



**Blackdown
Hills**
National
Landscape

Annual Review 2025–2026



Credit: Benjamin Graham

Welcome from Our Chair

The legal purpose of any Protected Landscape is 'to conserve and enhance natural beauty' and more recently all 'relevant authorities' (Local Authorities, public bodies, Protected Landscapes themselves) have a legal duty 'to seek to further' that purpose.

'Conserving' anything is not about 'preserving' it , which was the word originally used in the 1949 Act which established Protected Landscapes. Conserving something is to use it carefully, to prevent damage, waste or loss. The thing we are seeking to conserve is 'natural beauty' and that is defined in the listing which established us in 1991. It's not just about how the landscape looks, but how we use it, its tranquillity and the buildings which are part of it. 'Seeking to further' all this means we have to be active to promote it and make progress in a way which enhances the features of natural beauty rather than diminishing or degrading them in some way.

All this is even more important than it was in 1949. We now know beyond any reasonable doubt, that our climate is at extreme risk. Hot, dry, wet ,cold and wind will be more extreme and frequent. Plants , animals and humans will struggle to adapt. Mass movements of populations from inhospitable regions will require those in more hospitable parts of the planet to respond constructively. The UK's Protected Landscapes are at the forefront of our practical action to address these challenges.

This Annual review describes how we seek to tackle these challenges.

We undertake an enormous range of projects with multiple funding sources. We have fifteen independent sources of funds which finance about twenty discrete projects. The list is diverse but diversity in nature breeds resilience. This work takes people to apply for the funds, track the spend and organise the work and this is all done by the people,



most of them part-time, in the photo on page 4. They are at the forefront of action to alleviate climate change and on behalf of future generations I thank them for their work.

Our Management Plan describes all this in detail. It is a complex document which sets out the legal basis of our work and has been adopted by all the relevant parties and will be extant until 2030. Its on our web site and drives what we do.

Of course we don't do all this alone. The Blackdown Hills has about 600 farms, four major rivers and our largest centre of habitation has 2500 people. We are surrounded by much larger towns and busy motorways. We cannot achieve anything without working in partnership with all these stakeholders and in the pages which follow you will find many examples of us doing exactly that.

All this is challenging work. But it is important work. It is easy for one generation to take what it needs to survive at the expense of future generations because stewardship is an altruistic paradigm which requires some current sacrifice for a future benefit to others. But there is hope. Some of our projects have demonstrated that nature is extraordinarily resilient and adaptive. Our projects give nature a 'break' and future generations a chance to enjoy the world as previous generations have done.

Bob Nelson



Blackdown Hills National Landscape

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape spans parts of Devon and Somerset, from the northern scarp near the M5 to Honiton and Axminster in the south. Rising between 50 and 310 metres, it is valued for its tranquillity and sense of remoteness and was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1991.

The area is shaped by a plateau cut by deep valleys, creating a mix of exposed hilltops and sheltered settlements. Its special character comes from the blend of long-established rural traditions, distinctive geology, and varied habitats. Woodlands, hedgerows, heath, and farmland form a rich patchwork landscape, with historic patterns and locally distinctive buildings fitting naturally into their surroundings.



Our Purpose

The purpose of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is underpinned by legislation relating to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), which remains the legal designation for National Landscapes.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 established key duties for AONBs. Section 85 required relevant authorities to have regard to conserving and enhancing natural beauty when carrying out functions affecting an AONB, while Section 89 requires local authorities to prepare and review a Management Plan for each AONB in their administrative area.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 strengthened the Section 85 duty, requiring relevant authorities to “seek to further” the purposes of Protected Landscapes, rather than simply “have regard to” them. This creates a more active duty to ensure that the purposes of Protected Landscapes are recognised in decisions and activities affecting them, while allowing authorities to continue fulfilling their other statutory duties and responsibilities.

Defra have produced guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.



Meet the Team



Clockwise from top left: Catherine Farnell, Emily Hobson-Martin, Lisa Turner, Tim Youngs, John Hickey, Harry Shaw, Hannah Metson, Amy Taverner, Di Weeks, Jane Robertson, Lucy Jefferson.

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape team is a group of specialists working to conserve, enhance and celebrate this special landscape. Together, we deliver projects, support communities, engage partners, secure funding and help ensure

the Blackdown Hills remains a thriving place for people and nature. We are proud to work alongside farmers, landowners, volunteers, local organisations and residents who all play a vital role in caring for this nationally important landscape.



Tim Youngs, Blackdown Hills National Landscape Manager

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape has a suite of special qualities that together make it unique and outstanding, underpinning its designation as a nationally important protected landscape. These are the special qualities, individually and in combination, that we need to conserve and enhance for the future, and they should be considered in all decisions affecting the National Landscape.

The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan (2025-30) describes these special qualities, explains why the Blackdown Hills National Landscape is important, sets out an agreed vision for its future and identifies the challenges/ opportunities for the area (nature, climate, people & place), and how these will be tackled.

Guided by the Management Plan, the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership focuses action and resources on where it is most needed, working with land managers, communities and other stakeholders. 2025-26 represented a further step-change in delivery, with increased capital project funding from Defra and large externally funded projects.

Management Plan



The adoption of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan 2025–2030 marks one of the most significant milestones of the year. Following a lengthy period of review, consultation and refinement, the plan was formally adopted by all partner local authorities between June and August. This achievement represents not just the completion of a statutory requirement, but the establishment of a shared direction for the future of the landscape.

The focus has now turned to embedding the plan in practice. It has been published in a web-based format, making it more accessible and easier to use as a day-to-day reference. Summary versions and visual guides have been developed to help different audiences, from parish councils to land managers, quickly understand its priorities and actions.

The key priorities of the Management Plan are summarised in the infographic on page 6.



Blackdown Hills National Landscape MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-2030



"Conserving & enhancing our special landscape over the next five years"



PLACE

strengthen **LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**, support **NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING**, protect our **HERITAGE** and **ENVIRONMENT**

★ **HELP FARMERS INTO NEW environmental support schemes**

★ **ENHANCE natural capital & ecosystem services** THROUGH SUSTAINABLE, REGENERATIVE, LANDSCAPE-LED MANAGEMENT

★ **STRENGTHEN OUR planning influence** TO ENSURE DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS OUR LANDSCAPE & RELATED GOALS

★ **PROTECT historic buildings & features** AND REDUCE HERITAGE SITES AT RISK

★ **IMPROVE WATER QUALITY & FLOOD RESILIENCE** VIA CATCHMENT PROJECTS & CITIZEN SCIENCE

★ **EXPAND tree planting** AND woodland restoration, INCLUDING ORCHARDS AND "TREES OUTSIDE WOODS"

★ **MAKE Paths, parking & facilities EASIER** FOR EVERYONE TO USE

★ **BRING MORE diverse voices INTO DECISION MAKING & IMPROVE INFORMATION** WE COLLECT ABOUT inclusion

★ **ENHANCE landscape & heritage interpretation**

★ **USE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT** TO SUPPORT health & wellbeing

★ **EMBED Volunteering & school engagement** IN PROJECT DELIVERY

★ **Community Collaboration** ON CROSS-CUTTING RURAL ISSUES

PEOPLE

improve **ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSION, WELLBEING, INTERPRETATION & SUPPORT** for rural communities

NATURE

restore, expand & connect habitats to create a **RESILIENT, ECOLOGICAL NETWORK** across the Blackdown Hills

★ **RESTORE priority habitats** AND SSSI's TO "FAVOURABLE CONDITION"

★ **IMPROVE HABITAT DATA** THROUGH BETTER mapping, surveys and ground-truthing

★ **DELIVER KEY nature recovery measures**, INCLUDING SLOWING WATER FLOW AND creating wetlands

★ **PROTECT & RESTORE** THE characteristic patchwork ESPECIALLY Springline mires

★ **CREATE NEW wildlife-rich areas** IN BEST LOCATIONS, FOLLOWING THE IDEA OF "bigger, better & more joined"

FOUR deeply connected THEMES

to make the **BLACKDOWN HILLS** a more **resilient, nature-rich & people-friendly landscape**

... action on one theme strengthens **ALL**

★ **PROTECT peat, wetlands, heaths** AND OTHER SOILS THAT STORE CARBON

★ **MAKE SURE CLIMATE ACTION** SUPPORTS **natural recovery** AND VICE VERSA

★ **USE nature-based solutions** TO REDUCE FLOODING, IMPROVE WATER STORAGE & BUILD RESILIENCE FOR COMMUNITIES

★ **DEVELOP A climate adaptation plan** TO HELP US PREPARE FOR RISING RISKS

★ **WORK TOWARDS "net zero"** WITH COUNCILS, LANDOWNERS & BUSINESSES

CLIMATE

cut **CARBON**, protect **CARBON-RICH** places & help the landscape & communities cope with a **CHANGING CLIMATE**

Key Challenges & FORCES FOR CHANGE

- CLIMATE EMERGENCY
- NATURE RECOVERY NEEDS
- FARMING TRANSITION
- DEVELOPMENT & LAND USE
- ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY PRESSURES
- RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

DELIVERING THROUGH:

EVIDENCE-BASED monitoring

INNOVATION

COLLABORATION

BEST-PRACTICE

PROMOTING PARTNERSHIP working

STATUTORY BODIES

COMMUNITIES

LAND MANAGERS

VISITORS
BUSINESSES

THIS PLAN IS A TOOL FOR...

Farming in Protected Landscapes



The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme continues to underpin much of the practical delivery work across the Blackdown Hills. Now in its fifth year, the programme is enabling farmers and land managers to take forward projects that directly address climate change, biodiversity loss and access to nature, while also supporting resilient farm businesses.

A notable feature of the year has been the flexibility of the programme. Funding allocations have fluctuated as projects evolved or were withdrawn, requiring constant management to ensure funds were fully utilised.

Behind the scenes, delivery has been strengthened by the team structure. A new FiPL trainee role has brought additional capacity, while specialist contractors have supported delivery across nature, climate, people and place outcomes. The Local Assessment Panel, chaired by a local farmer, continues to provide strong governance and ensures projects are grounded in local knowledge and priorities.

Importantly, the announcement that FiPL funding will continue for a further three years provides confidence and continuity, allowing longer-term thinking and planning across the farming community.



Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

38 projects funded

£324,000 in allocated grants

Restoring Farway Marsh

Farming in Protected Landscape Case Study



At Farway Marsh near Chardstock, a 2.5-hectare area of former, drained wetland has been restored to hold water on the land, slow flows and help reduce downstream flooding. Led by the Kit Brook River Restoration team (part of Friends of the River Axe) in partnership with the landowner, the project used a range of nature-based solutions, including scrapes, leaky dams and hinged trees, to re-establish a functioning wetland system.

The work was underpinned by detailed surveys, from river morphology to wildlife and water quality and brought together a wide range of partners, specialists and volunteers. Around 150

people engaged with the project through events, site visits and ongoing monitoring, while creative outputs such as a short film and artwork have helped share the story more widely.

Although still in its early stages, initial signs are encouraging, with local feedback suggesting reduced flooding during winter storms. Just as importantly, the project has reconnected people with a lost landscape feature, building local knowledge, skills and pride, and demonstrating how targeted, community-led action can deliver lasting benefits for nature, climate resilience and people.



Funded Lab Helps Farmers Care for Their Flock

Farming in Protected Landscape Case Study

Sheep and beef farming is a vital part of the rural economy, but managing parasites remains a major challenge. Routine worming, while convenient, can lead to resistance over time, making treatments less effective.

A group of farmers near Luppitt worked together to find a more sustainable solution, aligning with national best practice through the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) approach. With £1,820 of FiPL funding, they established the Luppitt Community Laboratory, a shared facility where farmers can carry out faecal analysis to understand parasite burdens in their livestock.

Housed in a converted building next to the village pub, the lab enables practical, accessible testing. Training sessions have given farmers the confidence to analyse samples themselves and use the results to make more informed decisions about treatment.

Now open during weekdays, the lab is helping reduce unnecessary worming, improve animal welfare and support more sustainable farming across the local area.



Connecting the Culm

Working with nature and communities to create better a future for the River Culm



Connecting the Culm continues to grow as one of the most ambitious programmes in the Blackdown Hills, bringing together multiple funding streams and partners to address flooding, water quality and landscape resilience at a catchment scale.

The programme now comprises a series of interconnected projects, including National Highways, the Devon Resilience Innovation Project (DRIP), Flood Defence Grant in Aid (GiA), and developing work with Network Rail, together representing investment of over £2 million, with further funding in development. Early work to develop a financial model has also been completed, strengthening the case for long-term investment in nature-based solutions.

Significant progress has also been made on the National Highways-funded project, where feasibility and detailed design stages have been completed, unlocking a £1 million

implementation phase. This work focuses on addressing water quality issues linked to motorway outfalls while delivering wider biodiversity benefits across the catchment.

Alongside this, DRIP and GiA schemes are delivering practical interventions on the ground. Work with landowners has led to the installation of features such as leaky dams, scrapes and ponds, designed to slow the flow of water during heavy rainfall events. These interventions are already beginning to demonstrate how small-scale changes across multiple sites can have a cumulative impact on flood risk.

Looking ahead, more ambitious restoration projects are in development, including large-scale river and floodplain works planned around Hunkin Wood. The programme is also engaging with partners such as Network Rail, where early design work is exploring opportunities for floodplain reconnection across the wider catchment.

A key aspect of Connecting the Culm is knowledge sharing. The annual forum continues to bring together farmers, partners and communities, with this year's focus on soil health highlighting its importance in both flood resilience and nature recovery. Alongside this, the Connecting the Culm engagement programme has successfully increased awareness and understanding of nature-based solutions through a mix of school workshops, community events and accessible resources. It reached a wide audience, particularly school pupils, using hands-on and locally relevant activities to explore climate impacts and practical responses.



Triple Axe

Farming, Nature and People



The Triple Axe partnership exemplifies collaborative working across boundaries, bringing together organisations and initiatives operating across the wider Axe catchment.

Over the past year, the partnership has strengthened its governance structures, establishing a steering group and forum to support coordination across a wide range of activities. This has been supported by the development of a new website, which will act as a central hub for information and engagement.

On the ground, work has continued across the three core themes of farming, nature and people. For farmers, the programme builds on earlier Farm Resilience Plans by offering practical support, including soil analysis and advisory workshops. These activities are helping farmers better understand and manage key resources such as nutrients and soils.

In terms of nature, river restoration work along the River Yarty has begun to show tangible results. Measures to reconnect the river with its floodplain and reduce erosion have been successful, with aquatic plant communities naturally re-establishing and spreading along restored stretches. This work is providing valuable evidence for future restoration schemes.

Rivers Run Through Us

Rivers Run Through Us (RRTU) works on the 'People' and 'Nature' themes of the Triple Axe priorities, taking a holistic, collaborative approach to restoring and celebrating the natural heritage of the River Axe, its tributaries and valleys. It is about strengthening connections between people and heritage, farmers and consumers, rural communities and towns, soil and water.

RRTU focuses on three themes: river, soil, and people. It highlights how river catchments are shaped by water and soil, the farming that depends on them, and the people who rely on what they produce. The project nurtures community action to monitor river health, protect soils and habitats, and reaches out to empower everyone to find their own connection with the river and its heritage.





Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund (made possible by National Lottery players) and the Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund, the project is in its 18-month development phase.



During this development period, RRTU has evolved into a wide-ranging programme that lays the groundwork for future landscape-scale delivery, bringing together partners, specialists and local communities to design an ambitious and inclusive activity plan.



A series of pilot activities has explored different ways of engaging people. Work with schools has seen trout eggs introduced into classrooms, creating a direct and memorable connection between young people and river ecosystems. Collaboration with national organisations has contributed to the development of a strategic monitoring plan for the catchment, combining citizen science with professional data to build a clearer picture of river health.

The project has focussed on three species during the development phase; water crowfoot, water vole and trout. Mini-species action plans have been developed and monitoring programmes piloted to connect local communities with these indicators for river health.



Volunteer with water vole. Photo credit: Fiona Coope

The project has also supported local action through a £25,000 community grant scheme, enabling a range of initiatives that benefit rivers, soils and local communities. Alongside this, wellbeing activities and outreach programmes have engaged individuals and groups who may not traditionally access the countryside, helping more people to develop a personal connection with the landscape.

As the project moves towards its delivery phase, the focus is on strengthening partnerships and ensuring that Rivers Run Through Us is well positioned to deliver lasting benefits for the river, the landscape and the communities connected to it.



Volunteers pulling invasive non-native Himalayan Balsam

River Yarty

Floodplain and Habitat Restoration

Triple Axe Case Study



The River Yarty floodplain and habitat restoration project has delivered significant improvements to river habitat and natural floodplain function through a combination of Environment Agency Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF), Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Blackdown Hills National Landscape funding.

Following the successful completion of the first phase in 2024-25, restoration work continued during 2025-26 on a further 500-metre stretch downstream of Yarty Farm Bridge. The project focused on reconnecting the river with its floodplain, stabilising eroding banks and enhancing in-stream habitat. Works included the placement of 1,500 tonnes of flint, chert and stone, the

installation of 500 live willow stakes, and the use of 500 cubic metres of brushwood to create more diverse and resilient river conditions.

The project demonstrates the value of partnership funding and collaboration in delivering large-scale nature recovery. During 2025-26, restoration works were supported by £41,040 of WEIF funding, £40,000 from FiPL and £2,860 from the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Project Fund, helping to improve habitat quality, biodiversity and the river's long-term resilience to climate change.



Photo credit: John Parry



30by30 Funding

During 2025-26, Blackdown Hills National Landscape received £157,000 of capital uplift funding to support nature recovery and contribute towards the national 30by30 ambition, which aims to protect and effectively manage 30% of land for nature by 2030.

Funding was targeted at areas with the potential to meet 30by30 criteria, helping to bring existing habitats into better condition and create or restore habitats that strengthen connections across the landscape. This landscape-scale approach is important in creating more coherent and resilient ecological networks, allowing wildlife to move more freely between areas of high-quality habitat.

One project supported the purchase of a remote-controlled scrub-cutting machine for use at Hense Moor SSSI, Hartridge and Luppitt Commons and other nearby sites. These areas include valuable lowland heath, species-rich mire and dry acid grassland, where controlling scrub is essential to maintaining and improving habitat condition. The machine enables safe management of steep, wet and difficult-to-access ground where using a conventional tractor is not possible.



The equipment was purchased for a consortium of farmers belonging to Luppitt Commons Ltd, enabling it to be shared between land managers caring for sites of significant landscape and nature conservation interest. This collaborative approach will support ongoing habitat management across multiple sites and help strengthen ecological connectivity at a wider landscape scale.

Other projects supported through the funding included the creation and restoration of three hectares of orchard and the restoration of a series of ponds between two areas of priority habitat, helping to create a more connected and resilient network for nature across the Blackdown Hills.



Wild Neroche

Restoring and Transforming Landscapes

The Wild Neroche Restoring and Transforming Landscapes project works with land managers across 7,000 hectares of the Blackdown Hills National Landscape to support practical land management changes that strengthen farm businesses and boost biodiversity. By promoting sustainable, nature-positive approaches, the project aims to improve habitats, strengthen ecological connectivity and build resilience across the landscape, while supporting viable land management businesses.

The project builds on evidence and work undertaken through Wild Neroche, one of Forestry England's "wild areas", where a pioneering approach is being taken to restore fully functioning ecosystems and support nature's recovery. The Wild Neroche Land Management Advisor, Jane Robertson, works directly with farmers and land managers in the area surrounding Neroche to identify and enable practical interventions, drawing on existing grants as well as funding mechanisms specifically available to land managers within National Landscapes and National Parks. The advisor role is hosted by Blackdown Hills National Landscape and funded through a partnership between Forestry England and Tesco.



The project is combining a range of funding sources, including Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL), the Wildlife Rich Habitat Fund and 30x30 uplift funding, to support targeted habitat improvements. Activity is focused primarily on Tesco supplier farms, while also engaging neighbouring holdings to create joined-up, landscape-scale change across contiguous farm clusters. During the first pilot phase (August 2025 to March 2026), £99,000 was invested in the project area, including £87,000 delivered directly through Wild Neroche.

Alongside on-the-ground delivery, the project is building an evidence base and supporting long-term planning. Five Natural Capital and Connectivity Plans were piloted during the first phase, with a further 12 to be developed in 2026-2027. These plans provide a baseline of existing natural assets, identify opportunities to strengthen ecological connectivity, and set out practical recommendations for land managers. To encourage uptake and share learning, a programme of farmer engagement is also underway, with one event held to date and three more planned over the coming year.



Access for All

Defra Access for All funding has supported a wide range of projects aimed at making the Blackdown Hills more inclusive and accessible.

With £88,000 allocated, alongside additional funding carried over from previous years, improvements have included upgrades to paths, signage, car parking and visitor facilities. At Dennings Down Farm, work to create a more accessible viewing platform and wellbeing space, alongside improved parking, is helping to open up parts of the landscape that were previously difficult to reach. Additional support has also been provided for access improvements at sites such as Henbury Hillfort and the Blackdown Practice Hub.



The programme has also focused on improving community spaces, including accessible community gardens and play areas, as well as the provision of specialist equipment such as an accessible 8 seater vehicle to support group visits.

Alongside physical improvements, training and site visits with accessibility specialists have helped build awareness and capacity across partners, supporting both physical and digital accessibility improvements and ensuring a more inclusive approach to access across the Blackdown Hills.

Chardstock Harmony Garden

Access for All Case Study



The Chardstock Eco Group community garden project shows how targeted funding can create inclusive, nature-rich spaces that are accessible to all. The project transformed a previously underused area into the Chardstock Harmony Garden, a vibrant shared space, bringing people and nature together under the strapline 'neighbours and nature growing together'.

A key strength of the project is its strong community ownership and wide participation. Eight local groups, including the primary school, sports clubs, and community groups, each take responsibility for individual planters, fostering a sense of pride and long-term stewardship. A dedicated community planting day brought these groups together to establish the garden.

Accessibility has been a key focus, with improved access, seating and an adapted picnic bench enabling people of all ages and abilities to enjoy the garden. This has already made a real difference, including enabling a parent with a disability to access the space and watch their child play nearby.

Environmental enhancements include the creation of a 'bank garden' and a 22-metre deadwood hedge, providing valuable wildlife habitat. The project has also attracted additional funding and in-kind support, demonstrating strong partnership working and maximising impact.



Nature Connection Network

Established in 2025, the Blackdown Hills Nature Connection Network was created with support from Blackdown Hills National Landscape (BHNL), which continues to play a key coordinating role. The network brings together a diverse mix of sites and organisations across the Blackdown Hills, all committed to helping more people connect with nature, improving health, wellbeing and confidence, and supporting green prescriptions and nature-based interventions. It has now grown to around thirteen sites, ranging from smallholdings and family farms to larger, established outdoor learning centres.

The network focuses on improving access to nature, particularly for under-represented groups, and on addressing barriers to participation such as transport and access to suitable activities. Members are actively engaged in enhancing opportunities on their land, supported through shared learning, training, and collaboration.



During the year, four in-person site visits for the network were delivered alongside regular newsletters, helping to build a strong and connected community.

FiPL funding has enabled the purchase of shared equipment and resources, including a gazebo, display materials and creative activity tools, which can be used across multiple sites. This has supported the delivery of educational, creative and wellbeing-focused activities.



Nature Calling

Nature Calling is a National Landscapes arts programme that uses creativity to connect new audiences with their local landscapes. As part of this initiative, Blackdown Hills National Landscape and East Devon National Landscape collaborated on The Work of Giants, an intergenerational community arts project exploring the region's ancient landscapes and history.

Delivered during summer and autumn 2025 and completed in November, the project brought together Year 8 students from Honiton Community College and members of Dementia Friendly Honiton. Through creative activities such as storytelling, sound, photography, writing, and performance, participants shared their experiences and perspectives of the landscape.

An immersive theatre company, Four of Swords (Phil and Sarah), worked with musician Jim Causley to develop the project, drawing on the participants' voices and creativity. The work was inspired by Enta Geweorc "The Work of Giants", an Old English term for ancient monumental sites. The project culminated in an immersive film installation and public exhibition at Thelma Hulbert Gallery, offering a unique interpretation of the landscape's myths and history. It demonstrates how creative engagement can deepen connections between people and place while fostering collaboration across generations. Funded by Arts Council England, the project was supported by Dementia Friendly Honiton, Thelma Hulbert Gallery, Honiton Community College, and English Heritage.



**Nature
Calling**



**National
Landscapes
Association**

activate



HM Government



Festival of Heritage

This year's festival brought together community, culture and landscape through a series of events.

The Blackdown Hills Festival of Heritage 2025 built on previous years' success, delivering a programme of seven free events that celebrated the area's rich and varied heritage. The festival engaged a wide audience through a mix of guided walks, workshops, talks and community events. Activities ranged from exploring dairy farming traditions in Hemyock to creative workshops using natural materials, offering opportunities for people of all ages to engage with the area's heritage.

Delivered in partnership with local organisations, landowners and specialists, including Thelma Hulbert Gallery, the South West Airfields Heritage Trust and Dunkeswell Abbey Church Trust, the festival attracted strong attendance and positive feedback. The programme successfully connected over 300 people with the landscape's history, encouraging participation across all age groups.



Hillforts of the Hills

National Grid Landscape Enhancement Initiative and Historic England funded the Hillforts of the Hills project which is now nearing completion, delivering improvements to some of the most significant historic sites in the Blackdown Hills.

Work at Dumpdon Hillfort and Hembury Hillfort has included scrub clearance, habitat management and the installation of interpretation, helping to both protect and enhance these monuments. The project has successfully addressed many of the issues that placed these sites on the Heritage At Risk register, while also improving their value for wildlife and visitors.



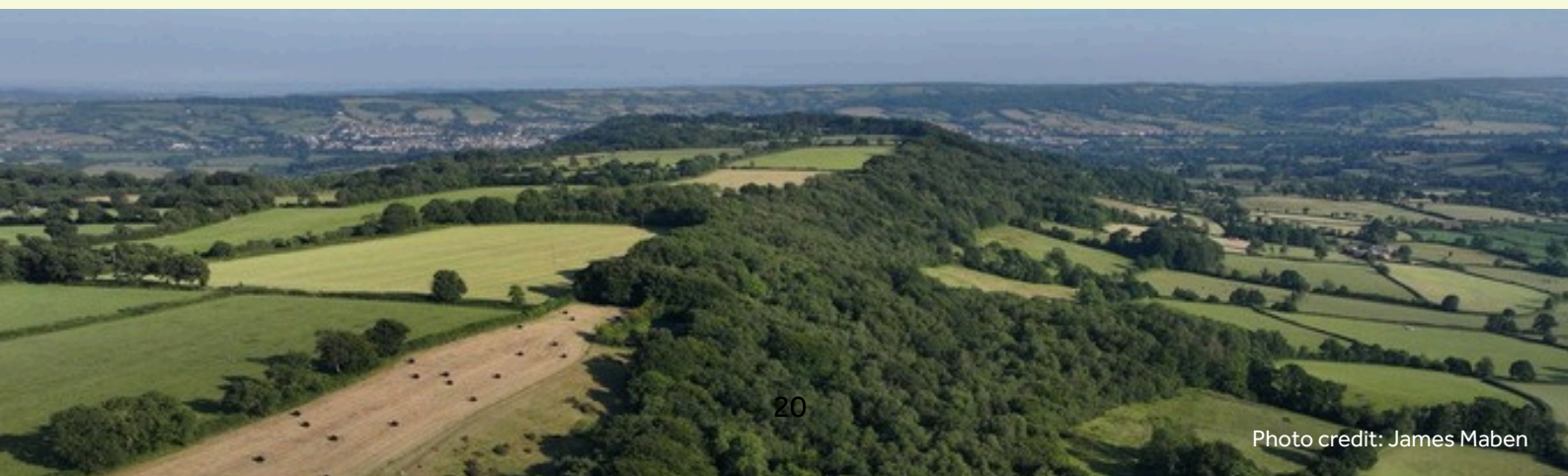
Planning

One of our key roles is to advise on planning policies and development proposals that affect the Blackdown Hills National Landscape. We do this by responding to planning consultations that could significantly affect landscape and natural beauty, publishing guidance, and working directly with other National Landscapes and planning authorities.

In 2025-26, 151 planning proposals were considered. After assessment, detailed responses were provided for 57 of these. Detailed responses were made to East

Devon Local Plan (second Reg 19 Local Plan Consultation) and to the Government's proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Additional consultations included 10 from National Grid Electricity Distribution (mainly upgrade works), nine from the Forestry Commission (including felling licences, a Woodland Management Plan and EWCO planting), and further enquiries from National Highways, Wessex Water, and various woodland consultants.

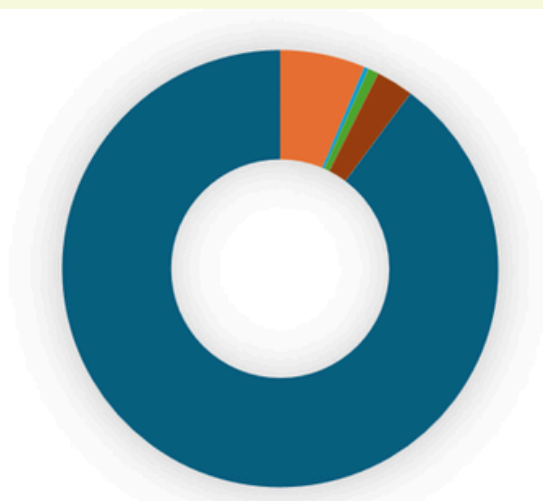


Financial Statement



Income and Expenditure Account For the year ending 31 March 2026

	2024/25	2025/26
Expenditure	£1,571,881.00	£2,713,940.00
Staffing	159,942	171,367
Office costs	10,688	8,990
Partnership costs	26,068	21,390
Partnership projects	101,550	75,107
Capital funded projects	1,273,633	2,437,086
Income	£1,571,881.00	£2,713,940.00
Income brought forward	153,236	414,725
DEFRA – Core	247,415	195,681
DEFRA – Farming in Protected Landscapes	606,514	423,900
DEFRA – Access for All	54,463	88,786
DEFRA – Capital uplift	51,733	157,441
DEFRA – Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund	16,959	27,958
DEFRA – Water Environment Investment Fund	115,739	66,040
DEFRA – Water Restoration Fund	-	75,000
Local Authorities	52,802	53,587
Other income – Connecting the Culm	221,597	933,508
Other income – Wild Neroche	-	65,000
Historic Building Restoration Grant	12,002	-
National Lottery Heritage Fund – Rivers Run Through Us	39,421	212,314
Surplus (deficit)	0	0



Gross Expenditure %

- Staffing - 6.31%
- Office costs - 0.33%
- Partnership costs - 0.79%
- Partnership projects - 2.77%
- Capital Funded Projects - 89.80%

We are grateful for the continued support of many organisations, including:

- Defra
- Somerset Council
- Devon County Council
- Mid Devon District Council
- East Devon District Council
- Environment Agency
- Blackdown Hills National Landscape Partnership Management Group

And to the many community groups and volunteers across the Blackdown Hills who support our work.



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