PI) is given to [Cabinet](#) quarterly (Scrutiny Committee every 6 months). Quarterly [Performance Dashboards](#) share data on e.g. greenhouse gas emissions avoided by generating solar power and using electric vehicles. Notes also [available online](#). (sustainablemiddevon.org.uk/our-plan/#aims-priorities)
- 2.2 The Council's Carbon Footprint
- 2.2.1 Annual [carbon footprint reports](#) are published on the Council's [Sustainable Mid Devon](#) website. A [carbon footprint](#) measures emissions in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e).
- 2.2.2 Net emissions for the 2023/24 financial year were 16,454 tCO₂e. Elements in the Council's direct control were 2,103 tCO₂e, a fraction of the overall total.

2.2.3 Reports from the 2018/19 baseline year onwards have been produced by the University of Exeter's Centre for Energy and the Environment (CEE) via the South West Energy and Environment Group (SWEED). Analysis was based on BS EN ISO 14064-1 and the Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

2.3 Progress on the CAP at Q4 end 2024/2025 was promising. Table below.

| Actions, Activities, Projects | Emissions Cut, tCO ₂ e/year | Q4 24-25 Status | Progress % |
|---|--|-----------------|------------|
| Property Services | 218 | | |
| Pannier Market LED fixtures and controls. | 2 | complete | 100% |
| Exe Valley, additional solar car ports. Now battery storage. | 37 | emerging | |
| Culm Valley, new ASHP, solar. | 45 | emerging | |
| Exe Valley CHP 70kW. (Gas fired, combined heat and power.) | -50 | active | |
| Solar Car Ports, Phoenix Lane multi storey. | 146 | active | 5% |
| Building Management System project at Phoenix House. | 38 | active | 5% |
| Fleet | 7 | | |
| Replace 1 van | 2 | emerging | |
| Replace 4 vans | 5 | TBC | |
| Housing | 135 | | |
| Solid Fuel appliance removals from HRA Stock | 50 | active | 32% |
| Whole house UPVC window replacements to HRA stock | 15 | active | 40% |
| Internal Insulation upgrades to HRA stock | 13 | active | 60% |
| Whole roof Replacement to HRA stock | 7 | active | 50% |
| Renewable Heating installations to HRA stock | 48 | active | 10% |
| LED lighting to Bathrooms in HRA stock | 1 | active | 84% |

3.0 Community and partnership activities

3.1 Climate Change Strategy themes:

- Vibrant landscapes at the heart of Devon
- Climate Resilient Communities
- Healthy Homes
- Green Growth and Bright Futures
- Sustainable Services and Spending

3.1.1 Engagement activities so far, in brief:

- Meetings with community groups and champions to discuss potential, Sustainable Bradninch, Sustainable Crediton, Sustainable Tiverton, Uffculme Green Team, Tidcombe Fen.

- Community engagement and a presentation of the Climate Change Strategy at the *Connecting the Culm* 2025 Forum.
 - Community engagement and a presentation of the Climate Change Strategy at the Hemyock Parish Council.
 - Energy Boost Mid Devon - ECOE Advice at landlord networking event.
 - Launched Green Enterprise Grants, handling expressions of interest.
- 3.1.2 Community engagement and promoting events, exemplars and projects.
- 3.1.3 Online promotion continues via social media, the Let's Talk Mid Devon engagement platform and the Sustainable Mid Devon website.
- 3.2 Vibrant landscapes at the heart of Devon
- 3.2.1 Devon's [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) (LNRS).
- 3.2.2 The portfolio holder, Forward Planning Team leader and the C&S Specialist have worked with the LNRS team to prepare the consultation paper and consider the LNRS resources. The draft LNRS website and mapping will be presented at the earliest opportunity for consultation, prior to public consultation. We hope to have a presentation at Planning Policy and Advisory Group (PPAG) 16 June.
- 3.2.3 The Council is a Supporting Authority for the LNRS, a statutory requirement in England ([Sections 104 to 106](#) of the Environment Act 2021). The Local Plan must 'have regard' for the Strategy, and relevant development proposals will need to demonstrate consideration of it.
- 3.2.4 Co-benefits to nature recovery include: climate change adaptation and mitigation; water quality; Natural Capital and ecosystem services; wellbeing.
- 3.2.5 The LNRS will inform nature recovery at a local level, by mapping habitats, features and key species to identify opportunities and priorities to boost ecological connectivity, diversity and abundance. Online resources aim to help everyone to play a role in nature recovery.
- 3.3 Climate Resilient Communities.
- 3.3.1 The Resilience Officer is working with communities on emergency preparedness, which helps to support climate resilience. Many key risks and mitigations identified by Towns and Parishes relate to climate change, as extreme events are predicted to be more frequent or more severe in future. Attended the May meeting of Devon Communities Together.
- 3.4 Healthy Homes
- 3.4.1 [Energy Boost Mid Devon](#), a partnership project with charity ECOE Advice, launched in April. Mid Devon residents will benefit from healthier homes thanks to independent advice, workshops and retrofit support funded by

£45k from the climate and sustainability budget plus a £15k Energy Efficiency Fund to help those who can least afford the home improvements.

3.4.2 ECOE Advice attended the Council's landlord networking event in May.

3.4.3 The Housing Initiatives Officer worked with DCC and the other district authorities on a bid for the Warm Homes: Local Grant; decision awaited.

3.5 Green Growth and Bright Futures

3.5.1 [Green Enterprise Grants](#). Launched in May 2025, offering grants £500 to £5k for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) the £30k scheme funded by the Council's climate and sustainability budget will drive local investment and attract match funding to help reduce emissions in Mid Devon.

3.5.2 Deletti 'Phase 2' partnership. The Council will host 12 new rapid [chargepoints](#) under this scheme (2 per hub) being run on renewable power, owned and operated by Wenea. Notes on the installation status:

- Cullompton; Forge Way (installed).
- Crediton; Market Street (installed), St Saviour's Way (scheduled).
- Tiverton; William Street (installed), Pannier Market (scheduled), Westexe South (scheduled).

3.5.3 Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) scheme. Devon County Council's (DCC) procurement is completed. The majority of the £7m subsidy from OZEV (Office for Zero Emission Vehicles) will benefit on-street residential areas and community car parks including at up to 12 Mid Devon parishes.

4.0 **Corporate activities**

4.1 An additional Project Manager is now in post to deliver climate and sustainability projects for the Property Services team. Priority projects include solar power, battery storage and energy efficiency e.g. building fabric upgrades and management systems.

4.2 Biodiversity Duty Action Plan in place. Goals being implemented include:

- Early stage review of Council land management and opportunities to enhance nature.
- Consideration of potential to enhance conservation status for key areas, and liaison with managers of special sites such as Local Nature Reserves.
- The Planning team records the number of Consents with BNG secured (and enforcement of action for nature).

4.3 The C&S Specialist continues to give support to all teams and has:

- Worked with Devon Assurance Partnership on the Climate Change internal audit.

- Carried out Corporate Plan performance and risk reviews. Created a cross-team External Funding tracker for measures 1.2 and 2.2.
- Coordinated CAP monitoring.
- Collated carbon footprint data.
- Has initiated cross-team work on climate risk resilience and adaptation.
- Worked to support and brief the Corporate Management Team (CMT), service leads and others on corporate environment aims.
- Led development, consultation and launch of projects.
- Revised and updated MDDC online content.
- Supported team meetings and Service Lead meetings with climate and sustainability being a regular agenda item. Shared opportunities with Members, NZAG, CMT, colleagues etc.
- Support for the leisure team and Property Services to respond to audits, surveys, priorities and opportunities for investment and improvements.
- Met quarterly with key operational managers to support communications, teamwork and to help prioritise actions.
- Provided secretariat support for Net Zero Advisory Group (NZAG). NZAG will review its Terms of Reference this year.
- Worked with the Cabinet Member to take forward actions raised by this PDG and NZAG with colleagues and partners.

Financial Implications. The financial implications associated with this report are the overall costs of the C&S Programme, budgets linked specifically to the Council's Corporate Plan, Climate Strategy and CAP.

Legal Implications. The Council's environmental sustainability duties are underpinned by legislation e.g. [Environment Act 2021](#). All local authorities have obligations under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) with regard to climate change adaptation (resilience) and mitigation (emission reductions). [Full Council declared a Climate Emergency in June 2019](#).

Risk Assessment. Progress on Performance Indicators (PI) provided separately by Performance and Risk Reports. There are 2 main risks (to the Council): 1) that the Council does not take sufficient actions to enable it to meet its Climate Emergency declaration ambitions; and 2) that the financial implications of Climate Change are not adequately measured and reflected in the Council's decision making.

Impact on Climate Change. The role of the C&S Specialist in support of the corporate officer team is central to the Council's C&S Programme by actions such as the development of strategic positions and delivery of projects through internal, community and partnership work.

Equalities Impact Assessment. There are no equality impacts associated with this report. Specific projects and policies are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty. (Assessing the equality impacts of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is not only a legal requirement, but also a positive opportunity for authorities to make better decisions based on robust evidence.)

Relationship to Corporate Plan. Please refer to Section 2, paragraphs 2.1 - 2.2.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off / mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151 Officer
Date: 28.5.25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 28.5.25

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director
Date: 28.5.25

Performance and risk: Steve Carr
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager.
Date: 28.05.25

Cabinet member notified: Yes.

Report: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No.

Appendix: Exclusion of the press and public from this item of business on the published agenda on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. No.

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Jason Ball, Climate and Sustainability Specialist: Email: JBall@MidDevon.gov.uk Tel: 01884 255255.

Background papers: Previous update provided to this [PDG](#) on 11 March 2025. For background details, please refer to previous reports, all [available online](#).

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Report for: Planning, Environment and Sustainability PDG

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Date of Meeting: | 10 th June 2025 |
| Subject: | Summary report on Planning matters |
| Cabinet Member: | Cllr Steve Keable, Planning & Economic Regeneration |
| Responsible Officer: | Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy |
| Exempt: | N/A |
| Wards Affected: | All wards |
| Enclosures: | N/A |

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)

This report provides a summary of activity undertaken in relation to planning matters during the last quarter.

Recommendation(s):

1. That members note the contents of the report.

Section 2 – Report

1.0 Introduction

This report seeks to provide Members with updates across a range of matters relating to Planning and Building Control. The updates are in line with those previously agreed for inclusion within this report at the June 2024 meeting of the Policy Development Group.

2.0 Updates:

2.1 New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

- 2.1.1 Further to the release of the latest iteration of the NPPF in December 2024, it remains expected that the Government will consult on a national set of 'core' development management (DM) policies. These 'core' national DM policies are expected to cover generic topics such as viability, space standards, use of renewables etc where consistency in policy is considered helpful and appropriate. Local development management policies may be able to continue where they address local issues. It is understood that the Government believes such changes will simplify and streamline the planning process, speed up decision making and unlock additional housing delivery. Although recent updates continue to hint at imminent release of such draft policies and the consultation, no timetable has been confirmed.
- 2.1.2 Alongside the Development Management policies, a 'streamlined' NPPF is expected with proposals for changes to the planning committee systems for Local Planning Authorities (LPA's).
- 2.1.3 Members may also find it interesting and noteworthy to know that, in a recent article published in 'Planning Resource', it was stated that, since the latest revision of the NPPF (Dec '24), approval rates through Inquiries have more than doubled¹. PINS statistics also show that the proportion of planning appeals allowed by PINS has reached a seven year high in the first quarter of 2025. It is therefore apparent that the revision of the NPPF is resulting in additional approvals via appeal and this trend is anticipated to continue.

2.2 New Local Plan: Plan Mid-Devon

- 2.2.1 Work to develop the new Local Plan (Plan Mid Devon) continues albeit recent staff departures means that recruitment is required to ensure the team is at capacity and able to progress work in a timely fashion.

¹ <https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1918498/new-nppf-game-changer-recent-appeal-decisions-says-planning-silk>

2.3 Development Management Policies:

- 2.3.1 The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan consultation ended on the 19th March 2025 and a further report is before this PDG today which seeks a recommendation from this PDG on to the 8th July Cabinet meeting that the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan (Appendices 1, 2 and 3) is adopted.

2.4 Development Management:

- 2.4.1 Performance within Development Management remains strong with 100% of householder applications determined within 8 weeks and 0.2% of minor applications overturned at appeal. (Q4 data.)
- 2.4.2 However, Q4 income remained depressed meaning that the service closed the year £106k down against budget on statutory fee income. This is a slight improvement on the trajectory versus the Q3 data – but is still disappointing, especially as it was considered income could pick up as applicants sought to beat fee increases which became effective from 1st April 2025. However, this financial picture does reflect the wider market sentiment and macro-economic conditions with housebuilders, contractors and other Local Authorities also experiencing a downturn in sales/contracts and applications.
- 2.4.3 Although the discretionary fee income is also down against target for the year (£141k versus £175k target), this level of income achievement is still a significant achievement given the wider market conditions and it reflects the proactive work being undertaken by the Development Management team to secure additional income streams – notably through pre-application advice activity.
- 2.4.4 At the time of writing this report, the Tidcombe Hall planning inquiry was underway with the Council seeking to defend the earlier refusal of planning permission. The appeal been scheduled for 4 days and the opening day saw around 70 members of the public attend the inquiry to listen to proceedings and/or participate.

2.5 Conservation:

- 2.5.1 A 'forward plan' of conservation areas to be reviewed has been requested by Members and was briefly referenced at the last meeting of the PDG.
- 2.5.2 Work will continue on this alongside other Local Plan work and the intention is to progress this further once the Tidcombe Hall inquiry has concluded and officer resource is freed up to support the work.

2.6 Building Control:

- 2.6.1 Building Control (a shared function with North Devon Council) continues to perform well, albeit with continuing resourcing challenges and pressures accruing through changes introduced through the Building Safety Act (2024).
- 2.6.2 Q4 data showed 97% approval of full applications within 2 months (versus 95% target and 100% achieved in Q3) and continuity of a strong market share (82% versus 75% target and 81% in Q3.) Market share of new housing completions has dropped back versus Q2 data (17% vs. 29%) but remains below target (40%).
- 2.6.3 Applications numbers, and therefore income, remain low/below target with a trading deficit of £76k across the financial year versus a breakeven target. Again – akin to Development Management - this is reflective of a depressed housing market and low confidence within the construction/development sector as a whole. Poor trading conditions seem likely to continue through Q1 of 2025/26.

2.7 Planning Enforcement

- 2.7.1 The Enforcement services continues with a high/active case load albeit there continues to be churn/change in the live cases as new cases are presented and officers close older/completed cases.
- 2.7.2 The service continues to operate with two officers (a contractor and an assistant enforcement officer.) Multiple attempts have been made to recruit a senior enforcement officer with the most recent attempt (with market supplement applied) occurring since the last report to the PDG in March. Although applicants did apply for the role, no successful appointment was made. The

service will therefore continue with the existing contractor and officer arrangement with the intention to seek to recruit again later in 2025.

- 2.7.3** In addition to this, planning officers continue to support with the resolution of live cases in order to seek to manage and reduce the case-load.

Financial Implications

Financial implications associated with this report are limited – but members are asked to note points relating to financial performance and other implications of matters.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

Risk Assessment

There are no major risks associated with this report.

Impact on Climate Change

The scope of this PDG means it has a significant opportunity to progress positive work around climate, biodiversity and other environmental/sustainability matters. Officers will work to seek to support the PDG in maximising these opportunities.

Equalities Impact Assessment

No negative equalities impacts are expected.

Relationship to Corporate Plan

The work of this PDG will supports a wide range of corporate objectives and the corporate plan as a whole.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 27.5.25

Statutory Officer: Maria de Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

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Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 27.5.25

Performance and risk: Stephen Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

Date: 28.5.25

Cabinet member notified: yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy

Email: rmarsh@middevon.gov.uk

Telephone:

Background papers:

PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY PDG WORK PLAN 2025-2026

| Meeting Date | Agenda Item | Theme | Officer Responsible | Comments |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------|--|-------------------|
| 10th June 2025 | | | | |
| 10.06.25 | Election of Chair | | | For decision |
| 10.06.25 | Election of Vice-Chair | | | For decision |
| 10.06.25 | Start Time of Meetings | | | For decision |
| 10.06.25 | Climate and Sustainability Update | | Climate and Sustainability Specialist (Jason Ball) | For information |
| 10.06.25 | Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan | | Director of Place and Economy | For decision |
| 10.06.25 | Performance Dashboard Quarter 4 | | Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager (Stephen Carr) | For information |
| 10.06.24 | Planning Summary Repot | | Director of Place and Economy | For information |
| 10.06.25 | Work Programme and Identification of Items for the Next Meeting | | | To review |
| 23rd September 2025 | | | | |
| 23.09.25 | Climate and Sustainability Update | | Climate and Sustainability Specialist (Jason Ball) | For information |
| 23.09.25 | Performance Dashboard Quarter 1 | | Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager | For information |
| 23.09.25 | MDDC Draft Budget 2026-27 First Review To review the draft MTFP for 2025 – 26 | | Deputy Chief Executive (S151) | For consideration |
| 23.09.25 | Planning Summary Report | | Director of Economy and Place | For information |

| Meeting Date | Agenda Item | Theme | Officer Responsible | Comments |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------|---|---|
| 23.09.25 | Work Programme and Identification of Items for the Next Meeting | | | To review |
| 25th November 2025 | | | | |
| 25.11.25 | Performance Dashboard Quarter 2 | | Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager | For information |
| 25.11.25 | MDDC Draft Budget 2025-26 Second Review To review the draft MTFP for 2026 - 27 | | Deputy Chief Executive (S151) | For consideration and recommendation to Cabinet |
| 25.11.25 | Climate and Sustainability Update | | Climate and Sustainability Specialist | For information |
| 25.11.25 | Planning Summary Report | | Director of Place and Economy | For information |
| 25.11.25 | Work Programme and Identification of Items for the Next Meeting | | Clerk | For consideration |
| 10th March 2026 | | | | |
| 10.03.26 | Performance Dashboard Quarter 3 | | Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager | For information |
| 10.03.26 | Climate and Sustainability Update | | Climate and Sustainability Specialist | For information |
| 10.03.26 | Planning Summary Report | | Director of Place and Economy | For information |
| 10.03.26 | Chairman's Report for 2025-2026 To receive a report from the Chairman of the Environment PDG on the work of the Group for 2025-2026 | | | For information |