

Mid-term evaluation report

This project is being delivered by the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), on behalf of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme.



With funding support from:

Made possible with



**Heritage
Fund**



This document was commissioned by Quantock Hills AONB on behalf of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme. It has been researched and written by Heritage Insider.

Completed March 2023

All photos are copyright Quantock Hills AONB unless otherwise stated.

Front cover photo: Photo walk at Broomfield.



Made possible with

**Heritage
Fund**

Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme: Mid-term evaluation report

Contents

Glossary of terms and abbreviations.....	3
Executive summary	4
1. Background.....	7
1.1 The Quantock Hills	7
1.2 Journey to a Landscape Partnership Scheme	8
2. Methodology	9
2.1 What does the evaluation process seek to find out?.....	9
2.2 How was the evaluation undertaken?.....	10
2.3 Limitations	11
3. Progress health check.....	13
3.1 Governance and risk management.....	13
3.2 Project management and resourcing	14
3.3 Partnership-working.....	18
3.4 Project delivery progress	20
4. Emerging outcomes.....	23
5. Successes and challenges.....	36
5.1 Successes and opportunities.....	36
5.2 Challenges and blockers.....	43
6. Planning for the Scheme's legacy	46
6.1 Legacy planning to date	46
6.2 Key ongoing benefits of the QLPS.....	46
6.3 Legacy risks and next steps.....	49
7. Evaluator's recommendations	51
List of Appendices	56

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Accessibility – The degree to which a product, device, service or environment is available to as many people as possible¹

AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Commons – or common land is privately owned land with ‘Rights of Common’ over that land, most often to graze animals, as defined in the Commons Registration Act 1965 and subsequent legislation

Commoner – a person with a right to farm the land, graze sheep, cattle and ponies and to use resources from the land, such as trees, peat and soil. Commoners graze their livestock on Commons

Diversity – When using the term ‘diversity’ within this document, it refers to everything that makes us unique – from the categories protected by UK law (age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation) to our personality types and ways of thinking

ELMs – Environmental Land Management Schemes, the new way the UK government will subsidise Land Owners after leaving the EU

¹ Source: The Disability Information Bureau. www.dibservices.org.uk/accessibility-issues

² A good description and useful typologies of where and how we engage with nature can be found in Gelthorpe, J. (2017) *Disconnect from nature and its effect on health and well-being. A public engagement literature review*. Natural History Museum

Engagement – The act of engaging or the state of being engaged; active involvement²

FiPL – the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, part of Defra’s Agricultural Transition Plan, which runs from July 2021 to March 2025

Inclusion – Inclusion means providing a space where everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources, and where everyone feels valued and accepted. Everyone should be able to contribute and have a voice. This may mean making reasonable adjustments to facilitate participation³

Outcomes – The significant changes that directly result from your activities. These changes may be for individuals, organisations, communities, policies, practices or the environment

Outputs – The direct result of a scheme (for example training or intervention sessions completed, persons reached, materials created or distributed). Also called a ‘deliverable’

Protected landscapes – A collective term used to refer to National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

QLPS – The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme, or ‘the Scheme’

³ Source: Social Work England. www.socialworkengland.org.uk/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/what-we-mean-by-equality-diversity-and-inclusion

Executive summary

Small in scale but immense in character, the Quantock Hills is a unique environment of diverse landscape scenery: heathland hills; dense coniferous forests; rolling farmland valleys dotted with red sandstone villages; escarpment; Jurassic coastline; woodland; and country houses with designed parkland. The special nature of this landscape was recognised in 1956 when it was designated as England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme ('QLPS' or 'the 'Scheme') is a £2.6m five-year programme designed to bring a partnership of organisations together to achieve a wide range of landscape- and community-inspired aspirations in the Quantock Hills, and to provide a long-term legacy of people and landscape engagement, a symbiotic relationship benefitting both the place and its people.

The Scheme is now in its mid-term period and therefore subject to an independent evaluation by sector specialists Heritage Insider Ltd.

Project delivery to date

To date, the Scheme has been well managed and with evident adaptive management occurring. Partnership-working has been key to delivery and time spent cultivating relationships has led to valued and fruitful collaboration in most areas of the Scheme.

The dedicated QLPS team have built good rapport (internal and external) and effective ways of working, and invested time in partnership relationships. The team are high-achieving but staff capacity has now a hit a 'glass ceiling', limiting how much the Scheme can achieve.

Overall, the Scheme has built momentum and delivery against targets is good. There are a few notable exceptions where progress has faltered due to difficulty in gaining appropriate permissions, consensus or partner buy-in. In these cases alternative plans are already in place to mitigate the risk to overall Scheme delivery.

Emerging outcomes

It is too early to fully assess the difference the Scheme is making; however, there is emerging evidence of a meaningful range of outcomes for heritage, people and communities, most notably:

- **More, and a wider range, of people engage with heritage** – the Scheme has approached audience development in an authentic, skilled and collaborative way. This area of work is not complete but great leaps in inclusive practice are evident that can provide a model for future engagement programmes
- **People will volunteer their time** – the volunteering programme is providing the opportunity for more local people to take action for the Quantock Hills, and building capacity for future action. The volunteering experience is delivering deep benefits for individuals
- **Heritage is better recorded/identified** – research, investigation and recording across cultural, built, archaeological and natural heritage mean that there is now a more robust and complete picture of the heritage of the Quantock Hills as a result of the Scheme
- **People have learnt about heritage** – the Scheme team's innovative approach to events, learning and programming has resulted in attendees finding their own relevance in the Quantock Hills, whilst discovering new aspects of its heritage, new places or connecting with new people

- **People will have developed skills** – the Scheme has hosted apprenticeships as well as fostering the skills of volunteers, staff, partners and Land Owners and Managers. This is helping to build capacity for positive action for the heritage of the Quantock Hills now and in the future, as well as delivering personal benefits for individuals, such as greater confidence and agency, and improved employability.

The Scheme is successfully mobilising people to improve, care for and share the Quantock Hills through partnership-working, volunteering and engagement programmes. This is contributing to the local area being a better place to visit, live and work. Other outcomes will continue to be strengthened by the remainder of the Scheme, for example heritage will be in better condition and better managed.

The Scheme is successfully moving the partners along the first steps towards the vision for 2025 and beyond. Not only that, but the new models of working trialled by the Scheme can provide examples of how protected landscapes can move towards a position of being ‘for all’ through inclusive, authentic engagement and action.

However, building and nurturing trust, and the change needed⁴ in order to democratise the Quantock Hills landscape to ensure it is ‘for all’, are both long-term processes. This is in sharp contrast to the short-term nature of the intervention, i.e. the limited-time QLPS. There needs to be a clear legacy plan

⁴ Change is primarily (but not exclusively) needed within the delivery organisations themselves in order to diversify audiences, for example by offering more inclusive and accessible engagement programmes and communications, or delivery at scale

and/or exit strategy for engagement work to ensure the impact of the investment in the QLPS is maximised for communities. Visibility of the offer and transport for communities outside of the Quantock Hills to access green spaces, and capacity within the Quantock Hills to take action for heritage, will all be ongoing challenges.

Recommendations

The resulting recommendations have been developed by the external Evaluator, taking into consideration the ongoing needs and aspirations of the Scheme, the opportunities the investment has created to date, the changed context (for example as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, emerging ELMs scheme, FiPL etc.) and professional experience of the sector.

ER1 – Ease workload issues through stringent prioritisation and adding additional capacity

Heavily prioritisation of forthcoming work (including allocation of ‘available’ budget) is recommended, using the following criteria:

- ✓ **Cementing success** – add value to existing work rather than starting on new work packages
- ✓ **Longevity** – prioritise those items that will leave the biggest/ deepest/most secure legacy
- ✓ **Diversity** – those work-streams that can help the QLPS to continue to look beyond ‘the usual suspects’ to engage new audiences.

Building on the excellent budget re-forecast, consider more radical cuts to free-up budget to support another post. A new role of a **Community Empowerment Ranger** (or similar) would be beneficial.

There is potential for any legacy materials and tools, and video or other content, to be woven into a package of materials that can be launched alongside this case study.

ER2 Bring legacy-planning into sharp focus in day-to-day planning

This will help ensure the legacy of the Scheme investment. The questions below can be used to help guide team discussions and thought processes:

- Q What benefits will be left behind after this event, activity or works?
- Q Can we further maximise the size and depth of these benefits in any way? If so, what do we need to do now to ensure this?
- Q Who will benefit from what's left behind? Is there a way in which we could help more people or a more diverse range of people to benefit?
- Q How can we ensure the work undertaken by the project is maintained and the momentum built upon? Is it written into management plans or embedded in the work of others?
- Q Can we support these individuals or organisations now, to make the task easier, such as through training, helping put in place systems and processes (e.g. to support a diverse volunteer team)?

ER3 Raise the profile of areas of success

In order to take advantage of this opportunity, the final reporting should be split into two:

1. **Short high-level summary report** – to report on the impact of the whole scheme
2. **An illustrated case study** – showcasing the engagement work of the Scheme, including lessons learnt and practical tips, to be produced Jan–March. This will allow time for the Scheme team to launch and disseminate it (for example, lining-up speaking at the AONB conference in 2024) and to de-risk losing staff and therefore the richness of detail.

1. Background

1.1 The Quantock Hills

The special nature of the Quantock Hills was recognised in 1956, when they were designated as England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This rolling landscape is a patchwork of moorland, farmland and woodland, all the way through to fossil-rich coastal cliffs. Its upland oak woods provide a summer refuge for pied flycatchers whilst the distinctive beech hedgebanks serve to separate the upland commons from surrounding farmland and historic parkland.

The area's protected-landscape status was afforded not just because of its particular qualities as a natural environment, but in recognition of a remarkable story of human interaction with nature reaching back many thousands of years. The Quantock Hills have been prized, shaped and modified by a succession of human generations – from 3,000-year-old Bronze Age funerary barrows at Cothelstone to the Iron Age hill fort at Dowsborough, and to the woodlands peppered with industrial archaeology.

Within this relatively small area there are 60 Scheduled Monuments, 542 Listed Buildings and five Registered Parks and Gardens.

This rich tapestried landscape has also served as a muse for literary titans Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) and William Wordsworth (1770–1850).

The landscape, communities, and economy of the Hills remain entwined with the surrounding farmed fringes beyond the designated AONB, and all share a common 'Quantock' identity. Yet it is particularly vulnerable to change; historically, land-ownership has centred on a number of large estates that have engendered a strong sense of ownership, continuity and pride in the landscape. The area has suffered decline in the strength of its landscapes,⁵ with the impact of changing agricultural practices being compounded by changes in land-ownership where historic estates have been, or are being, broken up.



Figure 1 View north across the Quantock Hills at Dowsborough Camp, an Iron Age hill fort near Nether Stowey

⁵ Quantock Hills Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

1.2 Journey to a Landscape Partnership Scheme

A Landscape Character Assessment⁶ confirmed what local people have always known – that Quantock landscape and identity extend beyond the AONB boundary. To facilitate undertaking projects and engagement outside of the area, the AONB identified that it needed significant funding and a dedicated partnership, bigger and more diverse than the formal AONB Partnership, to ensure successful delivery at a true landscape-scale.

In 2015 the AONB, the Friends of Quantock and the South West Heritage Trust started developing proposals for a large, inclusive project. In doing so, the developing partnership particularly wanted to include new partners and audiences. The partnership was unsuccessful in an initial bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme;⁷ however, the funder encouraged the partnership to amend the bid and re-submit.

Pilot projects, an extensive programme of consultation and a number of commissioned reports⁸ helped to re-focus the Scheme. In April 2020, the Partnership was awarded £1.8m by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) towards a £2.6m Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS).

The purpose of this new collective partnership was to work together for the Quantock Hills to achieve a wide range of landscape- and community-inspired aspirations and provide a long-term legacy of people and landscape engagement – a symbiotic relationship benefitting both the place and its people.

⁶ Cookson and Tickner (2019). Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Landscape Character Assessment.

⁷ Formerly the Heritage Lottery Fund. Submitted in 2016

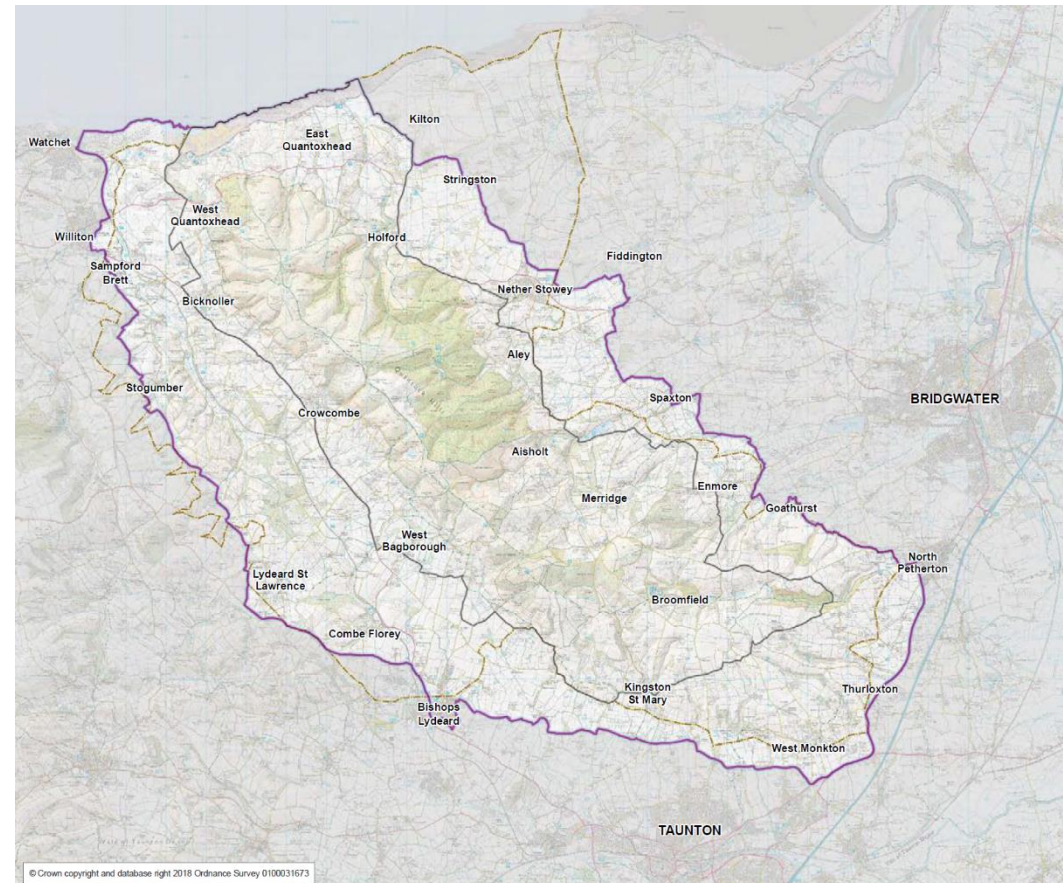


Figure 2 Map of the Quantock Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme area (boundary marked in purple) and AONB boundary (marked in grey). Extracted from the Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

⁸ A Landscape Character Assessment, a User Survey, and an Audience Development Report

2. Methodology

Specialist independent evaluator Heritage Insider Ltd has been supporting the Scheme to plan and undertake evaluation since the development stage. This has been completed in line with current NLHF evaluation guidance.⁹ An Evaluation Framework¹⁰ was developed to guide this work and later refined into a Delivery Plan¹¹.

2.1 What does the evaluation process seek to find out?

The Key Evaluation Questions below help to frame the evaluation and to guide the data collection and interpretation process:

How the Scheme ran and what it delivered

1. Have project management systems been appropriate and effective? Section 3.2
2. To what extent have the intended outputs and outcomes (with reference to Theory of Change) been achieved across the programme? Section 3.4 and 4
3. Who has benefitted from the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme and how?
4. What has gone well and what have been the key enablers (especially for priority projects)? Section 5.1
5. What could have been improved and what have been the major barriers (especially for priority projects)? Section 5.2
6. How effective has partnership-working been across the project between Quantock Hills AONB and wider partner organisations?

⁹ <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/good-practice-guidance/evaluation-guidance>

¹⁰ 2019

What opportunities and challenges has this approach brought?

Section 3.3

The difference the Scheme made

7. To what extent has the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme laid the foundations to help create, restore, enhance and record wildlife habitats, landscape features and the cultural heritage of the Quantocks?
8. Which strategies have been most successful for connecting, inspiring and enabling (depth and breadth) new and existing priority audiences to the Quantocks? Where/for which audiences should engagement activity be prioritised in the future?

Scheme impacts, legacy and learning

9. What have the Quantock Hills AONB and partner organisations learnt from the Scheme? Sections 5.1 and 5.2
10. To what extent has the QLPS moved the partners towards their vision for 2025 and beyond? Executive summary
11. Has the Scheme been able to build capacity and establish sustainable models of working? For example, supporting community organisations that can help care for heritage across the Quantock Hills AONB and surrounding areas, influencing Land Owners and encouraging people to become stewards of their local landscape and heritage Section 6

¹¹ The QLPS Monitoring and Evaluation: A quick guide to who, what and when. January 2021

12. What are the longer-term impacts of the Scheme likely to be and what is its legacy (with reference to Theory of Change)? [Section 6](#)

The interim evaluation process particularly focusses on beginning to address the questions marked in green within this report.

Throughout the report the term ‘stakeholder’ is used to indicate someone with a vested interest in the Quantock Hills or having access to it. The term ‘internal’ is used to denote those within the QLPS, i.e. staff and volunteers, while ‘external’ is used to denote those who are outside of the Scheme team itself, i.e. local residents and community organisations.

Evaluation priorities

Evaluation is not a ‘one size fits all’ process. It takes time and resources, and in-depth evaluation should therefore target the areas of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme which most need it. Using a framework provided by the external evaluators, the QLPS Programme Manager has worked with the staff team to prioritise areas of the Scheme which are most important to evaluate. These are those which are:

- ✓ Most innovative
- ✓ Represent the greatest risk (risk can be any type of risk, e.g. financial, partnership, reputational, safeguarding etc.)
- ✓ Have the greatest investment of staff time or costs to run
- ✓ Are of greatest priority to the Quantock Hills AONB, its partners or the communities of the Quantock Hills and its surrounding areas.

¹² Utilising a variety of methods of evaluation to build up a picture of the Scheme

Of these (and the central strands of work, e.g. social media), the following have been identified as high priority for evaluation:

- * 1.3 In the footsteps of the Romantic poets
- * 1.4 Quantock connections
- * 1.5 Young Rangers
- * 1.6 Quantock apprentices
- * 1.7 Quantock events
- * 1.8 Quantock futures
- * 2.1 Follies and Features – car park element
- * 2.2 Hedgebank restoration
- * 3.5 Understanding the landscape
- * Partnership working

2.2 How was the evaluation undertaken?

The QLPS team, partners and delivery organisations have collected the ongoing monitoring and formative evaluation data. Heritage Insider has used this information in combination with additional independent data collected by the consultants to create this high-level interim report.

A mosaic approach¹² was used for this evaluation, combining several evaluation techniques. This has allowed triangulation¹³ of data to create a rounded view of the partnership’s journey, progress against delivery to date (outputs) and what difference it is starting to make (outcomes and impact). This approach also enables investigation into the extent to which the aims and objectives has been met, and the success of key project activities.

¹³ Triangulation is a technique which facilitates the validation of data with the use of multiple sources.

Data collection methods are listed below:

1. Review of original project plans and documents
2. National Lottery Heritage Fund progress report
3. Quarterly monitoring spreadsheets
4. Review of budgets and risk register
5. Review of draft QLPS legacy plan
6. A range of monitoring and evaluation data from projects
7. Survey of volunteers 2023, N=17
8. Independent key informant telephone interviews with staff and external partners.¹⁴ See [Appendix 1](#) for interview framework and list of interviewees; see [Appendix 2](#) for a Rapid Thematic Analysis
9. Group reflective practice at a Project Learning Review session¹⁵
10. Recommendation and validation session with Board members.¹⁶

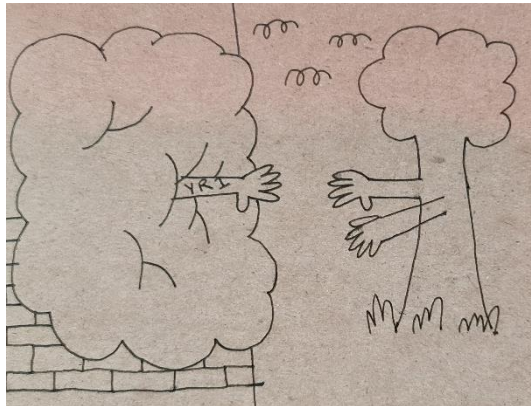


Figure 3 Drawing by a Scheme team member reflecting on the experience of delivering Year 1 of the Scheme and the challenges that lay ahead during a Covid-safe group reflective practice session facilitated by Heritage Insider.

¹⁴ N = 21

¹⁵ Led by Heritage Insider on 10 January 2023 and 14 December 2021. A Project Learning Review is a form of group reflective practice. Reflective practice is a way of studying our own experiences to improve the way in which we work and the project performs. It can help us to deal with real, complex and difficult situations as well as helping the team to recognise and capture successes. In the most recent session, the team were asked to undertake an evaluative technique called magazine feedback.

2.3 Limitations

There are always factors that limit an evaluation process and evaluators work to minimise the impact of these limitations and bias on the evaluation process and findings. Areas where limitations and bias cannot be mitigated are clearly acknowledged. A few specific examples of limitations on the evaluation of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme ('the Scheme') are outlined below:

Building capacity for monitoring and evaluation – The Scheme team, stakeholders and contractors have varying levels of experience of evaluation and approaches to this specialist field. In practice, this results in varying extent, depth and quality of client-side data collected.

Minimising bias – Every evaluation has bias, and professional evaluators work to minimise this and to acknowledge areas of significant bias. Bias will be kept to a minimum by putting in place a range of measures, such as ensuring that all partners are appropriately represented in the evaluation process, staff and volunteers well trained in the importance of robust evaluation and in practical evaluation skills, well-planned and trialled evaluation questions, and having common definitions for terms throughout the evaluation, such as 'volunteer'.

Using this technique, they first individually, then as a group, considered four key areas of work: people engagement, outcomes for heritage, partnership-working and strength of legacy. Individuals were then asked to consider what they felt was the biggest challenge and opportunity for the Scheme in the coming year and one thing that they could do to increase the legacy of their work and the legacy of the Scheme from themselves as professionals.

¹⁶ 22 February 2023

Short-term monitoring and evaluation – Many of the Scheme impacts will take a long time to come to fruition; some will not be evident or fully evident until after the end of the current funding.

Many of the Scheme impacts therefore lend themselves better to long-term study, especially those dealing with the creation, restoration or changes to management regimes e.g. 2.3 Quantock meadows.

It is therefore challenging to meaningfully evaluate some of these elements at the mid-term point; however, this evaluation aims to demonstrate emerging evidence for outcomes and the beginnings of any long-term positive impacts on the heritage, people and communities of the Quantock Hills and their surrounding urban and peri-urban areas.

3. Progress health check

3.1 Governance and risk management

The Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is the lead partner in the QLPS, and Somerset Council* (*prior to the creation of a Unitary Authority in April 2023, Somerset County Council) are the budget holders and host authority.

The diagram to the right shows the organisational structure for the Scheme.¹⁷

The Board is in place as a governance structure and has been meeting regularly. The input of a range of stakeholders is valued. The risk register is regularly updated and is an item on Board agendas, with attention placed on outstanding and escalated risks.

Whilst Board meetings work well, some stakeholders felt that the Board could be further engaged and consulted, rather than just being updated.

'It feels like the Board are told about things rather than consulted and engaged on items. I understand time can be limited but I think to engage the Board and fulfil the scheme and to ensure legacy, we need to ensure the Board are fully engaged and feel a sense of ownership.'

Stakeholder

It is common for project boards to function in this way and for this to be highlighted at the mid-point of projects. However, full engagement of the Board in shaping legacy, advocating on the achievements of the QLPS and

sharing lessons learnt would be an advantage for the QLPS in the second half of delivery – the Quantock Landscape Partnership has ambitious aims which cannot be achieved by the Scheme staff team alone.

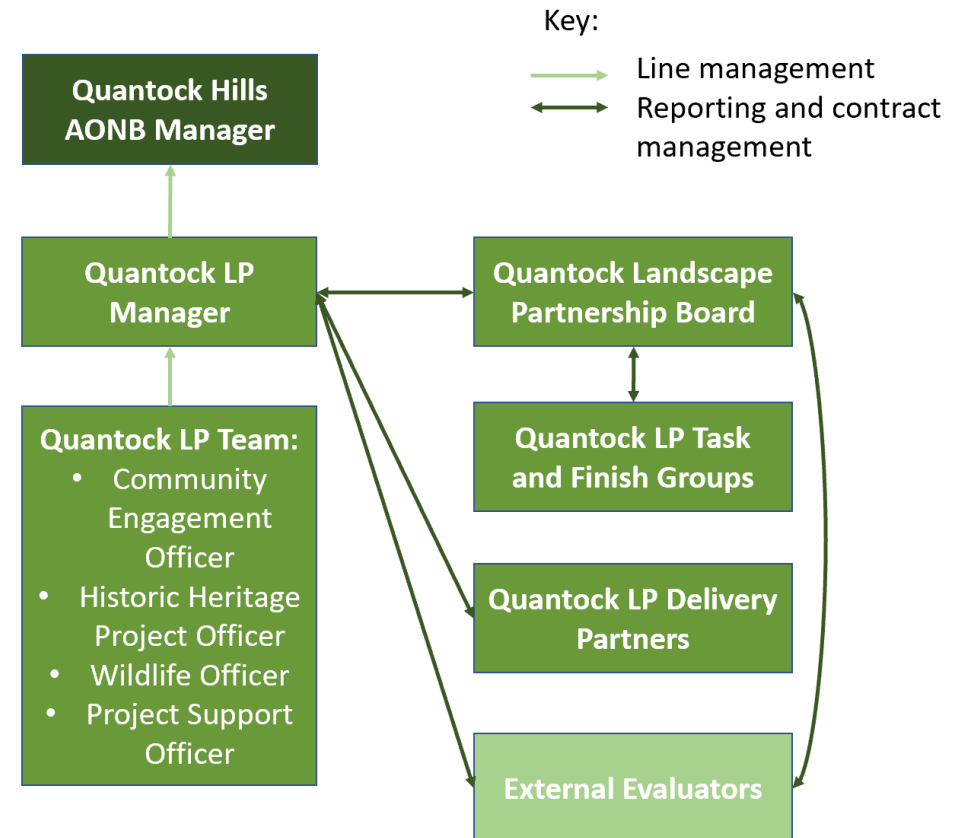


Figure 4 Organogram of the governance and staffing structure for the QLPS

¹⁷ Revised from the QLPS LCAP, 2019.

3.2 Project management and resourcing

Scheme team

The Scheme is managed by a dedicated Programme Manager and run day-to-day by a staff team in collaboration with partners and contractors. To date, the Scheme has been well managed, with good levels of adaptive management evident. External stakeholders echo this confidence in the project management systems being effective, and that the team has been supportive and efficient.

The team has built good rapport and effective ways of working and of supporting each other.

‘The project team are gelling very well, they have a clearer sense of direction for delivery.’ Stakeholder

The creativity of the staff team is a particular asset, resulting in some promising new ways of working, for example as part of events programming and in diversifying the volunteer team (see [Section 5.1](#) for further discussion).

Some team members felt that in the latter half of the project, it would be beneficial to come together as a team more frequently and to spend time enhancing collaboration within the team.

Each member of the team brings excellent skills, aptitude and varying levels of experience to the Scheme, which complement each other. However, it is a small team and it’s difficult to ensure all skills areas required to deliver a diverse programme are covered. As a result, some areas are not as strong as others, for example ecological monitoring; however, this work can be covered in other ways, for example by developing skills or by working with external

experts. More junior members of staff would benefit from mentoring support from peers external to the Scheme.

The team are high-achieving but staff capacity has now a hit a ‘glass ceiling’, limiting how much the Scheme can achieve. This is particularly true for time-consuming elements such as building relationships, negotiating permissions and community engagement. This is not unusual, particularly in a Landscape Partnership Scheme that is performing well. If a team has successfully navigated start-up and the first few years of delivery to develop relationships and (most vitally) trust, built a reputation as a ‘can do’ organisation and is well-networked and outward facing, then they naturally open more doors of opportunity for the Scheme.

In order to avoid scattered attention and undue stress on the team, the capacity issue should be addressed (see [Section 7, ER1](#)). Priority should be given to ensuring a robust legacy of those activities that are delivered within the remainder of the Scheme (see [Section 7, ER2](#)).



Figure 5 Members of the Scheme staff team reflecting on opportunities and challenges in the previous year. Photo: Heritage Insider

Two other mitigation methods that should be considered are the partial de-risking of the issue by ensuring Project Officers and Project Support Officer have dedicated time and thinking-space to document the work and procedures to date, and the consideration of options for the sustainability of posts or continuity of capacity post-funding.

The new team have moved office to the Thomas Poole Community Library – a move welcomed by stakeholders because they feel it has made the team

more ‘available’ for partnership-working and consultation. The team now meet regularly every Monday and Thursday, but also use the office on an ad hoc basis on other days as needed. The option to work from home a couple of days a week has been particularly welcome in terms both of saving commuting costs, time and carbon footprint for staff who live further away, and because it helps work/life balance, given how many evenings and weekends are required for community engagement.

Budgetary management

Somerset Council are the budget holder on behalf of the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme and are the host authority.

Overall to date, the Scheme has spent only 38% of its total planned budget¹⁹ and 77% of its projected spend.²⁰ This financial position is not unusual for area-based schemes, which are usually underspent at the half-way mark primarily due to the time it takes to get the scheme up and running, to

¹⁹ Actual spend up until end Dec 2022 was £880,034 against a total budget of £2,313,168

²⁰ Projected spend up until end Dec 2022 was £1,129,653

Loss of staff before the end of the Scheme is an identified risk within the Risk Register.¹⁸ Staff loss would certainly cause an impact on delivery of intended Scheme outcomes and would impact budgets (this could either be an underspend or a budget increase, depending on how staff turnover, and putting in place capacity to cover the loss, is handled).

These risks are graded as ‘high’ likelihood. As staff churn in the sector is currently very high and ability to recruit to posts is low, it is recommended that the impact of such losses is also elevated to ‘High’.

Planned mitigation includes ensuring that the staff team is not over-committed during the final year, and that events and activities can be covered by others if necessary. In addition, the QLPS could draw on the knowledge and resources of partners or engage additional consultant support to deliver discrete packages of work if required.

¹⁸ Both ‘Loss of staff during delivery’ and ‘Loss of staff during final year’ are addressed in the Risk Register, updated January 2023

commission works etc. Some of the remaining budget is already committed, for example, through let contracts, with 21% currently uncommitted but allocated to areas of future spend.

Some areas of spend will increase significantly during the remainder of the delivery phase. For example, central staffing costs have significantly increased over and above initial forecasts and are now projected to be up by 14%.²¹ Similarly, office costs are projected to increase by just under 10%²² and inflation is another obvious area of potential financial liability.²³

The apprenticeship scheme is also significantly more expensive than anticipated. This is due to supervision costs being higher than planned – older apprentices mean higher rates of pay, and changes to Government framework for the apprenticeships mean significant increases to apprentice salary costs.²⁴

In addition to those issues discussed above, there has been some variation from planned project budgets, which is entirely normal in a scheme of this scale and ambition. Some projects will be underspent, for example 2.5 hazel for dormice has been cheaper to deliver than anticipated because tree

²¹ This includes redundancy costs but working on the assumption that all staff are retained within the Scheme until March 2025.

²² Office and storage rent, IT support, phones, and other misc. costs. Savings were over-ambitious during the last review and additional costs have been incurred such as a storage container (circa £700/yr) and a subscription for Adobe Professional instead of using an external graphic design

²³ Inflation was originally calculated as 2.5% per annum based on 2020 costs and is now forecast at 3.5% of total 2023 budget with staff salary inflation projected at significant more than this based on best current understanding of likely flat rate increases in 23/24 then 4% in 24/25

removal has been achieved mostly internally thanks to Ranger and WO chainsaw availability. This has meant tree removal has been achieved at a low/negligible cost without the need for significant contractor support. Overall this project is anticipated to be 76% less than expected.²⁵

On the flipside, the Scheme is spending more than planned²⁶ in real terms in some areas, such as projects 1.5 Young Rangers, 1.6 Apprentices, 2.7 Community woodlands, 2.9 Batty Quantocks and 2.10 Walking. This is mainly due to the Council procurement limitations on hiring self-employed activity providers as per the planned model of delivery and supporting such activities through slightly increased internal staff capacity instead. As a result, all Project Officers have been moved to full-time contracts, which is one of the contributing factors to the previously mentioned staffing cost increases.

Another example is 2.7 Community woodlands, which has required costly unplanned ash dieback work²⁷ requiring 48% more budget than planned.²⁸

The Scheme has also been able to leverage additional and/or alternative funding against some planned areas of work. For example, £24k has so far been secured via the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme

²⁴ These are likely to rise again in April 2023

²⁵ Allocated budget was £23,298; however, the new projected spend is only £5,519

²⁶ With respect to the post-Covid reforecast

²⁷ The budget uplift was originally planned to be covered by not purchasing the planned tractor; however, this purchase is now going ahead to support work at Alfoxton (see Section 5.1)

²⁸ Allocated budget was £68,469; however, the new projected spend is now £101,075.

against delivery in the 2.2 Hedgerows and trees project, and £22,600 so far against delivery of the 2.6 Orchards project.

The Project Manager has already undertaken two budget reforecasts²⁹ to account for the changes in shape and flow of the activity and capital investment by the Scheme. The new budget forecasts map out how budget increases in some areas can be offset by actual or planned underspend in other areas. The result of this is an overall nil impact on the total investment package. Whilst a surplus was projected during the first budget reforecast, there is now unlikely to be a surplus and therefore there is not clear room in the budget for an extension, should one be required.

This reforecast has been well thought-through and has taken into account challenges and opportunities, and then assessed options. There are a number of risks associated with this reforecast that the Board should be mindful of:

- ‘Earmarked’ amounts based on rough costings rather than firm quotes, such as where the work is still to be scoped in fine detail. For example, 1.2 Digital Landscapes, where over 50% of ‘earmarked’ costs are based on speculative budgets
- Low spend and committed spend are relatively low compared to the overall project budget, indicating that a significant amount of work is still to be undertaken, some of which is in ‘new’ areas of activity/investment requiring set-up and contracting.

Despite this extensive work, some concerns remain amongst stakeholders that the Scheme may run out of budget before the end of delivery due to rising costs.

‘They are concerned there is a risk that the project may run out of money, especially given increasing costs.’ External stakeholder

²⁹ This went to Board for discussion in February 2023 pending the final copy of this report and recommendations within in

3.3 Partnership-working

Working in partnership is essential for unlocking a landscape-scale approach. In this way, collaboration is part of the DNA of the QLPS and a core strength of the programme, and the input and work of partners is essential to its success.

The core partnership is made up of the following organisations:³⁰



Quantock Commoners
Association

Friends of Quantock



A number of other wide-ranging delivery partners support the QLPS, including: Alfoxton Park Trust (a Buddhist retreat centre based in Wordsworth's old house in Holford); Country Landowners Association; Somerset Nature Connections (a sister Lottery funded MH project); PLUS Positive People (now finished); Wilstock Hub; Youth Unlimited, (community partners); The Woodland Play Centre and Young Somerset (key supporting providers).

³⁰ Correct as of April 2023



The Scheme has exceeded external and internal stakeholders' expectations.

'It has been fantastic, it has been more than anything I had expected.'

'I've absolutely loved working on the project. It's been a joy to marry arts and landscape. I've enjoyed working with the team.'

External stakeholders

They've loved being involved, have felt valued, and they feel the team is authentic, caring and sincere. They value the openness of the team and feel well supported.

'Absolutely [FEEL VALUED]. We feel very honoured. It makes me feel tearful, we feel like they really care.'

'I'm most proud that the project team care so much about our community and they take so much time with us'.

'If there was a higher score we would give it to them, they are brilliant, they find a solution for every problem. There are a few families where the wives are at home for different reasons, whether that is lack of transport or mental health issues, it is difficult to get them out of their homes. Jon suggested to invite them to a short hike on the hills, they organised the minibus transport to make them feel included and to increase their confidence to go out. They covered all the expense, organised everybody, they were very welcoming and

friendly. It was so good the ladies were asking me when they are going to go again for another hike. Nothing seems impossible for the team.'

External stakeholders

Some stakeholders felt that measures such as moving the office have made a difference to the frequency and ease of day-to-day liaison and partnership-working.

'Their office is more local now and so the staff are more available for people to talk to which is good. They are readily available to come and talk to us, and us to them.'

External stakeholder

External stakeholders feel that meetings are run well and the team have been easy to communicate with. They find the Scheme team to be professional and great at finding solutions.

'We work well with the LPS, we see them regularly and have regular meetings, the scheme is open and flexible.' External stakeholder

External stakeholders felt that the team did well at delicately handling matters where others had strong feelings, and when sensitive or unforeseen matters have arisen. There have been a few areas where communications have been complex or difficult (see [Section 5.2](#)) but in general, when any issues came up, external stakeholders feel that the team resolved them well.

The external stakeholders go as far as to say that they are feel proud of their relationships with the QLPS and other partners, which have grown and led to successful outcomes.

'[I'm most proud of] the successful working relationships that have been built with Land Owners, partners and the LPS.' External stakeholder

They are reaping the benefits of the relationship and partners are keen to continue working together into the future.

'That is very apparent, they have linked very well with similar projects and there is a lot of cross-over. There is some question about duplication, but that is minimal, and actually the benefits of the groups working together are brilliant. It's a huge success.'

'We have good communication from the LPS and we are kept abreast with opportunities which might be good for our community, like the cast iron road signs, hedging opportunities and we are in discussion to get some funding for the village hall too. It's a big help for a village as remote as ours.'

'I hope I keep collaborating with them for many years to come, they are greatly appreciated by us all. All of the team have been great and are a great support to me and the migrant community. I can't thank them enough.'

External stakeholders

There have been some isolated but notable issues with individual partner relationships – these are explored further in [Section 5.2](#).

3.4 Project delivery progress

The QLPS set out to deliver a wide-ranging and exciting set of outcomes that will achieve a step change in the number and nature of people engaged in and caring for the heritage of the Quantocks, and to take a significant step forward in increasing the resilience of the physical landscape. It seeks to engender greater knowledge and appreciation of the landscape's historical manorial roots as a way of informing future management at a time of unprecedented social, economic and climatic change.

Scheme delivery is split into three strands (see [diagram](#), right), each comprising a number of projects with common themes.

The Project team and partners are responsible for keeping records to monitor outputs on a day-to-day basis as part of their delivery work and to include these within quarterly reports to NLHF. The table on [page 22](#) provides examples of performance against intended targets for key outputs set during the development stage. It should be remembered that these are a 'snapshot' of progress at the time of the evaluation process and ratings will change as the Scheme progresses and, in particular, during ongoing recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the impacts of the Cost of Living crisis.

Despite significant challenges, overall progress against targets is good to excellent. After initial interruptions to staffing, the team have been able to build good momentum and excellent connections with other organisations, and within communities, that will stand the Scheme in good stead for the remainder of delivery.

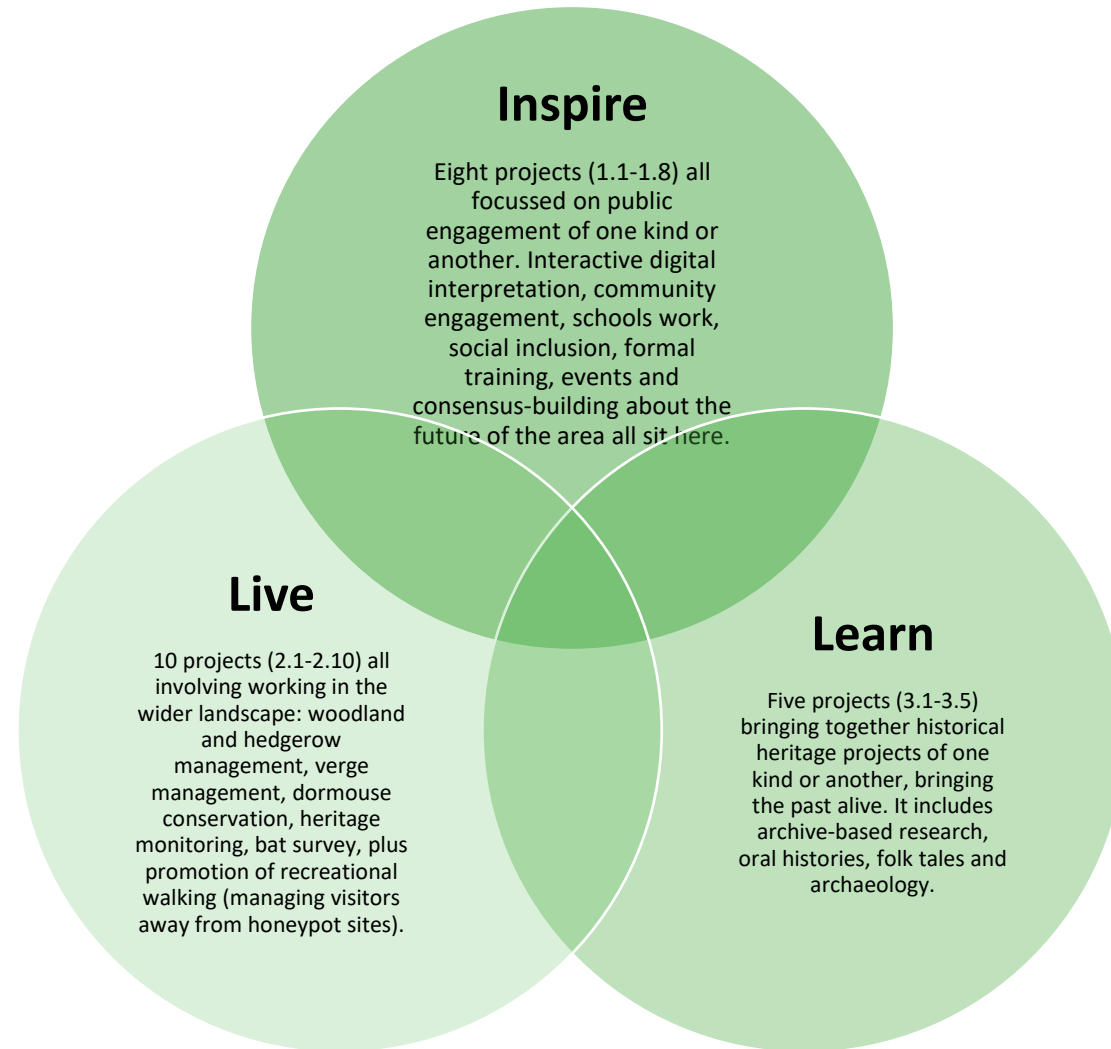


Figure 6 Diagram to show the three strands of the QLPS Scheme

Some projects and work packages are nearing completion, for example 3.3 Stories of the Hills (folk art) has been a successful project which is now completed, with over 90% of budget already spent.

Another is 2.9 Batty Quantocks, where the initial bat project is nearing completion, roughly on budget. This did not return as much data as expected but the team have identified the potential for valuable follow-on work during the remainder of the project next year and have therefore proposed a budget uplift of 42% for this area of work, to include provision for the purchase of static bat detectors.

2.7 Community woodlands is a low-budget project that is on track for completion. It has been able to deliver additional benefits, for example bulk-buying of trees so that additional saplings have been offered to communities to support their own planting.

However, there are a number of areas of the Scheme that are yet to start or make significant progress. These are:³¹

- **1.2 Digital Landscapes** – the poetry trail is underway, but the app has not been commissioned
- **2.1 Quantock Follies and Features** – this project has begun and significant work has been completed on planning and obtaining

³¹ These are all low priority for evaluation, with the exception of 2.1 Quantock Follies and Features – the build heritage portion of this project is medium priority, whereas the car park element is high priority.

permissions for a replacement car park. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors (including the sad and sudden passing of the Land Owner), this has not come to fruition. This is a priority project for evaluation and is explored further in [Section 5.2](#). It has been difficult to get traction with NT Fyne Court but there is now promising progress. On the flipside, the Scheme has committed to additional works at Alfoxton walled garden³² – see [Section 5.1](#) for further discussion

- **2.4 Wild Verges** – liaison with the Highways department has been very disappointing. It has been incredibly hard for the Scheme team to work with them and they had to resort to submitting a Freedom of Information Act request just to obtain basic information about local verges.³³ Given the ongoing issues, the project has been reworked into a community verge grant scheme instead
- **2.6 Quantock Orchards** – although some of this work is now being covered by FiPL funding
- **3.2 Quantock Memories** – an oral history project. 0% of the £10,202 budget is currently spent.

The table on the following page provides examples of progress against key Scheme-wide output targets.

³² Including, for example, wall repairs and garden restoration

³³ There is a separate paper on this area of challenge produced by the Programme Manager which provides detailed explanation of the issues.

Key to KPI progress RAG rating: Low risk: On track to meet target, has exceeded or looks likely to exceed target

Medium risk: Medium concern

High risk: High concern/requires continued close monitoring

Example outputs	Target	Delivered	% against target	RAG rating	Notes
Budget expenditure	£2,313,186	£879,829	38%	Green	This is based on the last claim figures (Claim 11) to NLHF. Despite there being under half spend at the mid-way point, this area is RAG-rated as green because this percentage of spend does not include amounts already committed and items spent but not invoiced before the claim date. Also, it is usual for area-based schemes to be underspent by the mid-way point. In practice this is usually mainly attributable a schemes' work programmes and staffing taking time to mobilise at start-up, rather than tenders being returned under budget.
Monetary equivalent of volunteer time given	£321,900	£129,780	40%	Yellow	Target of least 1,400 days of volunteer time given. Whilst the quality of the volunteer experience and resulting outcomes are excellent (see Sections 4.1 and 5.1), the quantity of volunteer time remains a concern – at this point, the Programme Manager projects a shortfall of around £60k.
Number of volunteering opportunities	300	289	96%	Green	Figures taken from quarterly monitoring spreadsheet
Length of hedgerow surveyed, in kilometres	12	6.4	53%	Green	Across four sites
Length (km) of hedgerow restored or planted, supported by QLPS grants	8	2.67		Yellow	At VS: 800m restored at Perry Farm, 600m created at Cothelstone Estate, 230m at Triscombe Stables 850m through FiPL, 20m via Andy, 170m Alfoxton Park
Number of trees and shrubs planted	2250	2200	98%	Green	
Hectares coverage of 25cm LiDAR survey	400	400	100%	Green	The whole QLPS area has now been surveyed. 1,350 LiDAR results have been analysed to date, with newly discovered historic features mapped and recorded.
Historic structures restored/conserved	15	3	20%	Red	Work complete at Thickets, Dowsborough and Stowey Mount
Number of historical collections successfully catalogued, archived and conserved	10	4	40%	Green	Kingston Historical Society; FotQ; Grove Farm Records; Thomas Poole Papers; cataloguing of Esdaile family archive and Edwin Hellard solicitor archive continuing
Number of people trained in historic building recording	8	12	150%	Green	People have also been trained in a range of other heritage recording skills.
Number of people attending Quantock Futures workshops	30	35	117%	Green	See Section 5.2 for further discussion.

4. Emerging outcomes

The table below summarises how the Landscape Partnership has been working towards achieving its intended National Lottery Heritage Fund outcomes, giving an example of an activity completed to date against each outcome. Supporting evidential quotes are taken from the stakeholder and volunteer telephone interviews, social media posts, survey respondents and workshop attendees.

Whilst the Scheme has experienced delays in delivering outputs, it has made progress in delivering all of its intended outcomes.

NHLF outcome	Selected example of how the QLPS is working towards achieving outcome	Supporting evidential quotes
Outcomes for heritage		
Heritage will be better managed	Whilst progress has been made in this area (for example, improved management of community woodlands and at Alfoxton Park – see Section 5.1 for further discussion of this latter point), it is the least well developed area of impact at present. This is not an unusual position to be in at the mid-point of an area-based scheme because it takes time to develop or adapt management plans, to foster the required relations and to undertake the required precursor work (for example, baseline surveys or an initial tranche of practical conservation works). This outcome should be fully assessed as part of the summative evaluation process.	
Heritage will be in better condition	Heritage is in better condition as a result of the Scheme in a range of ways, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural heritage – is in a better condition and is more accessible through works such as removal of Non-Native Invasive Species, bringing coppice back in management for dormice and other woodland specialists plus 19 hectares of Broomfield Common woodland and three hectares of Cothelstone Hill woods have been managed by the Scheme • Built and archaeological heritage – has been significantly improved. For example, a major milestone was the removal of Stowey Mount from the ‘At Risk’ register as a result of the work of the Scheme. Smaller works such as signpost restorations are contributing towards the sense of place of the Quantock Hills • Cultural heritage – is better stored and more accessible; see the ‘Heritage is better recorded/identified’ outcome below. 	<p><i>‘Without the funding, we wouldn’t have done the boundary work because it didn’t need to be done but to do it has restored an ancient farm boundary. It’s historic and nice to look at and matches the ancient map, so it’s really good for the preservation of history. We also planted trees.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Having diseased trees cut down and arranging a team during the pandemic to plant about 600 trees in the area. We are very rural but I’m aware that the projects have long reach into urban areas also.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Physical protection of heritage sites and making access issues so things don’t get eroded is something that we</i></p>

The Scheme will continue work to improve the condition of heritage throughout the remainder of delivery phase, and major works such as the current restoration works at Fyne Court will make a significant contribution towards the Scheme's overall impact.



Figure 7 Volunteers undertaking coppicing works.

do. At Dowsborough Hill Fort we did some ground management and protected a scheduled monument there. We also did work at Nether Stowey Castle too.'

'We have had huge successes with Built Heritage, not least of which one of the monuments has come off the At Risk register.'

'The Mount looks so much better. English Heritage have taken the Mount off their At Risk register as they are so pleased with how it is being managed. That is a huge outcome.'

'The Historic Heritage side has done really well too; that is a five-out-of-five too.'
Stakeholders

Heritage will be better identified/recorded

The QLPS is ensuring the heritage of the Quantock Hills is better identified/recorded by:

- **Recording historic heritage assets** – delivered by volunteers, updating existing databases such as the Somerset Historic Environment Record. Volunteers have been trained to support this element of the Scheme
- **Archival research** – a team of volunteers are undertaking this area of work
- **Recording natural heritage features** – for example, hedgerow surveys have been undertaken by volunteers at a number of sites, including Durborough Farm in Aisholt and Lydeard Farm in Broomfield. These help to assess the condition of hedgerows as an important habitat in farmed landscapes and create a baseline against which change can be assessed. Two teams of volunteers have formed, and as they have increased in confidence, they have been surveying independently (without direct staff supervision)

'Just wanted you to know how much I'm enjoying this LiDAR malarkey... It really has rekindled my archaeological interests and love of the landscape... Just wanted you to know that what you are doing is a Good Thing'
Volunteer

- **Recording key species and taxa** – this has included dormice via checking of dormouse boxes and footprint traps at strategic locations, plus bat trapping, tagging and surveying, which, for example, has successfully identified new Barbastelle bat maternity roosts and found the rare Bechstein's bat. Some of this recording has been shared with local people or has been citizen science, for example moth-trapping evenings at Fyne Court
- **A community archaeology programme** – see Section 5.1 for further discussion. This has been delivered in partnership with organisations such as Context One Heritage and Archaeology, and Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists. Volunteers have been heavily supporting this area of activity, including interpretation of LiDAR survey data.



Figure 8 Crowcombe community archaeology dig in progress

Outcomes for people

People will have developed skills

The QLPS has been developing the skills of people through a number of learning models. For example:

- **Apprenticeships** – Three apprentices have undertaken a range of training and development opportunities, as well as on-the-job learning. For example, all the apprentices have passed their chainsaw (cross-cutting) assessments as well as completing brushcutter and hedge-laying courses. This has significantly contributed towards their employability within the nature conservation sector. The Scheme has had a lot of very positive feedback from partners and Land Owners about the work the apprentice team has been doing

'...the photo editing was really interesting and taught me lots I didn't know about the settings and apps available.'

Participant

'A young lad who always wanted to do some archaeology, he came out and joined a dig and then went on to study further at university. The problem was that he had never had the opportunity or could not afford to join a dig, probably the latter; we paid for him

- **Young Rangers** – this group have developed practical conservation skills as well as involvement benefitting their well-being and confidence (see the *‘More, and a wider range of people will be involved in heritage’* outcome below). In addition, the Scheme has worked with other young people, such as Duke of Edinburgh candidates from the Field Studies Council
- **Competitions and training days** – the Scheme has run and supported a number of skills development opportunities, for example it has sponsored the Somerset hedge-laying competition and training day, which resulted in 216m of hedge laid in 2022. Members of local communities have also developed skills that will benefit their local heritage or themselves, such as familiarisation with using archives for research
- **Volunteer training** – volunteers have been offered training in a range of skills areas, from computer skills and first aid to EPS training for Dormouse Conservation. Some volunteers have also developed leadership and coordination skills and are able to provide support to newer volunteers



Figure 9 Competitor in the QLPS-sponsored hedgelaying competition

to have that chance and that inspired him to carry on to learn more.’
Stakeholder

‘Learning basic skills on a laptop too, I can do spreadsheets and stuff like that now.’

‘I don’t work at all at the moment; I have a lot of health issues. I spoke to Jon about a couple of things I’m hoping to do in the future, like a first aid course; he put me on one, I passed that. I joined another group to help people who are going back to work. I’ve done a computer course and an “empowering women” course. He has opened a lot of opportunities for me.’

‘We are part of a successful story. I have learned skills. I am now an Experienced Volunteer which means that I can go along and help and mentor new volunteers, which is a nice feeling.’

‘[I have learnt] Tent-making, recycling, painting walks and art walks. We have learned to plant some flowers and plants too.’

‘I have learned more about the use of the software that we are using...’

‘We are learning about archaeology, trowelling and sorting, it’s all exciting.’

‘When it comes to the archaeology, I have learned a lot of skills and knowledge actually. I’d love to volunteer further afield too.’

- **Staff team skills development** – the Scheme team and partner staff have benefitted from learning through delivery of this ambitious Scheme but also from formal learning opportunities, such as the Conservation Officer gaining his chainsaw-felling licence.



Figure 10 Unlocking the Archives disability engagement session

People will have learnt about heritage

The creativity of the QLPS staff team in developing interpretation and events has been a particular asset to the Scheme in helping to inspire people to learn about the Quantock Hills.

The QLPS team and partners have brought the Quantock Hills heritage to life and engaged people with green/blue spaces and their heritage in their own area through a dynamic and innovative programme of events.



Figure 11 Artwork by participant on the Coleridge literary walk. 'Thank you for Saturday's creative Coleridge walk. We have made the paint and I attach a new effort, based on the view I did on Saturday, using the three colours, and applied with the feather brush and feather quill and stick.'

'I love the muddy puddles and rocks.'

'I've seen flowers today that I haven't seen since my grandfather was alive... he called them Daddy's Shirt Buttons.'

'I've got goosebumps and I'm clutching a pile of moss. Isn't this a wonderful place!'

'The kids enjoyed the freedom and how they could go off and make their own fun as well as structured activities.'

'I know the names of three trees now!'

'The kids have done a whole school project about it.'

The Scheme has organised a number of events exploring the rich literary heritage of the area.

Another example is provision for families. Wild Wednesdays have provided an opportunity for families on the fringes of the Scheme area to come together, spend quality time with each other and connect with nature in accessible locations such as Stockmoor Country Park. A particular highlight has been success in engaging families from the Hamp area, which has previously proved very difficult for the Scheme. Partnerships with other organisations, such as Woodland Play Centre and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, have enhanced these events. The team has been able to extend their reach by being part of the Lyngford Park family fun days (Pride in Priorswood) in North Taunton.

As well as these informal learning opportunities, the Scheme has engaged formal education institutions in the programme. For example, by working closely with local schools on a series of poetry workshops which involved both taking schoolchildren to the hills to practise some creative-writing skills and bringing the classroom outdoors. These have helped to extend the reach of the Scheme's learning programme by building relationships with new schools from Pawlett to North Petherton. The feedback has been excellent, and this initial engagement has resulted in demand from schools for more engagement and trips to the Quantock Hills in the future.

Finally, interpretation will provide 'intellectual gateways' into the heritage of the Scheme area for years to come. This has included interpretation panels at carefully selected sites and trail leaflets (see the *'The local area will be a better place to live, work and visit'* outcome below)



Figure 12 Launch of one of six interpretation panels at Stowey Wood a site managed by the Stowey Green Spaces community group

'At school we only get to make really small things in art, but here we can work as big as we like.'

'I thought it was a great idea to view the written work of Coleridge within the landscape they were passing through. I'd never given a thought to the historical context of Coleridge and co., so was glad that you referred to it, even though I self-administered a mental kick for not thinking of this before.'

'A winding journey of connection – with people and a beautiful place'

'A stimulating experience. Enjoyed conversation with others and the moving excerpts/poetry which was read out.'

'Peace, nature and good company. A perfect way to spend a day.'

'Chance unexpected encounters, warmth, history, connectedness, both with nature and humans. Fantastic!'
Participants

'We had a poet in residence for three days. They parked a caravan on our land and people would come, listen and write poetry and walk the land. It was lovely and great to be a part of.' Volunteer

People will have volunteered time

The Scheme has provided a range of volunteering opportunities, from more active conservation management, archaeological digs- and finds-recording, and species- and feature-monitoring, through to people/visitor-engagement-focused roles.

Most people (N=14) have been volunteering for between one and five years (one has been volunteering for between 10 and 20 years). Volunteers have found the team welcoming, supportive, approachable and easy to engage with, and have come to regard the team as friends.

Overall, the volunteers feel highly valued by the QLPS, with an average satisfaction score of 8 out of 10. 94% either strongly agree or tend to agree that overall they are satisfied in their volunteering role. 94% either strongly agree or tend to agree that they feel supported by the service. They have especially enjoyed being invited to the thank-you events which have further cultivated good feeling.

There is a very high satisfaction level amongst volunteers. All either strongly agree or tend to agree that their volunteering helps them make a positive contribution. They have found the experience highly enjoyable and have felt well supported by the team. Section 5.1 provides further information on the significant impacts of volunteering on individuals. There was a sense of great pride in the work that the volunteers achieved, both individually and collectively. Being able to get involved with the practical activities, and doing things that felt challenging, have felt the most rewarding. Seeing the results of their hard work feels highly satisfying.

No big improvements were suggested, but several only heard about the project by chance, so better advertising would have increased reach. Volunteers felt that there are many different organisations locally that could be more joined-up with their messaging. The volunteers pointed out that the project wasn't accessible to all, for reasons including physical access to the location and IT literacy. However, the team were conscious of this and took steps to mitigate for it where possible and have been supportive in finding answers.

The Assemble system³⁴ has been used to support volunteer recruitment and management; however, most of the volunteers have not been using it. Of the small number who have accessed Assemble

'It has been a positive experience for me and I hope I have contributed something to environmental interests.'

'...I feel valued. When events are organised we feel a sense of belonging and that we get to be involved in the planning of the event. They communicate with us and they use our feedback during the event. It gives us a feeling of ownership.'

'The help has been clear and open, the emotional intelligence in the team is something that I have really appreciated. They have been able to understand the context of our project and our community. They have worked well alongside and in relationship to us, it takes a sensitivity and subtlety to do that, I notice it and I appreciate it.'

'It's an opportunity to make a positive difference for future generations'

'Interesting, rewarding, thought provoking and feeling like part of a team.'

'The friendly and supportive team made it an enjoyable experience for me.'

'It's an amazing group of people, all like-minded, quite diverse, really a great group of people.'

'It gets me out and about, I have no family. I do the walking in the Quantocks, I have found there are lots of things I can do and that interest me too.'

³⁴ A Somerset Council system which the Scheme must use to comply with insurance requirements for volunteering

(12%), they rated ease of access as 7/10. Below is a summary of what the volunteers said about the system:

- 29% (five volunteers) have **logged into Assemble** (website or app)
- 12% (two volunteers) were recruited this year using Assemble
- 12% (two volunteers) **accessed e-learning** through Assemble
- None of the volunteers had completed the training before Assemble started
- Asked **how easy they found the process and training**, the scores were 3 and 5
- Asked how **useful** Assemble has been for the volunteers, only 41% responded (seven volunteers) and **the average score for usefulness was 7/10**
- Asked to select what they think of Assemble, volunteers answered:
 - I don't really know what I'm doing with Assemble (N=1)
 - I can't see the point of Assemble (N=1)
 - I haven't really looked round much (N=2)
 - It's useful to have (N=1)

Just one suggestion about Assemble was given: *'Cut out all the bureaucracy'* Volunteer

'I like helping the local area from a conservation aspect. Nature conservation is something I find really worthwhile.'
Volunteers

Outcomes for communities

Negative environmental impacts will be reduced

Whilst not a primary focus of the planned QLPS, the Scheme has reduced negative environmental impacts in a number of ways, for example:

- **By taking practical individual action** – to improve the condition of the environment, e.g. through litter picks
- **Conservation management and capital works** – which are improving the condition of habitats and will support greater biodiversity as a result, for example meadow and orchard creation and clearing Non-Native Invasive species such as laurel
- **By delivering ecosystem services** – such as contributing towards flood mitigation and reduction of soil run-off due to tree planting.



Figure 13 Spruce Up The Severn' Severn Estuary Spring Clean at East Quantoxhead

'The tree planting schemes that we have done have been very positive, the replanting programme is ongoing.'
Stakeholder

More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with heritage

Both Taunton and Bridgwater were identified as strategically significant towns for the QLPS. They are a focus of development in Somerset, with 32,000 dwellings due to be constructed over the next 20 years. Encroachment of development will affect the nature and setting, especially in the southern hinterland of the Scheme area, where the landform becomes gentler.

The proximity and growth of these urban centres has been an opportunity for the Scheme to engage a wider range of people in the Quantock Hills. Many stakeholders feel that the programme has made a big effort to bring people from urban, and from lesser-seen, audiences, including minority backgrounds, into the hills. This has been a major area of achievement for the QLPS, with the team providing opportunities for people to get outdoors and discover the heritage of their local area.

Whilst the task of engaging with a diverse range of people is far from complete, stakeholders are proud that the project has successfully engaged a wide range of people, including young people and people from deprived urban areas or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Target audiences have ranged from Black and ethnic minority audiences, Bulgarian community groups, people suffering from mental health difficulties, wheelchair users, people recovering from trauma or drug or alcohol abuse to youth groups and women's groups. To reach a wider range of people, the QLPS team has partnered with community and specialist organisations, such as 2BU (youth support services for LGBTQ+ young people in Somerset), Young Somerset, Somerset Nature Connections and Ups and Downs (a Down's syndrome support group). The QLPS has worked with Young Somerset to deliver the Young Rangers programme and apprenticeship scheme. The Young Rangers has been supporting the personal development of young people experiencing life challenges



Figure 14 A Christmas celebration session at the Woodland Play Centre with 2BU

'The engagement side has really excelled and reached new audiences. That is a five out of five.'

'A big thank-you to the project for everything that has passed so far – the respect, the opportunities and especially the sensitivities toward our community; it has been very welcome. We are very grateful.'

'It's about getting the young people out of the estate and allowing them opportunities that they don't currently have. It has touched all of our young people, staff and their families; they have more confidence to go to the countryside and will do now in to the future – they might even take a career in the sector; the impact is immeasurable.'

'Tax-payers' money and funders' money is best spent on groups less likely to have access to these sorts of opportunities. It's worthwhile giving groups in society some of the lesser available opportunities as they will adapt and benefit the most. It's more bang for your buck.'

External stakeholder

'I've never been this close to a horse other than in Minecraft.'

'I've never been to the Quantock Hills in my 21 years of living here.'

'It gives me something to look forward to.'

or who are neurodivergent (rather than conservation task delivery ending in employment in the sector, as originally envisaged). The group has a varied programme, for example, LiDAR ground-truthing and coppicing activities.

The stakeholders feel the project team have made a big effort to understand them and the needs of their communities, and they consider the project team as friends. The Scheme staff team have worked to remove barriers, for example by providing transport and translators. Stakeholders felt that the programme has achieved a wide reach despite the Scheme area being sparsely populated, and gained trust from audiences that were initially reluctant.

Many recognise that this area of work takes a lot of resource but can deliver significant outcomes to beneficiaries. In doing so, the Scheme has even created life-changing experiences, and this has had a profound effect on some of the individuals involved.

There were many heartening stories of how the project has made a meaningful difference to people it has touched. Stakeholders reported seeing a change in the young people they work with, and many of the people the project engaged with have now had life experiences they hadn't had before. For some, the effect was profound and included life-changing events, overcoming fears and giving them the confidence to explore the countryside themselves.

'We can see physical change in the young people and the memories of the event or day will last with them; those small moments are so important for the young people.'

'My girls were surprised how much fun they had for so many hours without a screen in sight.'

'I love the serenity of the environment – it reminded me of Africa. My kids were taught on how to ignite fire using a local smashing iron, my son was excited about the charcoal he was able to make, it was lush.'

Participants

'We like learning new skills and meeting new people from different and other cultures and learning about other people's cultures.'

Volunteer



Figure 15 Participants on one of the camping trips by Sydenham and Stogursey Youth Clubs, in partnership with Youth Unlimited.

'There have been a lot of magical moments where children have let their hair down and run free and wild in the Quantocks, that has been special.'
Stakeholders

The local area will be a better place to visit, live or work

The Scheme is contributing towards making places both within the Quantock Hills and in the surrounding communities better to visit, live and work in. This is happening in a range of ways, including:



Figure 16 One of the community murals in production

'Rural communities unfortunately suffer greatly through lack of resources and lack of volunteers.'

'It's lovely and it really brings the community together.'

'There were kids in the park drinking and smoking and they were only 11, so we came here instead.'

'It's absolutely transformed the area. Like someone cares. It's about time someone did something.'

'We don't feel welcome in this part of the community – we want to be involved.'

'I'll bring the strimmer down and tidy up around here now.'

'Finding new places to walk and feeling safer that I have been there at least once to get to know it.'

- **Managing visitor pressure on sites and investing in infrastructure** – The Quantock Hills are a fantastic resource for the surrounding towns, but the huge growth in housing will add to the significant recreational pressures that are already apparent. This is particularly the case at the handful of honeypot sites. Left unmanaged, parking issues, conflicts with local residents, disturbance to wildlife and livestock, and path-erosion problems are all at risk of escalating. Investment is being made into visitor infrastructure, for example restoring historic signposts and small, targeted capital repairs such as on the Coleridge Way in Over Stowey on Watery Lane. Here the historic bridleway runs alongside, then actually along, the stream bed. The footpath had slumped into the stream and was subject to previous, unsightly and inappropriate repairs, so the project repaired it
- **Connecting people to new places, local heritage and their own heritage** – the Scheme is achieving this in a range of ways, for example the Stories of the Hills project has been exploring the cultural and folk heritage of the greater Quantock area in collaboration with The National Centre for Folk Arts at Halsway Manor. A beautiful illustrated folklore map of the area has been produced,³⁵ alongside an online resource with more details of the stories that have been discovered in the archive. The project has also included an evening at Halsway Manor, complete with a selection of the music preserved by Quantock shoemaker and fiddle-player William Winter, a family folk-singing event, music workshops with folk musician Becky Driscoll throughout the summer term for five local schools, song and outdoor-art walks around the hills, as well as performances of local music in the Carew Arms.



Figure 17 Watery Lane at Over Stowey before (left) and after (right) repairs made by the Scheme

'...seeing all that beauty right on my doorstep when I didn't realise it was there. Can't wait to see all the seasons.'

Participants

'Just a quick note to thank you – the first aid training course was excellent and it helps knowing we now have seven trained first aiders available for the project.'

External stakeholder

'It's about being involved with the landscape, helping to improve it and make it more available and accessible for other people.'

'It's about helping people to understand the heritage on their own doorsteps. We have done archaeological digs and engagement work at Copplestone and Crowcombe. That did well to engage the local village, it was about making people aware that heritage is everywhere and is on their doorstep too.'

'...the increase in knowledge is really opening that area up to people. There are lots of people working on their own to achieve local aims, so the work has been driven forward by others too.'

Stakeholder

³⁵ See online portal for digital version of the content <https://halswaymanor.org.uk/projects/stories-of-the-hills/>

This project has helped people to learn the traditions of the area by learning local songs and dances, experimenting with instruments, and living Quantock history in the twenty-first century

- **Contributing to sense of place** – The QLPS is helping to research and highlight the heritage of the Quantock Hills through collecting oral histories, historical research, digs and recording, interpretation, trails and events. For example, the archaeological digs have engaged local villages and helped to raise awareness of local history by actively involving community members in digs and sharing what has been found
- **Bringing different people together to take action in their local area** – Volunteering is helping to bring people together to take action, and evidence shows that participants have enjoyed working alongside new people from both within the Quantock Hills and the surrounding area. The Scheme is building the capacity for social and environmental action by inspiring people to take action or get involved themselves. It is also building the capacity of community organisations, for example by providing first aid training for Alfoxton Park Trust.

5. Successes and challenges

Every project is a potential learning journey.

The evaluation process provides a tool with which to identify those things that have helped a project along ('facilitators'), successes, opportunities it has created and the challenges it has faced. It is important to crystallise lessons learnt from these so that they can inform future working practices, project design and delivery.

This section provides examples of facilitators, successes, challenges and lessons learnt for the project, and Appendix 2 provides further supporting evidence from a range of stakeholders.

5.1 Successes and opportunities

'Facilitators' are things that helped the project to run smoothly and achieve its outcomes.

Adaptive management – during, and in the wake of, the pandemic, the QLPS team spent time planning and reworking plans in order that the Scheme could adapt to the limitations, and also the opportunities, of this challenging operating environment.

'That thought process around the challenges was really well intercepted by the project leaders.'

External stakeholder

High standards of partnership-working were maintained, and the support and 'space' to rethink were appreciated by partners and contractors.

'We still had contact over that period. We used street-based engagement during that time with our youth so that when the opportunities did start again we could hit the ground running.'

'We joined post-Covid, but still there was a huge amount of respect and understanding around people's experience of Covid and coming out of lockdowns and so on.'

External stakeholders

Covid-19 restrictions and health issues and concerns were just some of the issues that the QLPS team and partners had to navigate to keep things moving. The pandemic also changed the status quo and priority of need for local communities, for example mental health became a much higher area of need.

'We had some young people who were more resistant to going out than others; we saw anxiety from young people and their families post-Covid.'

Stakeholder

Some stakeholders felt that key decisions could have been made quicker and wholesale deferment may have changed the focus of the Scheme; however, on the whole stakeholders were very positive about the Scheme's response to the pandemic, and to its adaptive approach in general. Although some elements were delayed, the majority of engagement work was still able to continue in some form.

'There was still public involvement despite Covid; the project kept going despite those challenges.'

'We had socially-distanced activity days, five of them in total during the summer of 2021. It was outside, there were Covid measures in place, they put on activities despite the Covid barriers, the project still came along and made it great. They went on to deliver more in 2022 too.'

Stakeholders

This quality adaptive management is testament to the skill and professionalism of the QLPS team (see Section 3.2 for further discussion).

Inclusive practice and audience development – the project team adopted a number of successful strategies for broadening audiences through inclusive engagement, including community and well-being walks, arts and practical activities, building trust, co-creating and giving the opportunity to get involved in archaeology activities. This area of work has been highly praised by stakeholders and is a stand-out area of practice by the QLPS team and their partners. For example, members of the Scheme team attended the NAAONB conference,³⁶ where the QLPS engagement and outreach work was described by Anjana Khatwa³⁷ as *'outstanding'*.

Together they have been successful in creating welcoming, safe and non-judgemental spaces where a diverse range of people can feel comfortable, accepted and inspired.

³⁶ September 2022

Figure 19 Bulgarian family hanging Martenitsas on trees as part of a QLPS event. These are a traditional Bulgarian small piece of adornment, made of white and red yarn and usually in the form of two dolls, a white male and a red female. Martenitsi are worn from Baba Marta Day until the wearer first sees a stork, swallow or blossoming tree (Source: Wikipedia).



'They celebrate all of the people that they work with or engage with. It's really visible. They spent time to really get to know us before we even considered going up there; they came to our groups and got to know us before anything happened. That was very welcome.' External stakeholder

See 'More, and a wider range of people' outcome in Section 4.1 for further discussion. It is recommended that this area of work be the subject of an illustrated case study produced as part of the Scheme evaluation process – see Section 7, ER3.

Figure 20 Inspired by the Quantock Hills at Pride, QLPS helped 2BU to make Pride t-shirts and banners "Inspired by the Quantock Hills" - which several members later chose to wear to the Taunton Pride event.



³⁷ An acclaimed Earth Scientist, engagement specialist and TV presenter

Volunteering programme – The volunteers have found the experience very enjoyable and rewarding, especially practical tasks and engaging with others. They feel that volunteering broadens their experience of life by giving them the chance to learn new skills, cultivate a new appreciation for the local area and creating opportunities to take positive action to benefit the area.

Participating gives the volunteers a sense of worth and purpose, personal achievement and satisfaction from supporting others, meeting people and making friends. The chart below shows the degree to which the volunteers agree with these outcome-related statements:

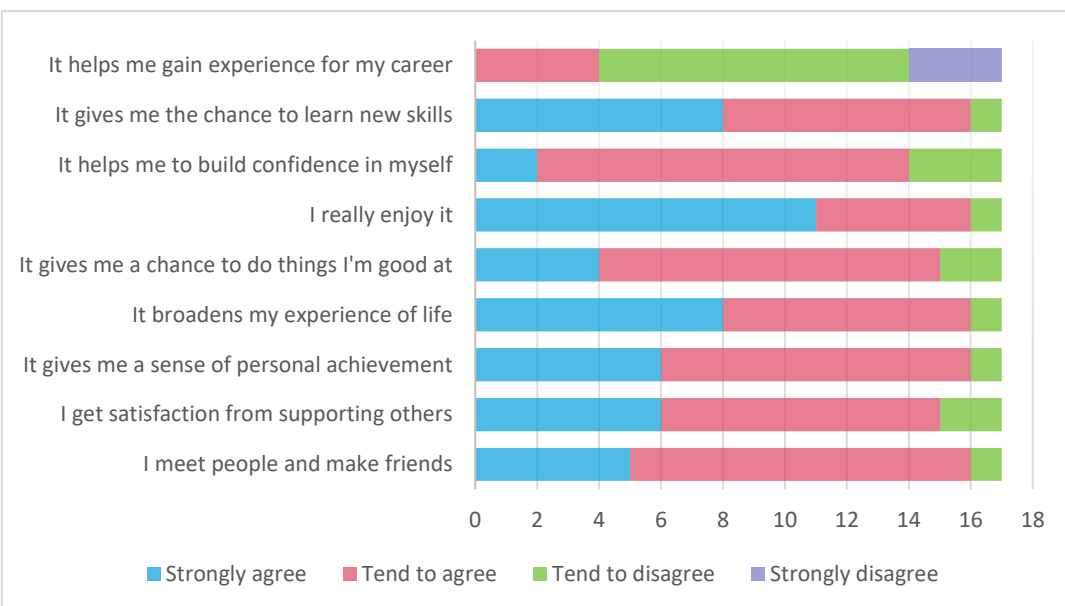


Figure 21 Bar-chart to show strength of volunteer agreement with outcome statements

The volunteers see their contribution as taking action for nature and learning about archaeology. They feel they are gaining skills and learning about the local area whilst doing good. Individual volunteers have learned lots of new skills, including archaeological skills and first aid.

'I have been volunteering with the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS) since mid-2021 and in that time, I have had opportunities that it's unlikely I would have without it. I have been involved in archaeological digs, I have help lead groups of people walk across some of the most beautiful landscapes that England has to offer. I've been part of a team using the output from some of the most advanced technical equipment there is, uncovering long-lost features in the Quantocks and even possible hill forts! I have met people, both volunteers and people within the QLPS team, who I can now call my friends. Working with the QLPS has led to some amazing opportunities in my professional life as well. I have been invited to film some of the projects to help promote the remarkable work that they are doing. And in doing so it has help me to gain some invaluable experience.' Volunteer

Volunteers recognise that the volunteering offer is reaching a wider range of people than it normally might, e.g. a range of ages, different socio-economic backgrounds, those who normally have lower representation in volunteering, such as disabled people and those from ethnic minorities. There is some concern about whether this will be able to continue in the current economic climate, and further measures to support volunteers to continue to give time during the Cost of Living crisis should be considered. The Scheme team have already begun discussions about how to ensure a legacy for this area of work.

'We need to engage more people and now, with the Cost of Living, I fear fewer people will now be able to afford to volunteer.' Volunteer

On the following page is a collection of sample quotes describing the impacts volunteers have reported. All quotes are drafted from first-hand volunteer testimony:

SKILLS AND LEARNING
<i>'Working as a research assistant investigating the archives for the QLPS has improved my skills in archival research and in writing blogs.' 'I volunteered to be a Historic Research Assistant without any relevant experience and was nervous about it. The friendly and supportive team made me feel at ease and encouraged me. It has been an interesting and enlightening experience for me.'</i>
CONNECTION WITH PLACE
<i>'I enjoy going out on the Quantocks and finding places I have not visited before. I talk to my friends about these places, which encourages them to visit too.' 'The volunteering has given me a far better understanding of the natural environment. It has provided me with skills to interpret the environment.' 'It has opened my eyes to this fascinating and fantastic part of the country'</i>
SENSE OF WORTH AND PURPOSE
<i>'I am involved in interesting and varied work. Volunteering is an important part of life which adds to the local economy. It provides a sense of purpose to those not in employment whilst adding value to a 'cause'. 'It has given me a worthwhile activity during retirement.'</i>
BENEFITTING THE LOCAL AREA
<i>'Trying to ensure that the AONB remains an AONB' 'I'd like to think I was in some way adding something to the community and scheme!'</i>
SOCIAL BENEFITS
<i>'It has given opportunities to meet other, like-minded people.' '[I've really enjoyed] meeting new people and being part of a team, particularly after having little experience of that due to the pandemic.'</i>
IMMENSELY REWARDING
<i>'Volunteering really is the highest paid role you will ever do.' 'A quick internet search for the meaning of the word volunteer returns this: "Volunteer/ˌvɒləntɪə (verb): work for an organization without being paid", which grammatically, might be correct. However, the payments that you receive volunteering with QLPS are worth so much more than any amount of money!'</i>
WELL-BEING
<i>'I genuinely can't find the right words to convey the positive impact that volunteering with the QLPS has had on my well-being and in making me more aware of the beautiful, historic countryside that surrounds us here in Somerset.' 'It has kept me both mentally and physically active in retirement, given me satisfaction in new achievements, and developed new friendships and knowledge in and of the Quantock Hills, where I now live.'</i>

Community archaeology – this has been another stand-out area, with deep outcomes for those taking part in digs and also for those attending wider community engagement events, such as Finds Days.

'Thank-you to the team for giving me this opportunity. I loved it and can't wait for the next time 🙌💡🌍.'

'Thank you so much, I had a wonderful two days on the Cothelstone dig. It was very special for me, as I adore the Quantocks.'
Volunteers

Those involved spoke passionately about what the experience meant to them, in terms of the social benefits of connecting with new people, learning and being able to apply or further an interest, and the well-being benefits of engaging in the activity.

'It was also great to meet like-minded people who are just as excited about really old stuff underground as I am.'

'It's a time just for me – when I'm not a mum, or an employee, or a wife... I'm just here, and it's my time.'

'I have now done three days on the dig and find it incredibly addictive!!! I can't tell you how much the experience has meant to me after the pandemic! ...I would also like to say how impressed I was as to how inclusive the group has been'
Volunteers

Volunteers also spoke of how much they valued benefitting from the expertise of the archaeological professionals involved.

'I volunteered and loved it! Exhausting but fascinating and the professionals involved were so kind and patient too. A great experience.'
Volunteer



Figure 22 Crowcombe dig community open Finds Day

Well-being benefits – whilst well-being was not a specific focus of the QLPS during the planning stages, the evaluation has found emerging evidence that many of the activities have resulted in well-being benefits. Well-being has also become a high priority for communities in the wake of the pandemic (see previous discussion on this point).

Attending events, getting out on walks and volunteering have all delivered benefits to individuals, ranging from physical activity, recovery from illness and boosting mental well-being, to less obvious benefits such as helping people to feel accepted, comfortable and express their own individuality and that of others; helping people to lead happy, fulfilling lives where they are actively engaged in their community and environs.

'My reasons for wanting to walk are many. It lifts my spirits and makes me feel alive when I see fantastic views. It blows away the cobwebs and puts a lift to my step.'

'It's quite therapeutic.'

'I suffer from arthritis in both hips; I just need to get out and do this.'

'Art and nature help me with my anxiety. This is when I don't feel all the stress.'

'I took a taxi ride here – I can't remember the last time I did that [felt brave enough to leave the house]. I thought I would be too scared to. I've made a huge achievement just getting here. I think we should give ourselves a round of applause.'

'Trying to be more social as I get a bit anxious sometimes.'

'I want to meet more people who may also be in a similar position to me.'

Participant

This should be an area of focus for the final evaluation of the Scheme, see **Section 7, EV3.**



Figure 23 A volunteer enjoying a practical conservation task in the Quantock Hills

Alfoxton Park Trust – a Buddhist group has purchased Wordsworth’s former residence in the Quantock Hills. This comprises a house and parkland. The Scheme recognised the opportunity to provide advice and practical assistance in bringing the parkland and walled garden into positive and proactive management. This is already beginning to make a difference and by the end of the Scheme there will be a huge difference, for example in restoring the walled garden.

A Heritage Statement for the walled garden, and associated plans and proposals for the new garden design, have been produced by historic garden consultant Simon Bonvoisin of Nicholas Pearson Partnership LLP in collaboration with the Alfoxton Community. The proposals have been designed with respect to the historic setting while meeting the future needs of the community. An initial grant from the QLPS of just under £15k was approved by the Board to support proposed works.³⁸

As a result, the Scheme has been able to practically improve the condition of the Park but, perhaps more importantly, support the Buddhist community in increasing their capacity for appropriate land management regimes in the future. This has included the purchase of essential equipment such as an Alpine tractor to help control bracken, and also the development of a management plan for the site that can guide its ongoing care.

The QLPS team are also working with the Alfoxton Community to maximise the community use and benefits of the garden, including during the reconstruction phase.

³⁸ This funding is targeted at supporting all the significant capital work which is to be completed in the next 18 months

This will leave a legacy of Wordsworth for the area, see Section 6 and be a heritage asset for the community.



Figure 24 Abie demonstrating the Alpine tractor at Alfoxton Park

5.2 Challenges and blockers

Every project encounters challenges or ‘blockers’ that slow or stop progress of the intended project plans, and has things that don’t go to plan. This section comprises examples of challenges encountered by the Scheme and any associated lessons learnt.

Operating within Council systems – Whilst the Scheme has the advantage of being backed by Somerset Council,³⁹ working within the framework and procedures of the Council has caused significant issues for the QLPS. The ‘red tape’ of local government has been a challenge for the team, and procurement processes and policies have been particularly restrictive. This issue has wasted a lot of time and energy, particularly for the Programme Manager.

This has meant that the Scheme has not been able to be as flexible and fleet-of-foot with mobilising works and activities as would have been liked and the system has not been compatible with the number of small contracts required, for example to deliver an engaging events programme as part of an area-based Scheme.

This is a familiar issue for some other projects hosted by councils, such as the Bathscape and Sydney Gardens LHF-supported projects hosted by Bath and North East Somerset City Council.⁴⁰

³⁹ Now a unitary authority, formerly Somerset County Council at time of grant application

⁴⁰ As evidenced by the *Bathscape LPS: mid-term evaluation report (2022)* and *Sydney Gardens end-of-project report (2023, now being finalised)*. Both Heritage Insider on behalf of Bath and North East Somerset Council

It has also meant that where a lack of capacity has been identified within the QLPS as a block to progress in a particular project, buying-in capacity through small consultancy contracts is not a viable option.

Gaining permissions – The journey to securing permission and delivering a Crowcombe Park Gate car park has been a long and unfruitful one.⁴¹

Following the Land Owner’s sad death,⁴² the Estate has been advised that they cannot grant consent for this project to proceed while his estate is in probate. This means even on a very optimistic timescale the QLPS will have ended before the project could be delivered. The decision to not pursue this issue and the car park has been taken with wider reputational risk and the ongoing, long-term working relationship with the estate in mind.

A plan for an alternative car-park location is now being pursued due to new opportunities opening to undertake substantial repairs to Withyman’s Pool⁴³ car park within the life of the Scheme. This will require no planning permission and, although the final figures are still to be confirmed, is likely to cost less money than the original planned car park. Thus the Scheme will still be able to invest in visitor infrastructure and deliver similar outcomes but just in a different location via an alternative investment route.

⁴¹ The process is not fully documented here as has been reported within Board papers and NLHF quarterly reports

⁴² Anthony Trollope-Bellew

⁴³ Also referred to as Wilmot’s Pool

Landowner liaison – Whilst liaison with some Land Owners has been very fruitful, engagement with others has been a challenge for the project in a range of circumstances and project contexts.

For example, a lack of engagement from the National Trust regarding capital investment⁴⁴ in the built heritage at Fyne Court has significantly slowed progress on this element of the Scheme. This was flagged in the Scheme Risk Register as a result. This has also meant there have been missed opportunities to date, for the National Trust to extend their own impact through proactive partnership with the Scheme. Thankfully, in early 2023 a fruitful meeting with the National Trust took place resulting in Scheme spend⁴⁵ on restoration of Fyne Court.

Stakeholders also felt that Land Owner engagement hasn't gone so well, and more time is needed to nurture these connections. In particular, engagement with some farmers, commoners, graziers and Land Owners has not been forthcoming.

'The main challenge was being able to hear from farmers and commoners. This is one stakeholder group that it was hard to get input into.'

'How to get through to some of the people who work and farm the land; they are busy people and to get them to engage has been tricky; farming landscape managers, in particular, are busy. There is more to do in that area of work.'

'It's important to sow the seeds for legacy with the Land Owners and land workers; the take-up for that is a bit slow so far.'

'We had a discussion day in Cannington. Very few could take the time to do daytime meetings, so evening meetings (and jugs of ale) would suit them better – that was a learning curve.'

'Managing [tree planting] is a challenge. We have a session planned to plant traditional hedges and that does require the engagement of the local Land Owners and that area still needs some further work. We need to get their buy-in, as much as awareness-raising with them; funding for the work is the second issue to awareness. Fortunately, we have some cash from the Lottery to help pay for that.' Stakeholder

This is in particular reference to agreeing a shared vision for the future of the Quantock Hills via the 1.8 Quantock Futures project. This project is nearing completion and is underspent. Independent consultancy Dialogue Matters were appointed to support delivery of a series of workshops and consultation opportunities to bring together stakeholders to discuss the future of the landscape. This element was hampered and slowed by delivery during the pandemic and communication issues between the QLPS team and the contractor. Farmers and commoners were missing from workshops, although they were consulted via telephone interviews as an alternative, to ensure their voices were reflected.

'This one has been challenging. I'm not entirely sure what the outputs of that project are going to be. It feels like we are talking to the same people that we are normally talking to, so unfortunately nothing new will occur; we are not reaching the unheard voices. There has been a couple of workshops that 90%

⁴⁴ Representing circa £128k of capital investment

⁴⁵ Outline at present awaiting final approval by NLHF

of the people in the room I already knew; I hoped it would be the other way around, I wanted new and wacky insights. At a more strategic level, we didn't think about how we would garner new views and build that into a consensus for the future.' Stakeholder

This has been a valuable learning process in how to usefully bring together stakeholders for place-based visioning work. Practical considerations such as the timing of sessions and social nature/motivations to attend will have an impact on the success of future similar exercises.

Despite difficulties, the workshops have been very positive and a final report is now available.⁴⁶ The challenge now is how to turn this final report into something that is living and breathing rather than a piece of work that happened and from which people have since moved on.

Other area-based schemes have had similar issues, such as the Our Upland Commons NLHF-supported programme managed by the Foundation for Common Land in partnership with protected landscapes. This programme has found that practical collaborative projects that have a visible positive impact on the landscape are a good next step from workshops, to consolidate the enhanced collaboration and build momentum.⁴⁷ They have found that trying to write down one single vision has been problematic; however, some areas, such as Shropshire Hills AONB, have found using a visualisation of the future landscape more fruitful.



Figure 25 QLPS team member helping to facilitate vision workshop of local stakeholders organised by Dialogue Matters

⁴⁶ Quantock Futures Final Report, March 2023

⁴⁷ As evidenced by the *Our Upland Commons: mid-term evaluation* (March 2023). Heritage Insider on behalf of the National Trust and the Foundation for Common Land

6. Planning for the Scheme's legacy

6.1 Legacy planning to date

The Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and partners will only benefit from funding for the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme for a fixed period. Once the Scheme ends, what it leaves behind is its legacy.

Legacy can be broken down into two categories:

Implicit legacy – things that will bring benefit after the life of the Scheme whatever happens, for example skills people have learnt, increased awareness of the heritage of the Quantock Hills, and changed attitudes.

Enhanced legacy – things that will (or could) actively continue after the end of the Scheme and need to be managed, maintained and monitored in a concerted way, for example habitat condition, ongoing training, partnership-working and networking, community engagement and web content.

Legacy can be enhanced further by taking steps within the life of the Scheme to secure or expand the extent or scale of the ongoing benefits. For example, by turning a set of lessons learnt into a template or protocol for running future events, or ensuring ecological data generated by the Scheme is lodged with the appropriate national recording schemes so that it can be accessed and used by as many people and organisations as possible.

Safeguarding the legacy has many benefits that go beyond simply maximising the value obtained through the National Lottery Heritage Fund for heritage, people and communities of the Quantocks and their environs.

⁴⁸ As part of the Landscape Conservation Action Plan, August 2020

Legacy planning to map out and secure the ongoing benefits of investment in the QLPS began in the development stage.⁴⁸ However, since then, much of the context for the Scheme's work has changed, for example altered community and organisational needs due to Covid-19, changes to land-management frameworks due to Brexit, updating of many of the policies and plans which provided the context for the Landscape Conservation Action Plan.

Planning legacy in detail, and ensuring the implementation of any actions to secure or expand legacy, are vital to ensure that all the time and effort that has been invested in the Landscape Partnership and individual projects does not dissipate once the current funding comes to an end.

The Programme Manager has already begun the process of examining legacy on a granular project-by-project basis. As a result, a paper has been presented to Board⁴⁹ for initial discussion that examines the legacy planned in legacy stages and includes updates and notes to bring this up to date. There is also a 'legacy checker' built into the quarterly reporting spreadsheet which has been used from some projects but not all.

6.2 Key ongoing benefits of the QLPS

In addition to the project-by-project legacy, the QLPS will have a more strategic set of ongoing benefits. The Scheme-wide legacy comprises ongoing benefits in the following broad themes, for example:

A more resilient local heritage sector - Through increased capacity due to investment and to improved partnership-working reducing duplication of effort or building momentum in areas of focus. The AONB Service support for

⁴⁹ Tabled September 2022

the AONB Unit to be able to be a core part of the legacy and integration of the Scheme's work (where appropriate) should happen during the remainder of the delivery phase.

However, without NLHF funding there will be a disconnect between action inside and outside the AONB boundary. Delivery (whether practical or social) by the AONB Service alone cannot be at the true landscape scale and partnership-working is essential. Furthermore, many of the pressures and the opportunities on the Quantock Hills landscape come from outside the designated area; the AONB alone will never have the flexibility and capacity to address them.

It is therefore important to ensure that partners are also supported to embed legacy, and that dedicated time is spent ensuring a robust model is in place for future partnership-working.

Enriched, engaged communities – there will be lasting social and cultural benefits for communities from the QLPS, both within the Quantock Hills landscape and on its fringes. Strong evidence for these is already emerging (see Section 4 and 5.1). For example, the Scheme team have adapted where possible to make things work, and have successfully built momentum with the group days. This has had a good impact on rural areas that struggle to mobilise people to get involved to record and care for the rich heritage of the Quantock Hills.

⁵⁰ Change is primarily (but not exclusively) needed within the delivery organisations themselves in order to diversify audiences, for example by offering more inclusive and accessible engagement programmes and communications, or delivery at scale

The audience development the Scheme is undertaking is also of benefit to the AONB Service and to partners who also aim to engage and serve communities. It is helping to find relevance with a more diverse range of people and test-out which models of engagement can deliver most impact.

Building and nurturing trust, and the change needed⁵⁰ in order to democratise the Quantock Hills landscape to ensure it is 'for all', are both long-term processes. This is in sharp contrast to the short-term nature of the intervention, i.e. the limited time of the QLPS. There needs to be a clear legacy plan and/or exit strategy for engagement work to ensure the impact of the investment in the QLPS is maximised for communities. Visibility of the offer and transport for communities outside of the Quantock Hills to access green spaces, and capacity within the Quantock Hills to take action for heritage, will all be ongoing challenges.

The stakeholders are pleased the project has been targeting efforts towards people from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve the most impact, and would like to see this continue.

Individual social, economic and cultural benefits – the Scheme is delivering a raft of benefits to individuals (see Section 4 and 5.1), some of which will be long-lasting. For example, stakeholders spoke passionately about how the Scheme has helped to build capacity through changing peoples' view of nature, their local area, and the ways they may behave towards it in the future.

'In an unmeasurable way it does build capacity; for the rest of their lives it changes their view on nature and the sector and their careers; it is building capacity but it is difficult to measure. It takes a lot of money in the short term but the longer-term impacts are greater, but difficult to measure.'

Stakeholder

Improved natural, built and cultural heritage – the condition and records pertaining to heritage within the Quantock landscape will be improved by the end of the Scheme. Legacy-planning processes will need to identify and take into account where longer-term monitoring and evaluation will help to show the true benefits of investment in a Scheme such as this. Projects such as 2.8 Quantock monitoring volunteers will help to build the capacity needed for such a legacy.

'The partnership are doing subtle works like hedge-laying and wall-building, the cast iron signs too, but they all have a long-term future in terms of their legacy for the area. They are important to the Quantock heritage – to maintain all of these things.' External stakeholder

Greater sense of place – a longer-term impact of the QLPS will be an enhanced sense of place, for example through better understood and recorded human history, shining a spotlight on the heritage of the Quantock Hills through engaging interpretation, etc. In addition, specific interventions will contribute towards the identity of the area. For example, the support provided to Alfoxton Park will leave a stronger legacy of Wordsworth within the local area, which will contribute to an enhanced sense of place, particularly with regards to the landscape's literary heritage.



Figure 26 A visitor enjoying Halswell House.

6.3 Legacy risks and next steps

Some stakeholders voiced concerns regarding the Scheme's legacy being at risk and that there's now only a small window to finish planning for legacy.

'Legacy discussion [needs to happen] with the right people early on, to ensure those people are engaged and co-design the legacy offer, to ensure the legacy actions are sustainable and supported.' Stakeholder

This risk (real or perceived) is exacerbated by the other, previously-discussed risk of staff leaving as the Scheme starts drawing to a close (see Section 3.2). This could leave the Scheme in a position where completing the transition to legacy is somewhat to severely hampered. Stakeholders expressed a concern that activities will completely cease when the project ends and believe in a need for a team or an officer in post after the project ends, to liaise and support the legacy elements of the project.

Several of the stakeholders noted that they recognise it takes more time than the lifespan of the Scheme to achieve all of its aims and make a difference (see Section 2.3 Limitations).

'A five-year project is the minimum to start on that sort of project; the previous scheme I was part of still isn't complete – it takes more like 10 to 15 years to follow it through properly.' Stakeholder

Meanwhile, some identified that legacy not only needs to be planned but also needs time to embed.

'I think people are aware but are they talking to the right people and making the right decisions now? These decisions and relationships take time. Thinking

about legacy is okay but making sure the legacy is embedded with partners is what should be happening right now. We are limited on time with this one; I don't want it to be thought about too late.' Stakeholder

Stakeholders would like legacy to be planned through partnership-working and consultation with audiences such as young people, co-designing future interventions where possible.

'Over the life of the scheme the risks are being managed, the legacy element is the biggest risk for me. I don't think there is enough linkage between the lead and the partners. Individually, we are thinking about budget and work planning for two years ahead now. We have a six- to nine-month window to come together and if we miss that, to realise a legacy will become a lot harder.' Internal stakeholder

At a strategic level, there seems to be a number of recurring themes that warrant focussed consideration and discussion. These are primarily non-project related issues, for example:

- Capacity for planning and securing legacy in detail – especially discussions with third parties
- Resourcing for volunteering capacity
- The desired volunteering model (e.g. self-governing, staff-managed, volunteer-managed but with AONB governance etc.)
- Forward plan for engagement priorities for the AONB
- Writing maintenance into management plans
- How work will be reflected in the AONB Management Plan etc.

These require strategic discussion not of individual operational projects, but of legacy across the Scheme or of a number of projects combined. An

updated Management and Maintenance Plan could be an easy way to cover the relatively straightforward issues such as who will continue to host website content, how capital works will be maintained and where budget is allocated for this, future monitoring regimes, where records (biological, oral history and historic) are lodged and accessed etc. Those elements of legacy not covered by this could be added or contained in a separate legacy plan.

In order to create the required momentum to make the biggest and deepest possible set of ongoing benefits from the Scheme, it is recommended that legacy be brought into sharp focus in day-to-day planning, as well as being a standing item on Board agendas. See [Section 7, ER 2](#) for further discussion and a set of questions to work through.

In this way, the staff team and partners can consider how their work can leave the biggest ongoing benefits. An easy first step is to turn resources created during the project, such as templates, ways of working etc. into assets by creating checklists, templates and case studies that can be used by partners and the wider sector, as was the tactic of NLHF-funded Ignite Yorkshire, Back from the Brink and Wild Paths projects. Ideally, invest enough time to embed or promote and disseminate⁵¹ to get best value for money from the investment.

⁵¹ Depending on whether they are for internal use or are useful externally to peers within the sector or to place-based partners

7. Evaluator's recommendations

This section comprises a table which provides an overview of the Evaluator's recommendations. Topics have been drawn from those most prevalent and pertinent within staff, volunteer and stakeholder input⁵² to the evaluation process.

The resulting recommendations have been developed taking into consideration the ongoing needs and aspirations of the Quantock Landscape Partnership, the opportunities created by the investment to date, evolving context⁵³ and professional experience of the sector.

Outline recommendations were presented for discussion at a facilitated Recommendation and Validation session with the Project Board (see Section 2.2 for details). This helped to refine the recommendations and ensure they were both practical and aligned to partner and stakeholder views, the operating environment, as well as including action to mitigate outstanding risks.

⁵² Source: client scoping meetings, key informant telephone meetings and Project Learning Review

⁵³ For example, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Cost of Living crisis, FiPL etc.

Area of LPS and section	What happened?	Example stakeholder quote	Why does this matter?	Evaluator's recommendation
<p>Project resourcing, Section 3.2</p>	<p>The team are high-achieving but staff capacity has now a hit a 'glass ceiling', limiting how much the Scheme can achieve.</p> <p>This is particularly true for time-consuming elements such as building relationships, negotiating permissions and community engagement.</p>	<p><i>'[The biggest risk is] NOT enough time.'</i></p> <p><i>'The team are working very hard and are very busy.'</i></p> <p><i>'The biggest problem is that we need volunteers. We need to engage more people and now, with the Cost of Living, I fear fewer people will now be able to afford to volunteer.'</i></p>	<p>There is the potential for staff stress and for spreading the team too thin and therefore not having the capacity to build upon and deepen the work and relationships already built to deliver deep outcomes.</p>	<p>ER1 – Ease workload issues through stringent prioritisation and adding additional capacity</p> <p>Heavy prioritisation of forthcoming work (including allocation of 'available' budget) is recommended, using the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cementing success – add-value to existing work rather than starting on new work packages ✓ Longevity – prioritise those items that will leave the biggest/deepest/most secure legacy ✓ Diversity – those work streams that can help the QLPS to continue to look beyond 'the usual suspects' to engage new audiences. <p>Building on the excellent budget reforecast, consider more radical cuts to free up budget to support another post. These cuts could come from a range of sources, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money that is within projects and currently 'available' – see detailed budget sheets • Cutting the digital landscapes app from the programme as it is likely to deliver a poor Return-On-Investment • Slimming-down some of the natural heritage work packages (and potentially some of the output targets) to allow an even greater focus on existing sites such as Alfoxton, rather than spreading the team even thinner over more sites. <p>A new role of a Community Empowerment Ranger (or similar) would be beneficial to focus on cementing the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering work – where low hours to support volunteering is a risk but the quality of the current offering is excellent and is implicitly linked to a strong legacy for the QLPS

Area of LPS and section	What happened?	Example stakeholder quote	Why does this matter?	Evaluator's recommendation
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting communities to take action themselves for the Quantock Hills – essential for long-term landscape-scale change. <p>To build legacy, this new role could be hosted within the Quantock Hills AONB and may combine some of the existing p/t Volunteer Coordination role (or complement them).</p>
<p>Legacy Planning, Section 6</p>	<p>Legacy planning has begun on a project-by-project basis. However, there is much work still to be done to help secure and expand the legacy within the lifetime of the Scheme, and to plan those areas of legacy which do not neatly fall within a single project, for example partnership-working.</p>	<p><i>'I think people are aware but are they talking to the right people and making the right decisions now? These decisions and relationships take time, thinking about legacy is ok but making sure the legacy is embedded with partners is what should be happening right now. We are limited on time with this one, I don't want it to be thought about too late.'</i></p>	<p>Without further focus on legacy planning there is a risk of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diminished Return-On-Investment from relationship-building Dis-engendered stakeholder relationships by leaving them feeling like they have been 'dropped' and are no longer a priority. <p>This process needs focussed attention and dedicated time on agendas and work</p>	<p>ER2 Bring legacy planning into sharp focus in day-to-day planning This will help ensure the legacy of the Scheme investment.</p> <p>Actions can be simple, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turning processes developed by the team into templates and lessons learnt into practical checklists Sharing and lodging as much ecological data as possible Turning the web materials into a legacy format or finding a 'home' for them where they would be most useful and have a 'life' after the end of the Scheme Quantock Futures – next steps Making a further 'quality vs quantity' shift and having a legacy focus when planning events and activities. <p>The questions below can be used to help guide team discussions and thought processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q What benefits will be left behind after this event, activity or works? Q Can we further maximise the size and depth of these benefits in any way? If so, what do we need to do now to ensure this? Q Who will benefit from what's left behind? Is there a way in which we could help more people or a more diverse range of people to benefit? Q How can we ensure the work undertaken by the project is maintained and the momentum built upon? Is it written into management plans or embedded into the work of others?

Area of LPS and section	What happened?	Example stakeholder quote	Why does this matter?	Evaluator's recommendation
			programmes at both operational and strategic levels.	Q Can we support these individuals or organisations now, to make the task easier, e.g. through training, helping put in place systems and processes (such as to support a diverse volunteer team)?
Evaluation and advocacy, Section 5.1	<p>It is part of the funder requirements that the QLPS is evaluated and an end-of-scheme evaluation report is produced.</p> <p>Heritage Insider are already commissioned to undertake this work. However, as long as this meets funder guidance, there is flexibility in the exact nature and outputs of the evaluation work of both the staff team and of the external Evaluator.</p> <p>The evaluation has highlighted that many stakeholders are not aware of the extent of the good and best-</p>	<p><i>'The engagement side has really excelled and reached new audiences. That is a five out of five.'</i></p> <p><i>'They celebrate all of the people that they work with or engage with. It's really visible. They spent time to really get to know us before we even considered going up there; they came to our groups and got to know us before anything happened. That was very welcome. It's about building relationships and building trust. They celebrate everybody who engages, in imagery and on social media; we are a part of that and it feels</i></p>	<p>There is the potential to spotlight and share learning from the engagement work of the Scheme more widely in order to raise profile and influence the practice of others.</p> <p>The protected landscape family⁵⁴ would particularly benefit from this in light of the move towards 'protected landscapes for all'.</p>	<p>ER3 Raise the profile of areas of success</p> <p>In order to take advantage of this opportunity, the final reporting should be split into two:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Short high-level summary report – to report on the impact of the whole scheme 2. An illustrated case study – showcasing the engagement work of the Scheme, including lessons learnt and practical tips. To be produced Jan–March. This will allow time for the Scheme team to launch and disseminate it (for example, lining up speaking at the AONB conference in 2024) and to de-risk losing staff and therefore the richness of detail being lost. There is potential for any legacy materials and tools, and video or other content, to be woven into a package of materials that can be launched alongside this case study. Nine volunteers have already offered to be interviewed for potential case studies. <p>Both elements of work should include Return on Investment calculations⁵⁵ to provide an indication of the value of the Scheme to the heritage, communities and sector within the Scheme area.</p> <p>The external Evaluator can support this work.</p>

⁵⁴ National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

⁵⁵ For example, the well-being benefits from volunteering

Area of LPS and section	What happened?	Example stakeholder quote	Why does this matter?	Evaluator's recommendation
	<p>practice engagement work being undertaken by the QLPS in order to demonstrate what an inclusive programme can look like in the Quantock Hills that engages a wider range of people. This has been a stand-out element of the Scheme so far.</p>	<p><i>like we are actually a bigger community of people, some that we have never met.'</i></p>		

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 List of key informant telephone interviewees and interview frameworks

Appendix 2 Rapid Thematic Analysis (**CONFIDENTIAL** – not for wider circulation)

Thank you to everyone who has generously contributed their time, pictures and thoughts to contribute to this evaluation