

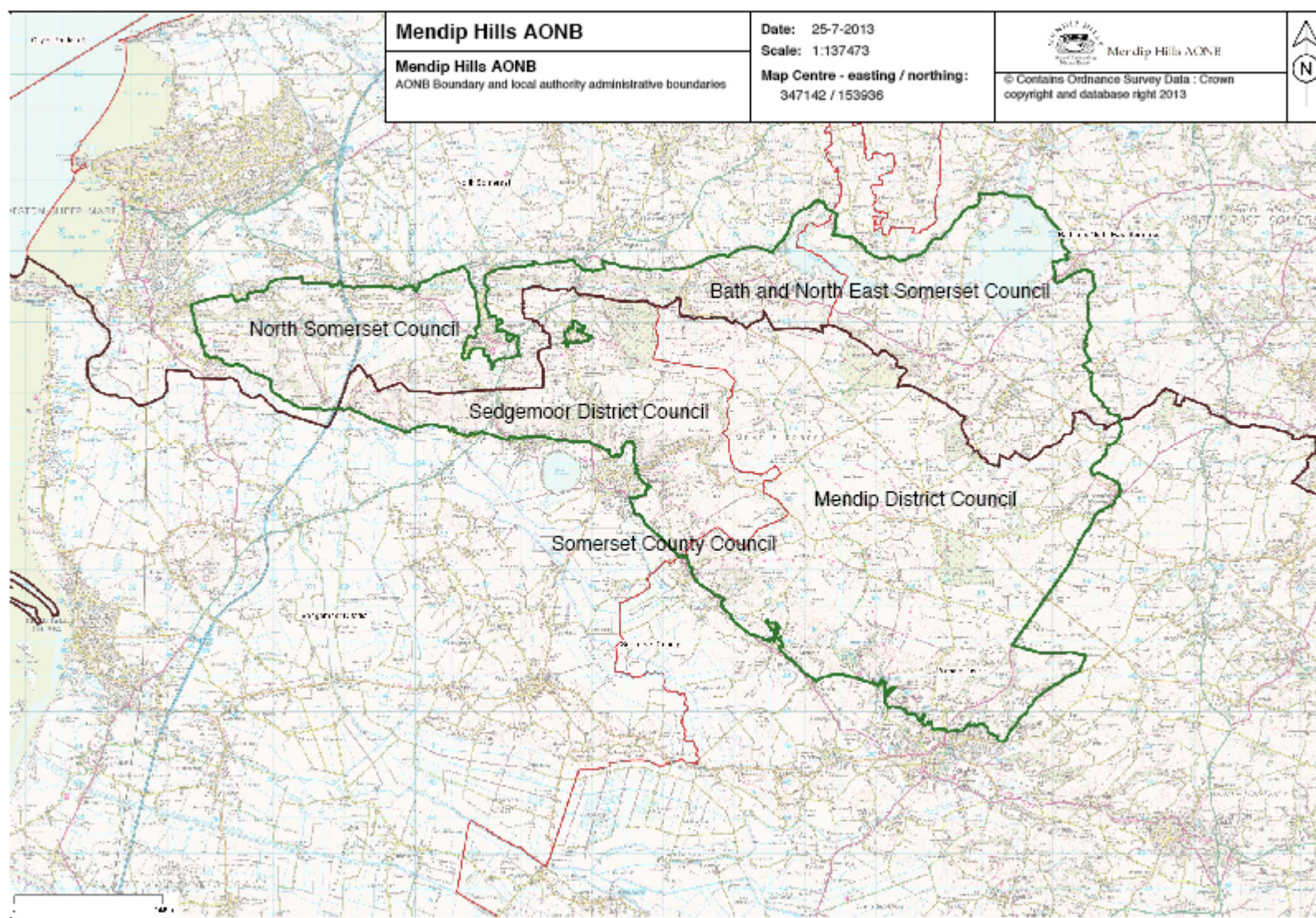


Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Management Plan 2014-19

(November 2013)





Content

1.0 The Mendip Hills AONB, Plan and designation

- 1.1 Our vision for the Mendip Hills AONB
- 1.2 The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan
- 1.3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- 1.4 Statement of Significance – the AONBs Special Qualities
- 1.5 The benefits of the Mendip Hills AONB to society

2.0 Drivers for change

- 2.1 National Association for AONBs
- 2.2 Making Space for Nature
- 2.3 Natural Environment White Paper
- 2.4 Biodiversity 2020
- 2.5 National Planning Policy Framework
- 2.6 National Character Areas
- 2.7 Nature Improvement Areas
- 2.8 Climate change

3.0 Themes:

- 3.1 Landscape Quality
- 3.2 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
- 3.3 Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage
- 3.4 Recreation, Access and Tourism
- 3.5 Natural Resources
- 3.6 Land Management
- 3.7 Development and Transport
- 3.8 Participation

4.0 Delivering and Monitoring:

- 4.1 Delivering the Management Plan and monitoring the state of the AONB
- 4.2 Framework for Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes

Appendices

- i) Drivers for Change – additional information
- ii) Glossary
- iii) Management Plan 2009-2014 Key Achievements

Ministers Foreword

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) are some of our finest landscapes. They are cherished by residents and visitors alike and allow millions of people from all walks of life to understand and connect with nature.

I am pleased to see that this management plan demonstrates how AONB Partnerships can continue to protect these precious environments despite the significant challenges they face. With a changing climate, the increasing demands of a growing population and in difficult economic times, I believe AONBs represent just the sort of community driven, collaborative approach needed to ensure our natural environment is maintained for generations to come.

AONB Partnerships have been the architects of a landscape-scale approach to land management. This approach is a key feature of the Government's Natural Environment White Paper and emphasises the need to manage ecosystems in an integrated fashion, linking goals on wildlife, water, soil and landscape, and working at a scale that respects natural systems.

This management plan also makes the important connection between people and nature. I am pleased to hear that local communities have been central to the development of the plan, and will be at the heart of its delivery. From volunteers on nature conservation projects, to businesses working to promote sustainable tourism, it's great to hear of the enthusiasm and commitment of the local people who hold their AONBs so dear.

AONBs are, and will continue to be, landscapes of change. Management plans such as this are vital in ensuring these changes are for the better. I would like to thank all those who were involved in bringing this plan together and I wish you every success in bringing it to fruition.

Lord de Mauley
Parliamentary Under Secretary at Defra

Chairman's Foreword

The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a naturally beautiful and nationally protected landscape.

The role of the AONB Partnership is to ensure that the Mendip Hills retain their unique character and special qualities whilst recognising that it is a place for people to live in, work in and visit

The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership has undertaken a review of the 2009- 2014 Management Plan on behalf of the local authorities who have the statutory duty to prepare AONB Management Plans under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. With their continued support and involvement we very much look forward with working with all partners and others to deliver this revised Plan.

Delivering an integrated approach to management of our protected landscape is an ongoing challenge with the uncertainties over national and local government funding and the array of current and future issues that we aim to respond to including demand for new development and renewable energy, the exploration for shale gases and a changing climate. Working in partnership has never been so important.

This revised Management Plan and Delivery Plan for 2014-2019 recognises conservation and enhancement inextricably linked to social and economic vitality. The Plans ambitions and priorities are set within the context of evolving national policy and their delivery at a local landscape scale. The National Planning Policy Framework, Biodiversity 2020 and ecosystem services all have direct relevance to AONBs. A key role for the AONB Partnership is to share and communicate information to assist their effective and appropriate delivery in the Mendip Hills AONB.

With the continued commitment of partners and the many public, private and voluntary sector groups whose work benefits the area I am confident that with our track record of achievement, despite limited resources, we can continue to conserve and enhance this special landscape that so many enjoy and benefit from.

Cllr Dawn Hill
Chairman, Mendip Hills AONB Partnership
October 2013

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership structure

The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership has the formal status of a Joint Advisory Committee to the five local authorities. The broad representation of partners enables the partnership to have a 'voice' independent of the local authorities. The Partnership

- make things happen, translating vision and national policy into local action
- engage with local communities and foster their skills, knowledge and energy
- provide value for money by securing additional funding, resources and project partners
- use innovative approaches to deliver real results through genuine collaboration
- promote sustainable rural growth, leveraging in a variety of income to protect and enhance the natural environment for the benefit of society and the economy

An **Officer Support Group** consisting of the lead officers from each local authority partner together with the Partnership Chairman provides support to the AONB Manager and the Partnership Committee.

The **AONB Unit**, led by the AONB Manager is a small team that works on behalf of the Partnership to fulfil its roles as set out above. The Unit is assisted by volunteers including Rangers, practical task volunteers and Young Ranger assistants.

Steering groups for specific projects and themes are managed by the AONB Unit currently these are Black Down Advisory Group, Mendip Rocks, Planning Group and the Sustainable Development Fund Advisory Panel.

Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee

Somerset County Council
North Somerset Council
Bath and NE Somerset Council
Mendip District Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Mendip Hills AONB Unit
Country Land and Business Association
National Trust
National Farmers Union
Natural England
Somerset Wildlife Trust/ Avon Wildlife Trust
West of England WREN/Community Council for Somerset
Bath & North East Somerset Parishes Representative
North Somerset Parishes Representative
Somerset Parishes Representative
Mendip Society/Council for the Protection of Rural England

For further information on governance and activity of the AONB Partnership, including Annual reviews and current membership see www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk

1.1 Our Vision for the Mendip Hills AONB in 15 years

The vision, linked to the Management Plan themes, sets out the ideal state of the AONB in 15 years time. It is hoped it will be achieved through the delivery of this Plan and its successors. In 15 years time there will be:

Landscape Quality

Wide understanding and appreciation of the Mendip Hills as a protected area of distinct character created overtime by the interaction of people and nature. Its ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value conserved and enhanced

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Resilient and coherent ecological networks in place providing bigger, better and joined up habitats with no loss of characteristic species. The areas diverse geology is understood and managed for its importance both to the biodiversity and ecosystem services that benefit business, people and wildlife

Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage

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

Recreation, Access and Tourism

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

Natural Resources

Integrated land use management that has restored and continues to enhance the areas natural resources including soils, food, and water supply

Land Management

As the main land use agriculture continues to contribute to enhancing landscape character including ecological networks and the provision of benefits such as clean water. The area of woodland managed for fuel as well as wildlife and recreation has increased.

Development and Transport

Sustainable development in or near to the Mendip Hills AONB is sustainable and enhances and respects the special qualities of the area, including tranquillity, and is contributing to the social and economic needs of the area.

Participation

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

1.2 The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan

1.2.1 The Plan for this nationally designated protected landscape is overarching of local authority administrative boundaries and the plethora of other plans and strategies. It identifies what is necessary to conserve and enhance this special landscape.

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

1.2.3 The Plan also has an important role in securing commitment from public bodies, including action to comply with the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act Section 85 Duty of Regard.

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

1.2.5 The AONB Partnership, the advisory body for the Mendip Hills AONB produces the Management Plan, on behalf of its local authority partners; Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council, Mendip District Council and Sedgemoor District Council.

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

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

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

1.2.9 This review of the 2009-2014 Management Plan is being undertaken in accordance with the Guidance on the review of AONB Management Plans, Countryside Agency (2006). A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), a Habitat Regulation Assessment as required by the European Habitats Directive and an Equalities Assessment will be undertaken and reported as part of the process.

1.3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3.4 The **Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000** confirmed the significance of AONBs. Section 85 places a statutory (legal) duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

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

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

Mendip Hills AONB (www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk),

Defra (www.defra.gov.uk) Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk)

1.4 Statement of Significance – the AONBs special qualities

Rising from the Somerset Levels are the distinctive Mendip Hills that with the lakes of Chew Valley and Blagdon form the 198sq kms that is the Mendip Hills AONB. The ^{*1}special qualities that create the Mendip Hills sense of place and identity are:

The **distinctive limestone ridge** with windswept plateau punctuated by spectacular dry valleys and gorges, ancient sinkholes and depressions, and impressive rocky outcrops. Cheddar Gorge probably the single best known limestone karst feature in Britain.

Views towards the Mendip Hills from Exmoor, Quantocks, the Somerset Levels and Moors and Chew Valley. The **views out** including across the Severn Estuary to Wales and the Somerset Levels to Glastonbury Tor and the Somerset coast.

A **sparsely populated plateau**, with settlements of Mendip stone largely confined to the spring line, retaining dark skies and a sense of tranquillity.

The **diverse and visible geology** that ranges from Devonian to Jurassic in a relatively small area making it one of the best area in the country to appreciate the relationships between geology, landscape and natural history.

Caves, for their wildlife, geological, archaeological importance including Avelines Hole the oldest burial site in Britain and Goughs Cave one of the most important Palaeolithic sites in Europe that provides a breeding site for Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats.

The **limestone aquifer** feeding the reservoirs of Cheddar, Chew Valley and Blagdon lakes providing habitats of local and international importance for birds with Chew Valley Lake designated a Special Protection Area for bird species.

The Chew Valley -a rich farmed landscape with fields divided by hedges.

Dry stone walls that criss-cross the plateau farmland grazed by sheep, beef and dairy cattle.

Steep south-facing slopes of flower rich limestone grasslands and the area known as the Strawberry Belt of horticultural activity producing soft fruits.

Ancient woodland combs on the north and south slopes offering varied habitats of national and international importance for a wide diversity of wildlife including dormouse and bats.

Evidence of human settlement dating back 500,000 yrs. Henge monuments, barrows and hillforts through to World War 2 sites are prominent features on the plateau as are remnants of Roman and Victorian lead mining.

A landscape enjoyed by large numbers of people for a wide range of interests and outdoor pursuits including caving, climbing , cycling and quieter activities including bird watching and walking due to areas of tranquillity

Particular combinations of these special qualities form **11 distinctive landscape areas identified in the Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment (1998)** see map p11.

1

* Work to support the justification and definition of these special qualities in the context of landscape character and levels of sensitivity is planned in the accompanying Delivery Plan.

- Bleadon Hills
- The Northern Slopes
- The South Western Slopes
- The Harptree-Cheuton Edge
- The Lox Yeo Valley and Winscombe Vale
- The Wells Bowl
- Bladon-Compton Martin Slopes
- Banwell Head to Towerhead
- Crook Peak to Callow Hill
- The Chew Lowlands
- The Plateau

Mendip Hills AONB

Mendip Hills AONB

Landscape Character Assessment (1988)
11 character areas

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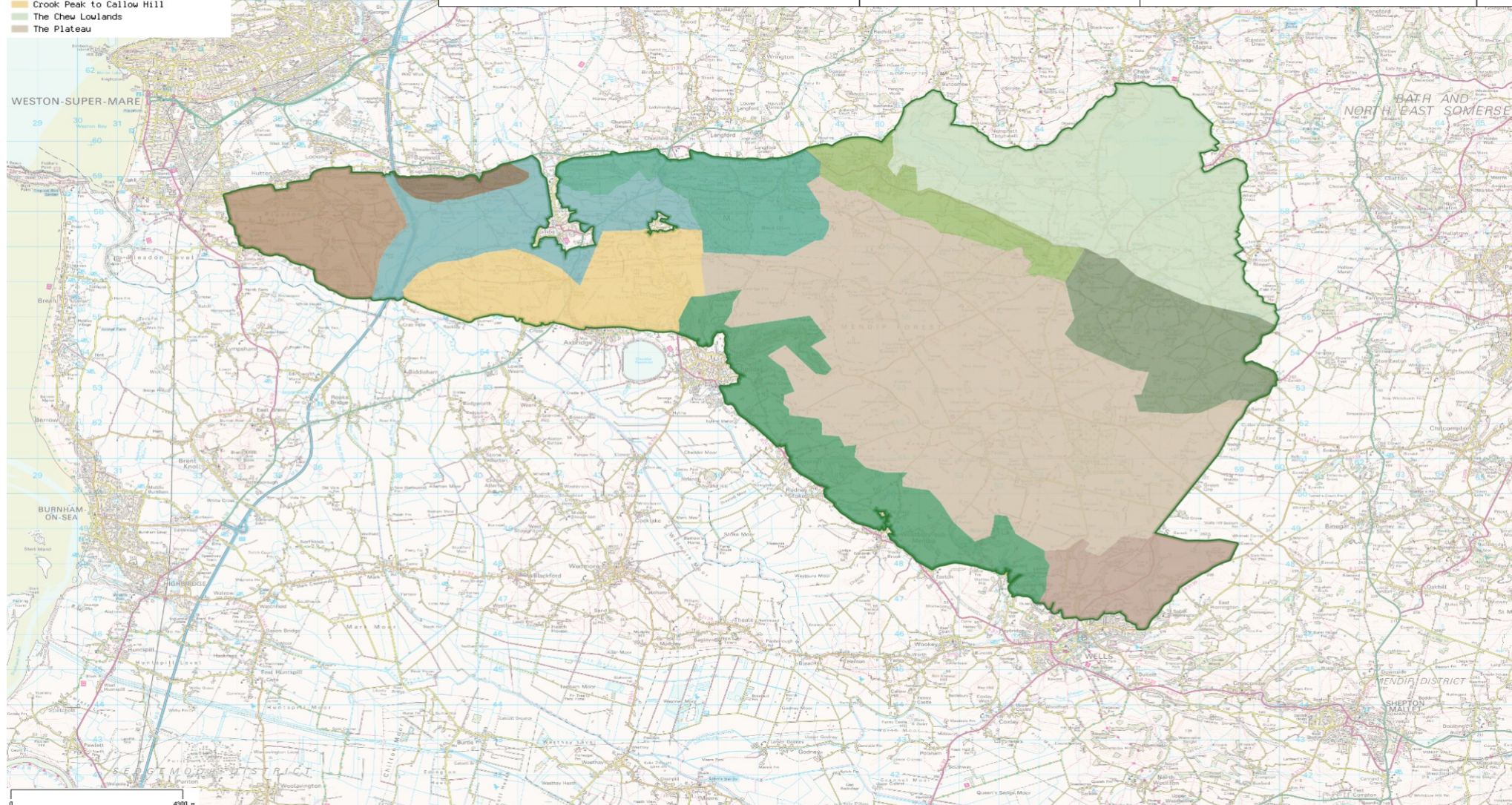
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Mendip Hills AONB

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1.5 The benefits of the Mendip Hills AONB to society

The Mendip Hills AONB provides a wide range of benefits to society. Each is derived from the attributes and processes (both natural and cultural features) within the area. These benefits are known collectively as ecosystem services and are shown on table on page 14. The table shows the importance of these services nationally, regionally and locally. Services of national importance reflect the AONBs special qualities (page 10) that have given its national protected landscape status.

The predominant services are summarised below:

Cultural services (inspiration, education and wellbeing)

Sense of place/inspiration: The Mendip Hills have a very strong character defined by their geology and position rising abruptly from the Somerset Levels. Species-rich scarp slope woodlands, calcareous grassland and the sparsely settled open plateau defined by rectilinear dry stone wall enclosures contrast with the Chew Valley with pattern of hedgerows, spring line settlements, and lakes.

Geodiversity: The AONB has 7 nationally designated geological and 8 mixed interest (geological and biological) SSSIs and 18 Local Geological Sites reflecting the importance of the geological interest. These include natural features of exposed rocks, dry gorges, sink holes, areas of sunken ground and cave systems of the classic Carboniferous Limestone karst landscape to sandstone peaks and a long history of quarrying and mining which ties it closely to the history and culture of the area.

Sense of history: The history of the landscape is evident ranging from prehistoric settlement and activity to World War 2 archaeology. The prehistoric henges of Gorsey Bigbury and Priddy Circles form in combination with over 300 Bronze Age barrows, a ritual landscape of national significance. Large hill forts from the Iron Age such as Dolebury and smaller sites such as Banwell are evidence of a complex pattern of territories and lordship. Quarries and pitted landscapes are evidence of lead mining and other extraction activity some of which continues today. Field patterns reflect the various histories of enclosure and settlement.

Recreation: The Mendip Hills are accessible to the large populations of Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare and the smaller surrounding settlements. Access to the outdoors is fundamental to promoting healthier lifestyles. Tourism is important to the local economy, Wookey Hole and Cheddar Gorge drawing in large numbers of visitors. Caving, climbing, cycling and walking are also popular activities.

Biodiversity: There are 27 SSSI's covering 2712 ha, 3 Special Area of Conservation (SAC), 1 Special Protection Area (SPA) and 2 National Nature Reserves within the Mendip Hills AONB. Ash woodland and calcareous grasslands are internationally designated as well as sites for greater horseshoe bats.

Provisioning services (food, fibre and water supply)

Food provision: Cheddar has a long tradition of, and is internationally associated with, cheese production. Dairying is prevalent on the plateau,

including land owned by the Yeo Valley dairy, a national food producer.

Water availability: The entire area lies over an important Carboniferous Limestone aquifer which is designated as a Major Aquifer Unit making a major contribution to public water supply and supplying Bristol and the surrounding area via Cheddar, Blagdon and Chew Valley reservoirs. The Mendip aquifer also supplies the hot springs in Bath.

Regulating services (water purification, air quality maintenance and climate regulation)

Regulating soil erosion: The vast majority of soils covering the Mendip Hills are at risk of erosion where poor management could result in loss of stabilising vegetation. This is exacerbated by the steep slopes and high precipitation. Sustainable systems of arable cultivation and appropriate levels of livestock to reduce poaching and soil exposure, particularly on steeper slopes are encouraged.

Regulating water quality: Most of the AONB is within a Groundwater Source Protection Zone due to its contribution to public water supply. Groundwater quality is generally good. The ecological quality of the emergent rivers is largely moderate, Parts of the Mendip Hills fall within the Congresbury Yeo catchment, part of the North Somerset Moors Catchment Sensitive Farming Priority Catchment.

Mendip Hills AONB Ecosystem services, their importance and relevance to Management Plan themes

Dark blue = national importance Mid blue = regional importance Light blue= local importance

Ecosystem services																			
		Food provision	Timber provision	Water Availability	Genetic Diversity	Biomass energy	Climate regulation	Regulating Water Quality	Regulating Water Flow	Regulating Soil Quality	Regulating Soil Erosion	Pollination	Pest Regulation	Sense of Place/Inspiration	Sense of history	Tranquility	Recreation	Biodiversity	Geodiversity
	Mendip Hills AONB																		
Management Plan themes	Landscape Quality																		
	Biodiversity & Geodiversity																		
	Historic Environment & Cultural Heritage																		
	Recreation, Access & Tourism																		
	Natural Resources																		
	Rural Land Management																		
	Development & Transport																		
	Participation																		

2.0 Drivers for change

The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan needs to take account of the wider environment in which it operates.

2.1.0 National Association for AONBs – shared objectives - The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NAAONB) is the voice of the AONB partnerships in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and represents those involved in the planning and management of 8000 square miles of the UK's finest landscapes. Many different organisations and individuals contribute to fulfilling the primary purpose of AONB designation- conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, alongside the staff teams dedicated to each AONB. The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership as a member of the NAAONB has signed up to four common objectives:

1. Conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, ensuring they can meet the challenges of the future
2. Support the economic and social well-being of local communities in ways which contribute to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty
3. Promote public understanding and enjoyment of the nature and culture of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and encourage people to take action for their conservation.
4. Value, sustain, and promote the benefits that the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty provide for society, including clean air and water, food, carbon storage and other services vital to the nation's health and well-being

2.1.1 The National Association for AONBs provides a coordinating and advisory role for AONBs in responding to and influencing policy and has been actively engaged in the following Government reports, policy and legislation that will influence future management of all AONBs. Below is a brief summary of each with links to key Management Plan objectives to show how these will be delivered in the Mendip Hills. Further detail is provided in the appendix.

2.2 0 Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network by Professor Sir John Lawton (Sept 2010) identified Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the largest of all the protected areas, as having great potential "to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network". "Think big: ecological recovery in protected landscapes" a joint response to this by National Parks and AONBs recognised that in order to realise this ambition, the land being under some form of agricultural, forestry or game management, it is critical that habitat improvement and creation becomes part of sustainable land management systems and businesses and provides adequate reward for land managers.

See Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objective BG2 &
Natural Resources and Land Management Objective N2

2.3.0 Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) – The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (June 2011) Largely influenced by Making Space for Nature, this White Paper set out four ambitions, three of which are key targets for AONB Partnerships:

i) Protecting and improving our natural environment – The AONB Partnership will create more joined-up action at local and regional levels, making the ecological network resilient to changing pressures. In this way, we aim to halt the decline in habitats and species, degradation of landscapes and erosion of natural capital.

See Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objective BG2

ii) Growing a green economy - Protected natural areas can yield returns many times higher than the cost of their protection. The AONB Partnership will help to create a green economy that takes full advantage of the opportunities afforded by greener goods and services and markets protecting nature's services. We will work with the areas two Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships to highlight and develop these opportunities.

See Recreation, Access and Tourism Objective R2 & Natural Resources and land management Objectives N1, N2, N3

iii) Reconnecting people and nature – The AONB Partnership will strive to restore lost connections with the natural environment and ensure fairer access to its goods and services.

See Participation Objectives P1, P2, P3 & Mendip Hills AONB Ecosystem Services table p14

2.4.0 Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011) outlines the strategic direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade on land (including rivers and lakes) and at sea, building upon the Natural Environment White Paper.

The NAAONB are part of the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group set up to provide Defra with partner/ stakeholder input to the Biodiversity Strategy 2020 annual delivery plan And AONB Partnerships are expected to assist delivery of a number of Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes.

See Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objective BG1 and BG2, BG3

2.5.0 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012

The National Planning Policy Framework replaced the majority of previous Planning Policy Statements. Recognition of the importance of protected landscapes is stated in Section 115 *'great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.'* The term 'great weight' is significant and is one of the most stringent legal tests that can be applied under planning law. In relation to major development the NPPF states that planning permission should be refused for major development in

AONBs except in exceptional circumstances and where they can be demonstrated they are in public interest. The 'presumption in favour' of sustainable development does not apply in AONBs is confirmed by NPPF para 14 footnote 9. The NPPF requires planning policies to plan for biodiversity (s117) at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries and address green infrastructure.

2.6.0 Healthy Lives, Healthy people (2010) This White Paper outlines a radical shift in the way public health challenges are tackled. Britain is now the most obese nation in Europe and there are rising levels of harm from alcohol. Smoking alone claims over 80,000 lives every year. Experts estimate that tackling poor mental health could reduce our overall disease burden by nearly a quarter. Health inequalities between rich and poor have been getting progressively worse. Government is looking to other partners to promote healthy living, to incentivise people to be more active.

See Recreation, Access and Tourism Objective R4 and Participation Objective P4

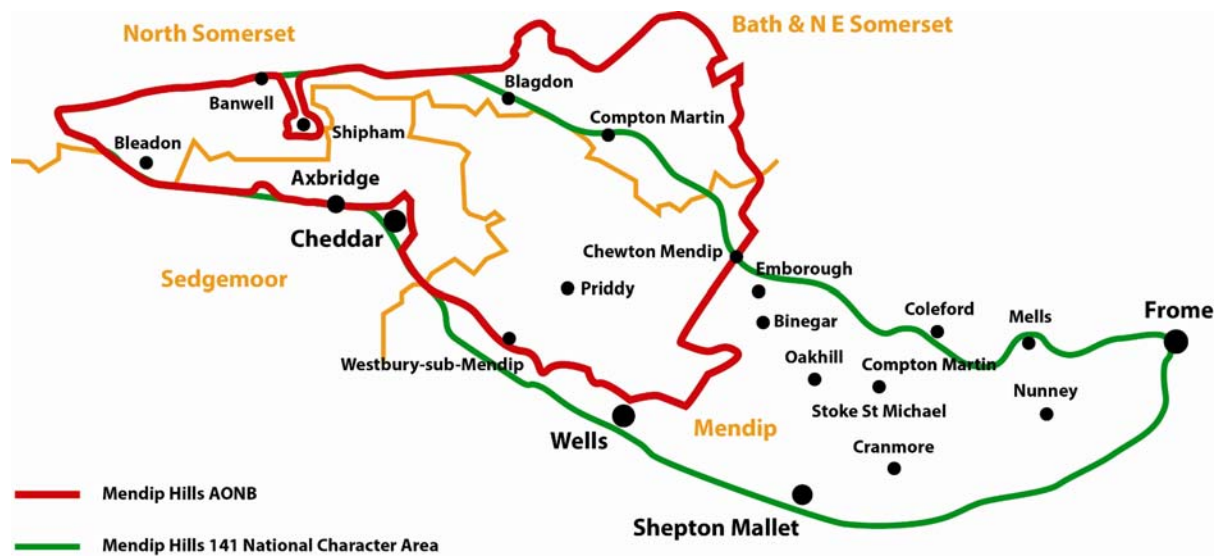
2.7.0 National Character Areas (NCA)

Natural England has produced National Character Areas profile documents for each of the 159 NCAs in England. NCA 141 Mendip Hills covers most of the AONB with the exception of the Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes. These are covered by NCA 118 Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges (3,858 ha of the AONB). The NCA documents include environmental data and Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEOs). Much of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (15,942 ha of its 19,800 ha) lies within the boundary of NCA 141 comprising 53% of the total NCA area (30,300ha).

2.8.0 Nature Improvement Areas (NIA)

Set out in the Natural Environment White Paper these are large, discrete areas that, by taking a landscape-scale approach, will deliver a step change in nature conservation, where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment. The AONB Partnership is investigating the potential of a locally determined NIA covering the NCA 141 and would take this forward as part of a holistic approach to implementing the AONB Management Plan, NCA Statements of Opportunity and NIA objectives.

See Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objective BG4



2.8.0 Climate change

The Climate Change Act 2008 aims to ensure that the net UK carbon account for all six Kyoto greenhouse gases for the year 2050 is at least 80% lower than the 1990 baseline, to avoid dangerous climate change. The National Planning Policy Framework Section 10 sees planning playing a key role in securing radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Under climate change the Mendip Hills are likely to get warmer; summers will continue to get hotter and drier and winters will continue to get milder and wetter with inevitable exceptions.

2.8.1 Climate change is likely to result in periods of heavy rain that may cause more frequent flood events from surface runoff, increased flooding of settlements at the foot of the hills, rock fall, soil erosion and associated impacts on water quality and also on tourism due to closure of tourist caves and road closure as seen in 2013.

2.8.2 Increased storminess, drought and prevalence of pest and diseases, for example Oak decline or dieback, may result in damage or loss of ancient woodlands and mature, ancient and veteran trees, especially parkland trees.

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

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

2.8.5 Changes to seasonal temperature and rainfall could begin to change tree productivity. Tree provenance of native species will become more important.

2.8.6 Increased carbon dioxide and a longer growing season could potentially lead to double cropping with impacts on soil condition due to increased cultivation. There may be potential for growing different crops suited to a warmer climate.

2.8.7 Increasing occurrences of droughts would lead to increases in water demand for crop growth, business and domestic use, and drying out and erosion of soils.

2.8.8 Species migration and loss of small or isolated habitats and populations are likely. Composition and productivity of habitats will change and require management.

2.8.9 The Environment Agency www.environment-agency.gov.uk using their own data, and data supplied by Met Office and water companies, measure, monitor and report on rainfall, water in rivers, water stored in aquifers and reservoirs, how dry

soils and outlook for river flow and groundwater. The Met Office provides a wealth of information on climate www.metoffice.gov.uk

2.8.10 Climate change will potentially impact on all aspects of the Mendip Hills AONB.

3.0 AONB Management Plan themes

To achieve the vision for the Mendip Hills AONB, the Partnership and stakeholders have set out objectives under 8 themes. Although there are objectives for each theme the Plan should be taken in its entirety and recognise the relationship between themes and ecosystem services as shown on table p14. The themes and their objectives are not in any order of priority.

There is an introduction to each theme followed by issues (with the exception of the Participation theme) and then objectives to address the issues. Relevant indicators to monitor change are shown for each theme. Actions associated with each objective are set out in the Delivery Plan 2014-2019.

3.1 Landscape Quality

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

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

3.1.3 The Mendip Hills AONB Landscape Assessment (Countryside Commission 1998) identified 11 distinctive character areas (see map p11). Consideration of the landscape needs to take account of the special qualities that make each of these character areas.

3.1.4 In addition to this Natural England National Character Area profiles that cover the AONB (see 2.7.0), 141 Mendip Hills and 118 Bristol, Avon Valley and Ridges, need to be considered. Each profile includes a description of the natural and cultural features that shape these landscapes, current drivers for change and as working documents they draw on current evidence and knowledge of these landscapes.

Issues

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

Landscape Quality Objectives:

L1 Promote appropriate management to ensure that the distinctive Mendip Hills AONB landscape is maintained and enhanced

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

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

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

Indicators (data provider):

% of land managed under higher level agri-environment schemes and uptake of Environmental Stewardship options (NE)

% of area that is tranquil (NE)

3.2 Biodiversity and Geodiversity

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chew Valley Lake Special Protection Area (SPA)

North Somerset and Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Mendip Limestone Grassland Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Mendip Woodlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) that includes the National Nature Reserves (NNR) of Rodney Stoke and Ebbor Gorge

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

3.2.8 Section 41 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 list of species of principle importance² found in England identified as requiring action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan continues to be regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. A significant number of these are found in the designated sites listed in 3.2.6.

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

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

3.2.11 The 'Netherworld' of the Mendips is significant and cave exploration is on going. In 2012 the largest Mendip cave was discovered and has some of the best stalactites and stalagmites in the UK.

3.2.12 The British Geological Survey (www.bgs.ac.uk/mendips) and Mendip Cave Registry and Archive (www.mcra.org.uk) are sources of information. Mendip quarry companies have invested in proactive relationships with the public offering opportunities to visit and the Somerset Earth Science Centre at Moon Hill Quarry has

² www.naturalengland.org.uk

initiated and partners a number of geology related projects including Mendip Rocks and Quarry Faces in the AONB that promote research and learning.

3.2.13 Protected landscapes have been identified (see 2.2.0) to deliver more resilient and coherent ecological networks, healthy and well functioning ecosystems which deliver multiple benefits for people and wildlife. Building the resilience of ecological networks will enable the ecological network to respond to climate change.

3.2.14 Work to understand the current state of the network has been on going for some years with support from the AONB Partnership. Somerset Wildlife Trust continues to map distribution of all remaining habitats in the Mendip Hills National Character Area (NCA). Initial ecological networks have been identified which will continue to be refined as survey reveals new areas of priority habitat. The focus will then move to identification of priority restoration areas within the ecological networks and identifying monitoring indicators to see how different species respond to strengthened networks. This work will further assist management advice and targeting of Environmental Stewardship schemes and development of a Mendip Hills Nature Improvement Area.

3.2.15 In addition it will also assist local authority's duty under The National Planning Policy Framework (See 2.5.0 Drivers for Change and 3.7 Development and Transport). This states that planning policies and decisions should be based on up to date information about the natural environment and other characteristics of the area including an assessment of existing and potential components of ecological networks.

Issues

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

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

3.2.18 Cave systems needs to be better understood with regard to water flow and water supply (See 3.5 Natural Resources) as was shown recently at Cheddar when sink holes became blocked and flood waters washed away part of Cheddar Gorge road and with the proposal for a fourth reservoir fed from the Mendip Hills.

Biodiversity and Geodiversity Objectives:

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

BG2 Promote a landscape scale approach to the conservation and expansion of coherent and resilient ecological networks within and adjoining the AONB.

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

BG4 Promote a holistic approach to implementing AONB Management Plan objectives, National Character Area Statements of Opportunity and a locally designated Nature Improvement Area's objectives

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

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

Indicators (data provider)

% of SSSIs in favourable/recovering condition (NE)

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

Condition of broad habitats (NE)

3.3 Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage

3.3.1 AONB designation recognises the importance of heritage and reinforces the need to protect and manage characteristic features. The Mendip Hills have evidence of human settlement dating back to Palaeolithic times, 500,000 years ago. Henge monuments, barrows and hill forts on the plateau are some of the most prominent features of the area. The historical value of the area is incredibly rich and important and includes 198 Listed Buildings and 169 Scheduled Monuments. Interest and participation in this subject is also high leading to previously unrecorded sites and features being recorded.

3.3.2 Customs and traditions that have historic and cultural associations with the land and activities of local people are important too. This includes Mendip cave exploration begun in the late nineteenth century, the Rock of Ages service to mark the origin of the famous hymn, Priddy Sheep Fair dating back 650 years, the hedging and ploughing matches promoting rural skills, village strawberry fairs and a more recent tradition Blagdon Pumping station Sunday open days. There are very few weekends when there is not an event happening in the Mendip Hills that is not custom or tradition related and demonstrates community engagement with their heritage.

3.3.3 Further to the Mendip Hills AONB Historic Environment Strategy (2001) identifying key research needed for the area a Lidar and aerial survey was commissioned and this led to English Heritage embarking upon a four-year research project (2006-10) to describe the change over time of settlement patterns and other human impacts on the landscape. Research reports and site surveys are on the English Heritage website and the main publication will be available in 2014.

3.3.4 Following publication of Mendip from the Air (2007), English Heritage continues to provide support to ensure that the Lidar data can be used by individual research students, local groups and consultants to inform understanding about the heritage.

3.3.5 The annual Mendip Hills Heritage Seminar started in 2002, now organised by Wells and Mendip Museum, presents recent and current research by professional bodies, local history groups and individuals. The annual national Festival of Archaeology is promoted locally by the Museum featuring a significant number of events in the Mendip Hills.

3.3.6 Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans are important tools for identifying and raising awareness of characteristic features. Together with Historic Landscape Character Assessments they contribute to the planning decision-making process. In 2012 the AONB local authorities with support from the AONB Partnership digitised the areas Tithe Maps to make them accessible to assist understanding of the landscape.

3.3.7 The Mendip Hills AONB Lifelines project (2006-8) gathered baseline information on dry stone walls. The walls not only reveal the underlying geology but also reflect changes in settlement and agriculture and provide wildlife corridors.

Issues

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

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

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

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

Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage objectives;

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

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

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

Indicators (data provider):

% of Scheduled Monuments in favourable condition and at risk (EH)

Number of listed and unlisted buildings at risk (EH)

Conservation Areas at risk (EH)

3.4 Recreation, Access and Tourism

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

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

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

3.4.4 Organised outdoor activities are an important part of the Mendip Hills rural economy bringing in nearly £6 million directly to outdoor businesses with those businesses spending £1.46 million³ locally. There are a significant number of businesses who use the Mendip Hills for outdoor activities that includes climbing, caving, abseiling, bushcraft, archery and mountain biking.

³ Economic Value of outdoor activity in the Mendip Hills AONB report (2006)

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

3.4.6 There are opportunities within the Mendip Hills to encourage higher spending visitors and develop products and packages having a high quality landscape to base them. Greentraveller's online guide to the Mendip Hills supported by the AONB Partnership provides a web site where visitors can plan a day visit or holiday in the Mendip Hills using businesses with green credentials. www.greentraveller.co.uk.

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

3.4.8 There are a significant number of walking and cycling organised events each year many of them for charity fundraising. The AONB Partnership has produced guidance for events organisers to help minimise impact of events on the landscape. The 1SW Cycle map, a joint project with NPs and AONBs in the SW enables updated information on the condition of routes to be provided to the public via a web site.

Issues

3.4.9 Managing the demand for recreation in a landscape that is designated for its natural beauty and is also a working environment with the majority of land under agriculture and in private ownership is challenging.

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

3.4.11 Areas of conflict arise between different user groups where activities (legal and illegal) have impacted on people's enjoyment.. The Police Pathwatch, and 101 service have reduced illegal use of Public Rights Of Way (PROW) and aggressive behaviour by motorcyclists and motor vehicles by encouraging reporting of incidents.

3.4.12 Intense rainfall has seen a number of well used rights of way heavily eroded by surface material being washed away compounded by ongoing heavy usage. Site management measures will need to be introduced to tackle some of these issues that may require seasonal restrictions on use of certain routes or areas and during long dry periods when there is an increase risk of fire. Such issues on Black Down, the largest area of open access in the Mendip Hills is now being dealt with by the Conserving Black Down project linked with the Discovering Black Down Heritage Lottery funded Project

3.4.13 Habitat deterioration or loss of sensitive wildlife habitats due to an increase in number of tourist visits, increased leisure use and or new access could occur without

careful management. Habitat deterioration or loss occurs from trampling and this can be exacerbated on steep slopes and by nitrogen enrichment from dog fouling.

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

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

Recreation, Access and Tourism objectives

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

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

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

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

Indicators (data provider);
%employed in tourism (Defra)
% of AONB accessible (NE)
Length of Public Rights of Way (NE)

3.5 Natural Resources

3.5.1 The principle of conserving natural resources within the Mendip Hills AONB, using them in the most sustainable way, and enhancing their contribution to the needs of society is fundamental in the future management of the area. Water and soils are considered under this theme. Quarrying, woodland and forestry and farming are considered under Land Management theme (3.6)

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

3.5.3 The three reservoirs, Chew, Blagdon and Cheddar, supply water to 1.1 million people and businesses in the Bristol Water area and a 2nd Cheddar reservoir is proposed. Both Chew Valley Lake and Blagdon Lake are internationally important for wildlife. Chew and Blagdon are designated as Drinking Water Protected Areas with the catchments that drain to them and these catchments which drain to the lakes have also been identified as Safeguard Zones. The Environment Agency, Bristol Water, Natural England and other partners are developing Drinking Water Protected Area Safeguard Zone action plans to address the sources of nutrients in the lakes.

3.5.4 There is little or no risk of flooding within the hills as rivers flow underground in this limestone landscape but flooding has been experienced in the Chew Valley and Cheddar where the streams and river emerge. North and Mid Somerset and the Bristol Avon Catchment Flood Management Plans cover the AONB.

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

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

3.5.7 Bristol Waters Metaldehyde Action Project includes Chew and Blagdon catchments provides updates and free advice to farmers to promote best practice on use of granular pesticides (inc slug pellets) and testing of soil, slurry and manure. Weekly water sampling in 2013 has shown consistently low levels of Metaldehyde.

3.5.8 Bristol Water continues to educate consumers about economical use of water. Constraints to limit or stop water being abstracted during low flow situations may become more frequent with a changing climate.

Issues

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

3.5.10 As more land is now managed under arable there is an increased risk of soil movement where run- off risks soil deposition in water and cave systems.

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

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

www.naturalengland.gov.uk Sensitive Farming Catchments

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

Natural Resources objectives:

N1 Recognise and promote the benefits and relevance of the AONB as a valuable source of ecosystem services, economic and health benefits.

N2 Promote conservation of water resources and enhance their quality taking measures to reduce low flows and flooding by appropriate management and use.

N3 Promote sustainable management of soils in accordance with best practice to minimise erosion and water pollution and maximise resilience to drought.

3.6 Land Management

3.6.1 The Mendip Hills landscape is largely a result of the way the land has been shaped by different land uses and maintained by farmers, landowners and estate managers over the centuries. As such, those with a stewardship role in the Mendip Hills are an integral part of conserving and enhancing the landscape and managing natural resources (see Natural Resources 3.5)

3.6.2 Farming is the major land use with 75% (14922 ha) of the AONB being agricultural land. Of this farmed area 82% is temporary or permanent grass and only 9% is arable. Grazing livestock is the predominant holding type. There is also some dairy and arable farming on the plateau. This includes Yeo Valley Foods, a national dairy producer who have land on the plateau and in the Chew valley. Beef and sheep grazing are concentrated on the small irregular fields and remnant sheep walks (sleights) of the escarpments where the soils are thinner. There are 17,460 cattle, 21,388 sheep and 1,651 pigs in the AONB⁴.

3.6.3 The area has been a target for agri environment grant schemes for over a decade with 61% of AONBs agricultural land receiving £933,010 in funding in 2013⁵. A number of farms owning traditional breeds have long been providing stock to graze land under conservation management for organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts and National Trust. Much of this land is the steep slopes and gorges with public access and where there is little benefit to the farmer but is vital to control scrub on these grassland areas.

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

⁴ Defra Agricultural survey (June 2010)

⁵ Natural England March 2013 Annual Figure

3.6.5 There are a number of traditional and new orchards in the area. Thatchers Cider has recently planted slopes near Compton Bishop.

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

3.6.7 Working with the local farming community to safeguard future food production whilst enhancing key ecosystem services such as biodiversity, water quality, water regulation (flooding) regulating soil erosion and quality, pollination services and genetic diversity, geological and historic features is essential (See table of ecosystem services p14).

3.6.8 Woodland covers 14%⁶ of the AONB and significantly contributes to the landscape character and biodiversity. Half of the woodland, some of which is ancient woodland, is semi natural broadleaved woodland situated mainly on the north and south facing slopes of the hills. The Governments Forestry Policy Statement⁷ recognises the value of our native and ancient woodland and the need to maintain existing ancient woodland and increase the net area of native woodland.

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

3.6.10 Biomass energy has not had been undertaken in the AONB on any significant scale to date. Existing woodland cover offers potential for production of biomass energy, and another biofuel crop Miscanthus that has been planted in a number of fields has the potential to be extended to other areas.

3.6.11 Quarrying is an important part of the Mendip economy. Callow Rock and Battscombe are the two major quarries in the AONB both extracting Carboniferous Limestone. To lessen their environmental impacts quarries are required to meet acceptable levels of noise, dust, vibration and visual intrusion. (See 3.7 Development and Transport) and work has been undertaken by Somerset County Council and Somerset Wildlife Trust to build into policy an ecological approach to restoration

Issues

3.6.12 Change in the Common Agricultural Policy is likely to see reduced funding for environmental benefit. In addition to promoting good management of species rich priority grasslands it will also be important to encourage uptake of options that promote wildlife benefits in temporary leys. Promoting legume and herb rich swards for intensive silage production especially on the plateau should continue to be trialled as a means of increasing the permeability of large areas of agriculturally improved

⁶ National Forest Inventory March 2012 (2933.8 hectares)

⁷ Keepers of Time – A statement of policy for England's Ancient and Native Woodland (Defra/Forestry Commission, 2005)

grassland for wildlife (following successful pilot schemes by Somerset Wildlife Trust and FWAG).

3.6.13 There are woodland areas that potentially would benefit from management for wildlife, economic or recreational benefit or a combination of these. As the value of timber and wood fuel has recently improved private woodland owners may now consider sustainable management of woodland that would benefit biodiversity and landscape and the sequestration and storage of atmospheric CO₂.

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

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

3.6.16 Biomass crops as with new woodland planting, siting is critical in order not to devalue other goods and services in terms of landscape character and ecological networks.

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

3.6.18 Continuing to ensure that conditions are applied to quarrying and any other mineral or gas extraction, if permitted, such as fracking, to minimise impacts on groundwater hydrology, including that of the hot springs in Bath is essential. (See also 3.7 Development and Transport)

Land Management objectives

LMI Support sustainable farming to ensure it remains as the principle land use and contributes to maintaining the special qualities of the AONB.

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

LM3 Promote a sustainable woodland economy that enhances the Mendip Hills AONB woodlands and wider landscape with targeted woodland management and creation in appropriate locations supporting wood fuel and local community opportunities.

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

Indicators (data providers);

Total area of woodland (Forestry Commission)

% of woodland managed (Forestry Commission)

Area of new woodland created under Forestry Commission Grant Scheme (Forestry Commission)

Amount of rainfall (Environment Agency)

% of metaldehyde contamination (Bristol Water)

3.7 Development and Transport

3.7.1 Although the AONB embraces 28 parishes lying wholly or partly within its boundary there are few major settlements in the AONB, most are spring-line villages with only Priddy on the plateau itself. The villages and buildings of the AONB are vital elements of its character and are one of the special qualities that create the Mendip Hills sense of place and identity (see P9). Sensitive planning and design of development is crucial in retaining the character and appearance of the landscape particularly the open spaces within villages and the dispersed nature of development.

3.7.2 Responsibility for determining planning applications and transport matters lies with the local planning and highways authorities. The AONB Partnership Committee 'Guidelines for the referral of planning applications' determines which applications are referred to the AONB Unit's Planning Liaison Officer for comment.

3.7.3 Within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework, there is a need to manage development pressures and land use changes both within and in the setting of the AONB with sensitivity in order to maintain a balance in promoting economic and social viability whilst retaining the character of the landscape and enhancing wildlife. Strategies such as Green Infrastructure Plans, Biodiversity Opportunity mapping and landscape character assessments may assist in ensuring this.

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

Issues

3.7.5 The response in terms of development to the potential challenges of climate change and the impacts on the designated landscape is one of the most important issues to address. The need to reduce carbon emissions to tackle climate change is widely recognised and there are numerous measures in place to reduce energy use, improve energy efficiency and to reduce reliance on fossil fuels by generating electricity via renewable energy sources. Where protected landscapes are

concerned, the environmental benefits of generating electricity from renewable sources must be considered against the potential adverse impacts that renewable energy infrastructure may have on the character and quality of our finest landscapes.

3.7.6 The National Grid proposal for the new power line between Hinkley C power station and Seabanks has been progressing with significant AONB input through National Grid's Landscape and Views thematic group to ensure that impact on the landscape is minimised. Ensuring local authorities work together to ensure consistency in approach to this and other development proposals is a key role for the AONB Partnership.

3.7.7 The process of hydraulic fracturing commonly known as 'Fracking' to access sources of shale gas or coal bed methane has emerged as an issue in the AONB. Two companies have been granted licences to test drill in the AONB. The AONB Partnership has serious reservations about the process taking place with regard to impacts on the character of the landscape from buildings and structures, on aquifers and the water table and biodiversity.

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

3.7.9 Development pressure on the AONB comes from many sources including proposals on the edge of Weston super Mare for significant housing growth that will bring the urban area closer to the edge of the AONB increasing road traffic and recreational use. However there will be opportunities through effective Green Infrastructure strategies to mitigate these.

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

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

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

3.7.13 Issues and characteristic features relating to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB should be incorporated in local plans, such as Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Plans. A number of villages have identified a need for

affordable housing and in Priddy and West Harptree they have completed such housing schemes.

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

Development and Transport Objectives;

D1 Working with the local planning authorities, ensure that development in the AONB and its setting is of a nature, scale, location and design that meets community need without compromising the special qualities of the Mendip Hills AONB.

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

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

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

Indicators (data providers)
% of car ownership (censor data)
% Increase in light pollution (CPRE)
% of the AONB that is relatively tranquil (NE)

3.8 Participation

3.8.1 Understanding the purpose of designation, what makes this AONB special, with the need for sensitive management is crucial to the delivery of this Management Plan. People must have the opportunity to experience, enjoy and learn about the AONB and why it is special. The AONB Partnership plays a key role in raising awareness of the AONB, largely through the AONB Unit. The AONB Unit provides information on request, a web site, e-newsletter and various other publications including the AONB Visitor Guide. In addition to these there are Tourist Information Centres and other visitor outlets and partner web sites

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

3.8.3. The AONB hosts a number of programmes of events including the annual Heritage seminar, Mendip Rocks and Mendip Hills Festival of Archaeology as well as projects such as Quarry Faces that all promote research and learning that both assist in raising understanding, awareness and encourage participation.

3.8.4 Numerous local colleges and universities use the area for study and research projects. The AONB Unit has supported student research projects and partnered colleges to assist conservation projects including work with Bridgwater College on Black Down and Bath Spa Geography undergraduate students.

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

3.8.6 Increasing people's knowledge and involvement amongst under-represented groups, particularly young people, the elderly and those with disabilities requires targeted approaches. Cheddar Valley Access Group has devised easy going trails in the area and the AONB is already used by various bodies to bring adults and young people with disabilities out to enjoy the area and/or participate in conservation tasks organised with site owners.

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

3.8.8 The People and Places Project (2008 – 2010) provided opportunities for volunteering via partners the National Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the AONB. This evolved to establish a joint Volunteer Coordinator post with the Quantock Hills AONB to run a programme of volunteer practical tasks and coordinating the AONB Volunteer Rangers and Young Rangers. Other partners including National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and Mendip Society continue to run volunteer activities on their sites.

Issues

3.8.9 There is currently a fragmented approach to use of the Mendip Hills for peoples health and well being by the health sector. Developing new partnerships through the local authorities Public Health and Well being Boards is an opportunity to seek to address this. (see also Recreation, Access and Tourism Objective R4).

3.8.10 Maintaining and developing existing volunteer programmes and schemes such as the AONB Young Rangers scheme is a challenge with reduced funding but are vital to the areas well being.

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

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

Participation objectives:

P1 Increase the opportunities for volunteering and the range of people participating, to benefit the environment, peoples health and well being and local communities in and around the AONB.

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

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

Indicators(data providers)

Number of volunteer hours(AONB)

Number of Young Rangers completed two year programme (AONB)

Number of practical tasks (AONB)

4.0 Delivering the Management Plan and Monitoring the State of the AONB

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

4.1.2 Under each theme monitoring indicators are listed. Natural England is providing data through their **Framework for monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes** (see Table 4.2) other data will be collected locally.

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

4.1.4 The Mendip Hills AONB Partnership produces an Annual Delivery Plan, and Annual Reviews to report progress (see www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk)

4.2 Framework for Monitoring Environmental Outcomes in Protected Landscapes

Confirmed statistics being provided to each AONB and National Park 2013

Statistics	Provider
1. The area managed under agri-environment agreements, i.e Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS), Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) and the different levels of Environmental Stewardship (ES). Expressed as a % of the protected landscape and as a % of the draft Utilisable Agricultural Area within it.	Natural England
2. The total annual values of agri-environment agreements (CSS, ESA and different levels of ES)	Natural England
3. Interactive spreadsheets enabling protected landscape bodies to calculate the uptake of ES field parcel options and 'numbers of' items e.g trees, which can be tailored to local circumstances.	Natural England
4. The uptake of 6 themed groups of ES options that contribute to conserving and enhancing landscape character: - The area of land under ES for the management and protection of archaeological features - The number of hedgerow trees and in-field trees managed under ES - The area of woodland managed and created under ES - The area of low input grassland managed, restored or created under ES - The area of land under ES for the management, restoration or creation of lowland heathland - The area of land under ES for the maintenance, restoration or creation of moorland Statistics provided in early June.	Natural England
5. The area of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable or recovering condition.	Natural England
6. Condition of broad habitats within SSSIs	Natural England
7. Number of heritage assets, including the number of listed buildings (including grade II listed) and structural scheduled monuments, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields.	English Heritage
8. % of heritage assets that are 'at risk', including buildings at risk (excluding grade II listed), monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, conservation areas and places of worship.	English Heritage
9. % of the protected landscape that is relatively tranquil for its area.	Natural England
10. Number of geological SSSI unit features, and % in favourable or recovering condition.	Natural England
11. Total area of woodland (Sub-divided into categories, e.g. broadleaved, conifer, mixed, shrub land plus young trees, felled woodland plus ground prepared for new planting. Sub-divisions tbc)	Forestry Commission
12. % area of woodland that is managed (incorporating woodlands where there has been Forestry Commission England grant scheme or felling licence activity in previous 5-10 years).	Forestry Commission
13. % of the protected landscape as 'accessible natural environment'	Natural England
14. Length of Public Rights of Way (likely to be sub-divided e.g into footpaths, bridleways, cycle tracks, and Byways Open to Traffic. Sub-divisions tbc)	Natural England
15. Length of National Trails	Natural England
16. Land use change statistics	Defra

Appendices

i) Drivers for change- -additional information

Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network by Professor Sir John Lawton (Sept 2010) concluded that England's collection of wildlife sites does not comprise a coherent and resilient ecological network that is capable of coping with the challenge of climate change and other pressures. To make space for nature we need more, bigger, better and joined up sites to create a sustainable, resilient and more effective ecological network for England.

Practically this requires actions under five headings:

- Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management.
- Increase the size of current wildlife sites.
- Enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through 'stepping stones'.
- Create new sites.
- Reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

These actions will help to establish an ecological network that meets the needs for wildlife and people today, and one that is more resilient to the future.

In "Making Space for Nature, it identified Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the largest of all the protected areas, as having great potential "to establish a coherent and resilient ecological network". **"Think big: ecological recovery in protected landscapes"** a joint response to this by National Parks and AONBs recognised that in order to realise this ambition, the land being under some form of agricultural, forestry or game management, it is critical that habitat improvement and creation becomes part of sustainable land management systems and businesses and provides adequate reward for land managers.

Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) – The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (June 2011)

Largely influenced by Making Space for Nature, this White Paper set out four ambitions, three of which are key targets for AONB Partnerships:

- Protecting and improving our natural environment
- Growing a green economy
- Reconnecting people and nature

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services (2011) outlines the strategic direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade on land (including rivers and lakes) and at sea, building upon the Natural Environment White Paper, and is the UK Government national commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Biodiversity 2020 outcomes will be delivered through actions in four areas:

- a more integrated large-scale approach to conservation on land and at sea;
- putting people at the heart of biodiversity policy;
- reducing environmental pressures;
- improvement of knowledge.

The NAAONB are part of the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group set up to provide Defra with partner/ stakeholder input to the Biodiversity Strategy 2020 annual delivery plan.

AONB Partnerships are expected to assist delivery of a number of Biodiversity 2020 Outcomes including:

Outcome 1c – By 2020, at least 17% of land and inland water, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, conserved through effective, integrated and joined up approaches to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services including through management of our existing systems of protected areas and the establishment of nature improvement areas

Outcome 1b “an increase in the overall extent of priority habitats by at least 200,000 ha.” The habitat creation aspiration for which is to be measured within NCAs and NIAs geographical areas.

Action 1.1.9 states: *Encourage and support new and existing large scale initiatives for improved ecological networks across the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designated landscapes.* Biodiversity and ecosystem targets are required to be integrated into all AONB Management Plans to meet the challenge of Outcome 1c.

As a Partnership, by 2020 we will have put in place measures so that *biodiversity is maintained and enhanced, further degradation has been halted and where possible, restoration is underway, helping deliver more resilient and coherent ecological networks, healthy and well-functioning ecosystems, which deliver multiple benefits for people and wildlife.*

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012

The National Planning Policy Framework replaced the majority of previous Planning Policy Statements. The NPPF confirmed, amongst other things, a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which requires the planning system to have a positive approach to performing economic, social and environmental roles. Councils are expected to approve development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay and to grant permission where a development plan is absent, silent or policies are out of date, unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Section 115 states that *‘great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.’*

Under Section 117, planning policies should plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries;

- *identify and map components of the local ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them and areas identified by local partnerships for habitat restoration or creation;*
- *promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, linked to national and local targets, and identify suitable indicators for monitoring biodiversity in the plan;*
- *aim to prevent harm to geological conservation interests; and*
- *where Nature Improvement Areas are identified in Local Plans, consider specifying the types of development that may be appropriate in these areas.*

Further reference to local authorities' consideration of ecological networks and green infrastructure is made in Section 114 *'Local planning authorities should set out a strategic approach in their Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure;*

Under Section 28, the NPPF requires that planning policies *'support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings'.*

In relation to the challenges of climate change the NPPF Section 10 states: *'Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. This is central to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.'*

United Kingdom National Ecosystem Assessment (June 2011)

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA)⁸ was the first analysis of the UK's natural environment in terms of the benefits it provides to society and our continuing economic prosperity.

The assessment provides values for a range of services we gain from nature to help us fully understand the worth of the natural environment and how the benefits to individuals and society as a whole can be better protected and preserved for future generations. It stresses the need for a more collaborative approach to enhancing our environment, with everyone playing their part to embrace more of nature's benefits, which is where our work in the Mendip Hills comes in and evidences the crucial role that we can play. (See 1.5 The benefits of the Mendip Hills to society)

⁸ The UK National Ecosystem Assessment Synthesis of Key Findings <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>

ii) Glossary

Appropriate Assessment- The process is set out in the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) consultation document 'Planning for the Protection of European Sites: Appropriate Assessment' (August 2006). The screening assesses the likely effects of potential policies on Natura 2000 sites.

Calaminarian grassland - is where the process of succession has been halted due to the toxicity of soils containing high levels of toxic metal ions. These habitats may be semi-natural on naturally exposed deposits, or the result of mining, or from erosion by rivers, sometimes including washed-out mine workings.

Catchment Management Plans – plans to benefit whole water catchment areas by working in partnership with individuals and organisations. Records state of water quality, habitats and species, impacts and issues to be addressed.

CRoW Act – Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 - confirmed the significance of AONBs. Section 85 places a statutory (legal) duty on all relevant authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty when discharging any function in relation to, or affecting land within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
www.defra.gov.uk/wildlifecountryside/cl/index.htm

Ecological Network - An ecological network is a joined-up group of natural and semi-natural habitats which is managed with the objective of maintaining or restoring ecological function, in order to conserve biodiversity. Ecological networks are provided as a response to biodiversity decline, and aim to provide a connected collection of refuges for wildlife. These networks are the basic natural infrastructure that will begin to enable biodiversity to recover from recent declines, and help to protect socially and economically important ecosystem goods and services.

European Landscape Convention - also known as the Florence Convention, after the city where the convention was adopted - promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organises European cooperation on landscape issues. It is the first international treaty to be exclusively concerned with all dimensions of European landscape. www.coe.int

Green Infrastructure - is a strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.

Gruffy ground - remains of post medieval surface mining.

Karst - Landscape characterised by remarkable surface and underground forms, created as a result of the action of water on permeable limestone.

Landscape Character Assessment – a tool to identify what makes an area unique to aid planning and management of landscapes.

Lidar - a remote sensing technology that measures distance by illuminating a target with laser light and analysing the reflected light. Lidar is popularly known as a technology used to make high resolution maps.

Living Landscapes- an approach adopted by the Wildlife Trusts, recognising that nature conservation efforts must be implemented at the landscape-scale. In essence they aim to restore, recreate and reconnect habitats to enable wildlife to move through the landscape. They are large-scale conservation programmes essentially similar in character to those later defined as Nature Improvement Areas. Avon and Somerset Wildlife Trusts both operate Living Landscape schemes within the AONB.

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) – 2011 the government invited local councils and businesses to set up voluntary partnerships to help strengthen local economies, set out local economic priorities. They replaced Regional Development Agencies. The West of England and Heart of the SW cover the Mendip Hills AONB.

Local Nature Partnership (LNP)- partnerships of a broad range of local organisations, businesses and people who aim to help bring about improvements in their local natural environment. Setting up LNPs was one of the commitments made in the Natural Environment White Paper 2011. The West of England and the Somerset LNPs cover the Mendip Hills AONB.

Miscanthus – a perennial grass considered an ideal energy crop that has the appearance of elephant grass.

National Character Area (NCA)– There are 159 NCAs – these areas share similar landscape characteristics and follow natural lines in the landscape. Natural England are producing profiles for each NCA to provide decision making frameworks for the natural environment.

NCA 141 and 118 cover the Mendip Hills AONB. www.naturalengland.gov.uk

Natura 2000 sites – see SACs and SPAs

Nature Improvement Area (NIA) – these are large, discrete areas that, by taking a landscape-scale approach, will deliver a step change in nature conservation, where a local partnership has a shared vision for their natural environment. The partnership will plan and deliver significant improvements for wildlife and people through the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring and creating wildlife habitats, connecting local sites and joining up local action.

National Nature Reserve (NNR) – areas where wildlife comes first – established to protect most important sites of wildlife habitat and geological formations in Britain. The majority have some form of public access.

Parish Plan – evolving documents outlining how a community would like to develop over the next 10 years.

Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) identified by locally developed criteria, are the most important places for geology and geomorphology outside statutorily protected land. RIGS are selected in a different way to Earth science SSSIs, which are chosen on a national basis. RIGS are selected on a local or regional basis using four nationally agreed criteria. Nationally important geological sites are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Special Area of Conservation (SAC) –Protected sites under the European Community Habitats Directive -forming a network of high quality conservation sites.

Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) – these are sites of regional nature conservation importance.

Special Protection Area (SPA) –Designated under the European Birds Directive because of their importance to birds.

Special Qualities – AONBs are designated solely for their landscape qualities, for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty. Designation under the provisions of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act is to secure their permanent protection against development that would damage their special qualities. The AONBs special qualities are listed in the AONB Management Plan (see 1.4)

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) The countries best wildlife and geological sites. Many SSSIs are also NNRs.

South West Protected Landscapes Forum (SWPLF) – Umbrella body of protected landscapes, National Parks and AONBs, in the South West.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) The purpose of an SEA is to ensure that land-use plans and programmes, that are likely to have significant effects on the environment are subjected to a strategic level (high and over arching) assessment of options and alternative courses of action during plan preparation in order to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects.

Swallets – also known as sinkhole, doline, swallow hole - a natural depression or hole in the Earth's surface. Develop by a variety of methods –collapse, suffusion or solution. Can be 20 metres deep and 100 metres or more in diameter. www.bgs.ac.uk

Village Design Statement – produced by communities to identify local character and set out design guidance for new development

Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-2014 – Key Achievements - listed under 2009-14 Management Plan themes

Landscape Quality

- 2009/10 Black Down Advisory Group established
- 2010/11 Black Down Project work included installation of vehicle barriers and boulders to prevent illegal vehicle access and installed new signage at entrances to raise awareness of significance of site.
- 2010- 12 development and submission of bid to Heritage Lottery Fund for 3 year Discovering Black Down bid that received approval Dec 2012.
- May 2013 Discovering Black Down Project Officer appointed for 3 years
-

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

- 2009 AONB Annual Forum on Geoparc status
- 2011 saw first annual Mendip Rocks programme of events promoting geology of Mendip Hills – the AONB Unit/Wells and Mendip Museum and Somerset Wildlife Trust.
- Hawk and Owl Awareness Project
- Since 2006 Somerset Wildlife Trust's Mendip Living Landscape mapped over 12,000ha of land in the Mendip Hills NCA and provided survey reports to landowners. Survey work continues and a number of projects have been established: Linking species rich grasslands, Seeds for Change, Industry and Nature Partnerships.
- In 2013 the first ecological networks for the Mendip Hills NCA were mapped and described
- Somerset Wildlife Trust worked with Somerset County Council to incorporate a landscape-scale approach to restoration into the Somerset Minerals Plan, based on building resilience into ecological networks across the Mendip Hills NCA 141
- Avon Wildlife Trusts Wildflower Grassland Project working in North Somerset and Bath and North East Somerset areas of the Mendips since 2008 undertaken detailed wildflower surveys, produced reports and given advice to landowners and assisted farms with stewardship applications.
- 2011 AWT established Grassland Restoration Team volunteer group providing practical help to landowners with wildflower grasslands.
- Two Local Nature Partnerships covering the AONB set up.

Historic Environment and Cultural Heritage

- AONB Annual Historic Environment Seminar fully booked each year sharing latest research. Since 2011 the event is now organised by Wells and Mendip Museum.
- 2010 English Heritage completed 4 year Mendip Hills AONB research project
- 2010/11 Archaeological Management Plan produced for Black Down and Burrington Ham funded by Higher Level Stewardship grant.
- 2011 Beacon Batch barrow on Black Down stone pitched and turf capped to protect barrow.
- Restoration of 10 traditional highway finger posts undertaken in partnership with Somerset County Council.
- 2012 Quarry Faces project extended to cover Mendip Hills AONB
- Digitisation of Tithe Map project – Somerset County Council, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, AONBs

Farming and land uses

- Development of an Ecological approach to quarry restoration –SCC Minerals Topic Paper 5 Restoration
- Metaldehyde Project- Bristol water and farmers to reduce pesticides in water
- 61% of farmed land under an agri environment schemes in 2013
- Development of SWT/FWAG pilot approach for a new ELS option for legume and herb rich swards (Seeds for Change) with the potential for benefiting extensive areas of the Mendip plateau
- Catchment Management Plans in place

Access, recreation and tourism

- 2010/11 AONB Partnership Guidelines for Event Organisers produced
- 2010/11 Mendip Hills AONB part of 1SW Off- Road cycling project
- 2011 AONB Annual Forum - Benefits of a well managed landscape – attended by local businesses and others
- 2011/12 Visitor map panels installed at 5 visitor stopping points
- 2012 AONB Visitor leaflet (10,000) produced and distributed marking 40 years of designation
- 2013 AONB Visitor leaflet updated
- 2012 new plaque installed on trig point to mark 40 years of designation
- 2012 AONB Familiarisation day held for tourism businesses
- Strawberry Line signage – North Somerset Council installed additional signage to encourage visitors to use the line and local businesses.
- 2012-2013 – 27911 visits to the AONB web site of which 78% were (21844) 'new' visits and 17853 visits were to the Visiting page.

Development and Transport

- 2009/10 SW Horse related development guidance published by SW Protected Landscapes
- AONB Planning Liaison Officer responded to wide range of consultation regarding significant planning proposals including expansion of Bristol airport, National Grid route, Longleat Estates proposals for Cheddar Gorge, solar farms, wind turbines
- 2012 National Grid announced intention to underground power lines through AONB following AONB Planning Liaison Officers work to ensure potential impacts on AONB taken into account
- 2012/2013 Revision of horse related development and agricultural development Supplementary Design Guidance
- Both the above adopted as Supplementary Planning Document by Sedgemoor District Council in March 2013

Participation

- Young Ranger scheme (established 2005) has run two 2yr programmes (2009-11 and 2011-13) of 15 young people
- 2009 Advanced Young Ranger programme established
- 2010 Mendip Hills AONB hosted International Junior Ranger camp
- 2010 Independent review of Mendip Hills AONB Young Rangers stated that *'it was one of the best examples of excellence'*
- 2010 – 2012 Mendip Hills Young Rangers attended international camps in Netherlands and Slovenia
- Mendip Hills AONB part of EUROPARC Atlantic Isles project funded by European Youth in Action programme to establish UK Young Ranger network
- 2010 Celebration event for People and Place Project – 2yr project funded by AONB Partnership, Natural England, Somerset Wildlife Trust, National Trust to increase volunteering opportunities in the AONB.
- 2009/10 AONB Volunteer Rob Spraggon awarded SCC Staff Award for Can Do approach to work
- 2011- Mendip Hills AONB and Quantock Hills AONB created Volunteer Coordinator post. AONB Practical Volunteer Group established.
- 2010 – 2013 AONB Volunteers including Young Ranger assistants, AONB Rangers and task volunteers have contributed 4887 volunteer hours worth £35,000.

Making it happen

- Annual Reviews completed each year reporting on annual Delivery Plans
- 2010 new AONB Partnership Terms of Reference confirmed following review and included 3 Parish Representatives appointed for 5 years.
- Statement of Intent 2011- 2015 agreed by local authority funding partners and Defra
- Sustainable Development Fund awarded total of £191,682 in grants to 50 projects

- AONB Manager elected to National Association of AONBs and currently vice chairman with communication portfolio.
- AONB web site promoting the work of the Partnership and information on the AONB

